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Oral history interview with Allan Kaprow, 1981 Feb. 5-18

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Allan Kaprow on February 5 and 18, 1981. The interview was conducted by Moira Roth for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original audio recording was transcribed in the early-1980s. In 2018, the full audio was reconciled with the transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MOIRA ROTH: Archives of American February 5, 1981. Moira Roth talking to Allan Kaprow. Let us begin at the beginning.

ALLAN KAPROW: I was born August 23, 1927, in Atlantic City, New Jersey; where my mothers' parents lived. Although she and my dad were living in New York at that time. Like a good young mother-to-be; she went home to be with her parents. So they could—[inaudible]—during my birth. I have otherwise very little life to record in Atlantic City although I visited a number of times to see my relatives there. It is an interesting county, New Jersey; it was like a spa. Probably, by the time I was born, it was already on its way down. But that's where the traditional Miss America Contest occurred, on the Boardwalk.

MOIRA ROTH: Training and performance.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, and it was also the place where the first feminist demonstration in recent times took place when women burned their bras. At the occasion of, if I remember correctly, that year's Miss America contest.

MOIRA ROTH: When you were born in Atlantic City, were you born into a large family or small family?

ALLAN KAPROW: I had a lot of relatives there, or did then. They are mostly on my mother's side. Small tradespeople, hotel owners. That is, people who grew up around the tourist trade of that town; who probably originally came mostly from Philadelphia. Another branch of that same family lives there today. So I think that they took advantage of the growing tourist business in the teens and twenties of this century, who came to Atlantic City as a summer place. They moved there.

MOIRA ROTH: Where did they move from? From Europe originally?

ALLAN KAPROW: Originally, they were all Russians. At least, the older ones were that had come from the big cities in Russia, like—[inaudible]—and Kiev. They were probably of the same kind of middle-middle-class there as they turned out to be here: carpenters, butchers, salespersons of various kinds in the fabric industries, jewelers, and bakers.

MOIRA ROTH: And they were Jewish?

ALLAN KAPROW: They were Jewish. Yes. It is interesting that compared to a lot of the other immigrants, old grandparent immigrants of my friends, who also came from the same culture, were city people; rather than say farm people or petty tradespeople. They came here with not a high status, but a rather middling one. They didn't go through those transitions that some of the peasant class immigrants did. And so, they had very clear notions of what their offspring should be. They should be professionals. So that all those on my mother's side who were supposed to be, many of them failed. And certainly on my father's side, they all succeeded, as well as, having been destined for it. So we got architects, rabbis, teachers, computer specialists, and lawyers like my father.

MOIRA ROTH: Your father is alive?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, he still is.

MOIRA ROTH: Still practices?

ALLAN KAPROW: Still practices. He is seventy-nine now. Of course, quite—with all of his faculties and a "workaholic," which I am sure in some way as the lesser part of him, I have inherited. [Laughs.] He is a dear man otherwise.

MOIRA ROTH: What about your mother?

ALLAN KAPROW: She probably would have been a—dancer if she had been born in our more recent generations.

She has a great capacity for fun, loves a good time, and is a wonderful cook, thank God. [Laughs.] Yet, married, conventionally, this otherwise very loving husband, who was quite a "workaholic". They have a very conventional relationship of the serving wife and the working husband, you know, this “had a hard day at the office.”

MOIRA ROTH: Even now?

ALLAN KAPROW: Even now. So it is painfully evident that the mold of their world was the way it was then. But there was no alternative that they were aware of. Even though on my father’s side there were a number of single women. One of them my Great Aunt Celia, who is long since dead, but who was a wonderful singer, but more importantly than that, never married because she was a Communist cell organizer, in Russia. Then when she came here, she organized the garment industry.

MOIRA ROTH: So there were eccentric Kaprows?

ALLAN KAPROW: There were eccentrics, yes. I suspect probably more on my father’s side than on my mother’s, though. I don't know. The only people that I did meet were all of these Atlantic City proprietors, cab fleet owners and hotel managers, all part of that tourist business there.

MOIRA ROTH: What about grandparents? Were they present?

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh yes, sure. In fact, my grandparents lived, all of them, to quite an old age. My father’s mother having died very recently at what one could only figure as about 99 or 101, we could never quite be sure. And until the last few years she was very clear. They were very dominant figures on both sides of the family, more as family centers than simply as strong individuals in the sense of it, because I was usually away. From my very early childhood I went to Arizona, I believe at five.

MOIRA ROTH: Why?

ALLAN KAPROW: I was asthmatic as a child, so the doctors in those days had a common solution to a difficult, sickly child; they said send him to a better climate. So I was sent to Arizona on their advice, which was a wonderful but painful isolation.

MOIRA ROTH: Who did you stay with?

ALLAN KAPROW: I went on a ranch, I lived on a ranch which was set up partly as a, probably a working ranch, in a minor way, but mainly as it grew in—Tucson, Arizona, which was the center for sickly people suffering from one sort of sinus or another, kind of asthma or something. The ranch probably found that it was more appropriate as a business for sick children, and so more and more of these children, as I remember it, used to come and be taken care of. Of course it was a nice out of door life that you would expect for a young boy.

MOIRA ROTH: How long did that go?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, I stayed there for,—I guess, about five or six years.

MOIRA ROTH: That is a long time.

ALLAN KAPROW: And then, I went to a boarding school which was better equipped for education and which was solely set up for sickly children, called the Arizona Sunshine School, and from that after a few years I went to another one called the Brandeis school, same thing for slightly older kids. So all of these places came highly recommended and were attended by administrators and nurses who knew what to do for sick kids. They had programs set up for us and there was special supervision rather than just being a working ranch in which we would find a niche somehow. So I didn't get to know my grandparents or be with that— with the family back east —except during visits.

MOIRA ROTH: Would they visit you?

ALLAN KAPROW: My immediate mother and father would visit me, one perhaps once a year for a few weeks and another then, with mostly my mother and my sister, she would come out, say, with an aunt or some other relative and stay for a few weeks. So I was really quite alone, and as I got a little older, with a doctor’s advice, I would go back for short periods of time, for example, a summer, until in high school, the second year of high school, after beginning in the West, I got settled permanently in New York.

MOIRA ROTH: How old were you then?

ALLAN KAPROW: Fourteen.

MOIRA ROTH: So you were really very distant from your parents from age five to age fourteen.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yeah. Distant in that sense that occasionally I would see them for concentrated periods and then after that I wouldn't, although they would write frequently and keep in touch.

MOIRA ROTH: Did you have close friends on the ranch?

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh sure, including horses.

MOIRA ROTH: It was a lively place.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, it was. But I think in retrospect, I did not realize it at the time, but I certainly felt lonely. A—young boy doesn't know what's what when these things happen, that his parents have taken the best advice they can, and they—you know, they follow the advice and then you feel—I felt, I must have felt, certainly, rejected in certain profound ways, because I was sick, that must be the reason. And then my sister was born just before I left, she obviously was, meant to be there more than I.

MOIRA ROTH: Were there other siblings in the family?

ALLAN KAPROW: Other than my sister and myself? No.

MOIRA ROTH: What is your sister?

ALLAN KAPROW: She is a wonderful, very brilliant anthropologist, and—we've always had an uneasy relationship, partly competitive and partly because we did not grow up together, kind of wondering who the other one really is. Miriam is very,—tense, brilliant, critical, snooty.

MOIRA ROTH: What happened when you went back at fourteen and got to know your sister?

MR.KAPROW: I got to know her much better then—

MOIRA ROTH: And to reunite?—

ALLAN KAPROW: Of course I saw her, and she saw me during the visits—my mother would come out with her—or when I would go back East, but it was not really that continuous kind of family. That was what I got a chance to experience when I was fourteen.

MOIRA ROTH: And then the family had moved to New York.

ALLAN KAPROW: No, they always lived there.

MOIRA ROTH: So it was just Atlantic City.

ALLAN KAPROW: Atlantic City was merely the place where I was born; it was not the place I lived because after I and my mother were well enough to leave the hospital at that time, in which I was born, I went back with my father and she lived in New York. That is where the law firm was, and he was a lawyer.

MOIRA ROTH: Did you draw as a child?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes. I apparently drew very, very much, very early. It was at least as early as three or four, continuously, including my parents, and when I think of it, I have probably some old albums with things of mine somewhere. But I wanted to be an artist as early as I could think of it.

MOIRA ROTH: And this had nothing to do with a model in your family or taking an art class?

ALLAN KAPROW: No, no, there was no one in our family that drew, although my uncle—on my father's side I had an uncle, Uncle Joe is and was an architect, so he drew. But I did not know that until I became five or six. That was certainly a part of a role model. But I moved to Arizona about that time, and there is where I either saw the cowboy art and immediately responded to it, or read the comic books and saw cowboy art in comic books, I don't know, I can't remember, but by the time I was seven I was already avidly looking at cowboy books with the boys, especially the works of Frank Dobie. Frank Dobie was a writer of cowboy stories and Paul Brock, for example, is a great admirer of Frank Dobie also, they are both inspired by the same artists, and he illustrated his books in that rough sort of tiny collected cowboy horse with a kind of lanky oversized cowboy on top of it, a sort of style that he learned from very clearly, learned from this official unofficial Remington, and many years later I discovered Remington who was ever so much more glorious.

MOIRA ROTH: But you used to respond to those as a child.

ALLAN KAPROW: Frank Dobie? Yeah. I'd read the stories and I'd copy those drawings and pretty soon I was

drawing Cowboys and Indians and cows and cacti and mountains and flowers from prickly pears.

MOIRA ROTH: [Laughs.] What happened when you went back to New York City with your Arizona imagery?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, all I had was an accent and long blue jeans, and so they used to call me "Arizona, hey Arizona," or "Arizona Al," and since I did not like the name "Al," I settled for "Arizona."

MOIRA ROTH: So that was your nickname.

ALLAN KAPROW: For a very short while in high school—and I stopped drawing those cowboys and Indians because on returning, I wanted to go to some kind of school where there would be a lot of art classes. So it was arranged through educationalists that were friends of my parents, people whose names I can't remember— that were principals in various schools around the city—that I would be introduced, at least for that first summer before school started, the year that I moved back to New York, to some summer school teachers. I took some lettering courses and figure drawing courses and I found it very wonderful. And then I took the entrance exam for the High School of Music and Art, which was a specialized, though city-run school, equivalent to the High School of Science, which was recently begun in the forties as well, for those gifted in those particular fields. And these schools had a regular academic program, rather superior, in fact, in addition to extra courses in the chosen field. So I took that test and, in fact, Wolf Kahn the painter, and I both took the test together and became fast friends after that. We went through that school later on. And there art was quite a different thing. It was in relation to cowboy art, what Cubism is in relation to, I do not know, still life painting on Sunday. Even though in retrospect it looks to me like educational claptrap, it was important to me then because there was a far greater degree of knowledgeability on the part of those teachers than in the cowboy art that I had looked at. So I got a lot out of it, plus the music students whose concerts we would go to every year.

MOIRA ROTH: How did your parents respond to your liking art?

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh, I think as long as I was young, they thought it was "wonderful." It kept me busy.

MOIRA ROTH: But they didn't imagine that you'd become an artist.

ALLAN KAPROW: No, there was a sense, certainly on my father's part, that one day I would be a junior partner in his firm, that he was saving a desk for me, which would have been wonderful if I had felt inclined that way. But I think it was a big disappointment for him because it became clear that I was more and more committed and that I wanted to continue as I went to college and then to graduate school and began spending time with more artists than anyone else. I was not acting like the usual preppy or fraternity boy and he became worried about the social consequences of my inclination. You know, I could have been a pariah for all that he could imagine, and I think he alarmed my mother, who in other regards, was less disturbed by it. I think she responded quite out of intuition and not knowledge to the pleasurable and exciting and romantic aspects of what art must be, and he, being down to earth, or more as a professional man or in a business sense, he thought, well, this is going to be—the way I think of my son now, this is going to be a problem for that poor guy, he'd better get his feet on the ground; I don't want to support him for the rest of his life. So after a while, it was, I wouldn't say that it was one of those dramatic stories that you read about where some bloke and his parents beat the hell out of him and exclude him from everything, you know, take them out of their will and everything, it was not that bad, but it was serious, it was relentless, I would say.

MOIRA ROTH: And this would be around seventeen or eighteen when you had to decide whether to go to law school or to art school?

ALLAN KAPROW: Right, and I chose to be an artist. I recall that they would force issues to the point where I would have to be clear that I want to be and will be an artist. And they would respond by saying, "How do you know what you are going to be in a few years? How can you say that?" And then I'd feel ridiculous and say, "Well, I can say it. I know." Of course, I didn't know.

MOIRA ROTH: What was your household like? Was it a household with a lot of people at one time? A lot of conversation?

ALLAN KAPROW: No. My sister was off to boarding school and I was—it was a small family. During my teenage years it was very painful because, the way young people always— often feel alienated from their folks, self-definition is very important, and you do not know whether you are or aren't somebody. Well, that made dinnertimes very awkward. There would be an awful silence and my mother wouldn't say anything and you'd hear only the sounds of food being cut up, it was terrible. Much of that, thank heavens, has softened over the years, and now we get on very nicely.

MOIRA ROTH: Where did friends fit into this? Would they come to the house?

ALLAN KAPROW: They would come. Like Wolf Kahn and I were very close, as I said, and he would often come over and we would draw together or I'd draw at his house. His family was completely all involved in music. His father was a conductor, before they came from Germany, in the Hamburg or Hannover Symphony, and so that was a cultivated family.

MOIRA ROTH: Chamber music?

ALLAN KAPROW: Chamber music and you know, that kind of thing. You always heard music there and people going into the arts were fine, and Wolf and his brother, Peter, are both artists, no problem on that score. So I would often go over to Wolf's house in order to paint because it was more awkward doing it at my house. Nevertheless, I did it at my house, and some time, I guess it was about at the age of—I was in college then—that I began studying with Hans Hofmann, and I converted what used to be a maid's room, because there was no maid, into a studio. It was a little room about half the size of this. And it was just wonderful, it was like I had achieved something. There was a piece of property in a sense that was occupied by me as an artist.

MOIRA ROTH: And your parents tolerated that.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, they did. It was still difficult, but in retrospect what seemed horrible then was certainly much less dramatic than stories I've heard elsewhere, really terrifying stories of ostracization. So by and large, it could be—my family situation could be described as reluctant and losing support, and grudging support.

MOIRA ROTH: But not abusive.

ALLAN KAPROW: Not abusive. It really wasn't.

MOIRA ROTH: Aside from art, did you read a lot?

ALLAN KAPROW: I guess I did. It doesn't seem to me in retrospect that I did much reading, but I imagine I did.

MOIRA ROTH: Where did you go to college?

ALLAN KAPROW: To NYU.

MOIRA ROTH: Which college?

ALLAN KAPROW: The downtown branch, the big one.

MOIRA ROTH: In Washington Square?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yeah, and I had among my teachers Alfred Ayer, the philosopher, Alfred Hofstadter, Sydney Hook, Paul Edwards, the logical empiricists, and Delmore Schwartz, the poet.

MOIRA ROTH: That's quite a collection.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, it was terrific. And oh, there was a wonderful woman, I cannot remember her name, it was a German sounding name, and she was one of the great authorities in Norse sagas, Rausch, or something like that, yes, that was her name, Rausch. I don't think she is alive now, but she was superb. She would read these old sagas and what they must have sounded like then, it was incredible. So I had a rather remarkable set of teachers outside of my major, which was art, in which I had rather poor teachers, including Fredrick Hart, who was then recently discharged from the army as a young—cataloger. He was one of a team who cataloged all of Goering's hidden paintings in the salt mines. As part of the occupation army, it was his job to remove the da Vinci's and Titians and God knows what, you know, that were down there in the salt mines. He had to catalog them. He was an awful teacher, and I remember—

MOIRA ROTH: He taught Renaissance Art?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yeah, He would insist on names and dates to the precise number, and I thought at the time that he was not at all in touch with art, and in fact he was. But he did not know how to convey it. He was like so many young historians trained at the New York City Institute, NYU Institute, and I do not know whether he was, but he seemed to be. Just, he had none of the spirit of his great teachers, all of those great German historians who could not translate their inherited spirit which was so abundant and taken for granted in Germany, to Americans who had no culture. So all the Americans learned was names and dates, and, you know, cataloging techniques. Which was all fine, except that there wasn't any art there, no love of art.

MOIRA ROTH: When did you meet Hans Hofmann?

ALLAN KAPROW: I met him first in 1946, this was a year after I went to high school, because Wolf and Peter

Kahn went there first. And Wolf and I both were in commercial art.

MOIRA ROTH: They went to NYU?

ALLAN KAPROW: No, they never went there. Wolf went to the University of Chicago and did one of those—he was brilliant, is brilliant. He did one of those things, he got four years credit in one year.

MOIRA ROTH: Oh, this was under Hutchins.

ALLAN KAPROW: Under Hutchins, right, remember that? So then Wolf came back with a Bachelor’s degree while I was still in my first year, finishing my first year in college, and he went to the Hofmann School because Peter had gone the year before that and Peter said “Now this is where everything is happening, it is the best art school in the world,” and both of them were German so they could really speak with Hofmann—

MOIRA ROTH: When had Hofmann started out?

ALLAN KAPROW: In the 1930s, when he fled Hitler. He came here at the invitation first of the Art Students League, and then at the University of California, Berkeley. A year or so after he had gotten acclimatized, he brought his wife, Miz, over and whatever paintings and so on he could bring with him. And he settled here and opened up his own school, first I think it was in Provincetown, then the winter school in New York with the summer school, for the summers in Provincetown, continuing—so it was quite a number of years after that he came, before our involvement with the war.

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ALLAN KAPROW: As an aside, did you know that George Brecht was born in Atlantic City?

MOIRA ROTH: No.

ALLAN KAPROW: George Brecht is about two years older than I and so, conceivably, we were there at the same time when I was visiting my folks. His father was a musician, playing in an orchestra or something, and his real name is McDermott and he adopted, because he liked Bert Brecht, the name Brecht some time later on in his life. So much for Atlantic City.

MOIRA ROTH: I was thinking, from the point that you go to school with Hans Hofmann, you start, as it were, being in the right place at the right time, witness, you then meet Meyer Schapiro and a few years later you meet John Cage. So you started taking classes with Hofmann while you went to NYU?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, because the Art Department was less than good.

MOIRA ROTH: Can we quote you on this?

ALLAN KAPROW: You can. There was a very nice man there who was its chief artist and teacher, a man named Irwin. I do not know if he is alive today, but he was a sweet guy and came to dinner in his later years. But when I was there, he was very bubbling and always enthusiastic, sort of late dreamer of the School of Paris, in the kind of Neo-Impressionist tradition. I don't think he understood it very much, but he occupied NYU’s garret school with a kind of beret presence. It was very charming and it was very “Greenwich Village-y” and he was always nice to me and encouraged me, but there was nothing more than that. And when I went for a few visits to hear Hofmann’s criticisms, I saw Rothko and Barney Newman and Franz Kline, not to mention the older ones who now and again would come for Friday afternoon criticisms I thought, "This is a big ball game now."

MOIRA ROTH: And it was.

ALLAN KAPROW: It was.

MOIRA ROTH: How did Hofmann dress?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, he would wear a suit or casual shirt and pants, nothing artistic, but he had this wonderful pink smock. I guess he had several colors because they would be sent to the cleaners and I was one of the monitors who had to take care of cleaning up the place, including sending smocks to the cleaners. The one that I remember most, or the ones that I remember, were those which were sort of “purple-y pink”, and at that time he was in his sixties I guess and rotund and red-faced, very much like the Dornkup [Gold mine] ad in Germany for this corn whiskey, the kind of robust South German, pink-cheeked drinker on the placard. But he seemed very much like a mix of a South German beer drinker or whiskey drinker and Santa Claus.

MOIRA ROTH: How did he conduct his criticisms?

ALLAN KAPROW: He would come in twice a week. The rest of the time you were to work, by yourself, that is, as a group or individually off in a corner somewhere in your studio, whatever you chose. But there would be a model, which at the beginning of the week he would pose, on a model stand, very traditional. Here and there, there were still-life's set up, still-life's of a somewhat modernistic kind because there'd be the usual Chianti bottles and gourds and then tinfoil that would be bent in a variety of facets in and out of this to describe the planar movement between one side and another. And to create reflections that would destroy your sense of easy access to the hierarchy of things, there would be sometimes toy dolls turned upside down, or a brick, or some unlikely object; which was arranged not so much for its subject matter, as for its arrangements of planes in space. So the teaching was geared to your using it as a point of departure, whether a model or a still-life, not so much to draw it representationally, although sometimes you would do that if you wanted to, and he was a good critic. So he would come in on a Tuesday, having briefly come in on Monday and pose the model or arrange the still life, or both. On Tuesday he would go around from one student to the other, in classic style, the way the old masters did it, he would quietly critique your drawing, referring to the model. The drawing would be using, would use usually your own version of his school vocabulary, which was an amalgam of Cubist and Constructivist marks, and he would point out the relationship of how that figure in space moved out there and its relation to the drawing here. And sometimes he would take your drawing and he would ask for a piece of charcoal and he would correct it, and you would see miracles taking place with these lines. But of course if you were very jealous about your own drawing being manipulated by him, you'd feel squelched, so there was evidence of that in several students. He even, on rare occasions, because of the reactions, he would take your drawing and tear it carefully down the center, or to the right of center, or across the middle horizontally, and then shift the sections an inch or two away from one another, so that the axes would be coordinated, and you'd see the whole bloody thing coming to life. And then he'd draw a few lines connecting those shifted parts.

MOIRA ROTH: That is a brilliant teaching—

ALLAN KAPROW: Some of these have been collected, that is, among the older students, especially some of the older women there who were in the class, everything that Hofmann touched was precious, and they were keeping them. These are now going to be exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum. I got a call the other day; did I have any drawings from that period?

MOIRA ROTH: Well, did you?

ALLAN KAPROW: No, I don't know. If I do, they're in New York City in a warehouse—

MOIRA ROTH: What was your work like at this point?

ALLAN KAPROW: It was somewhere between the abstract, abstracted generalized, sort of Pseudo-Cubist style of Matisse, of around 1914, 1915, and Mondrian.

MOIRA ROTH: Now did Hofmann talk about Mondrian?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, sure. I learned a lot from him.

MOIRA ROTH: And he also talked about Matisse?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, he honored such people as widely ranged as Paul Klee and [Piet] Mondrian, but he was clearly deriving his sense of things out of a—what he called a plastic or constructionist tradition, a Formalist tradition.

MOIRA ROTH: So this was a period when you were taking Literature classes, Philosophy classes—

ALLAN KAPROW: And music.

MOIRA ROTH: Bad art history classes, sweet studio classes at NYU and then having this very intense experience of Hans Hofmann's studio.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes , there was—nowhere in colleges that I know of—though I didn't try them all—where in those days—and I am speaking of the nineteen forties, you could get a really professional art education. You went to art schools for that, and there were precious few of them in the United States. I think Hofmann was one, and the—what was that Dutch modern, sort of student of, or collaborator with Le Corbusier—Ozenfant—Amédée Ozenfant. He had a pretty interesting school. I never went to it—

MOIRA ROTH: In New York—

ALLAN KAPROW: In New York, and some of the people came to it. For a while, Leger taught right after the war, he was there. Masson was there for a period—[inaudible]—but I don't think that Lacan taught. So where did you go? You really could not. And college is simply— not even in the Midwest, which had preceded New York, and the

West coast in art education— that was really hokey, you know, John Stewart Kerr and that kind of thing.

MOIRA ROTH: What reverberations did you get of, say, European Surrealism, or the fact that Mondrian had died fairly recently in New York?

ALLAN KAPROW: I picked it all up through Hofmann in the beginning, although art history classes, no matter what the teachers were, provided me with information, and Peggy Guggenheim's Museum Art of This Century was still there at that time. The Guggenheim Museum in its old form still had a lot of stuff in it, even though there was a lot of Rudolph Bauer, there were still Kandinsky's. And the Museum of Modern Art was there, so one had a chance, really, to see quite a lot. But Hoffman stimulated that. He would say, "Oh, Matisse is having a show in Philadelphia. You've got to go see it.' So we would do so.

MOIRA ROTH: And you haven't mentioned the Abstract Expressionists.

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, I said I met them, or saw them, now and again at his Friday criticisms. The Friday criticisms were interesting because that's when the paintings were brought in, and as a monitor in the school, if you were—I was an evening monitor because I went to school at NYU in the daytime—our job was to organize student paintings and bring them out one after the other when the master called for them, and you would have this—now, a public critique, in which everyone would come to listen. Whereas during Tuesdays, he would go from drawing to drawing and a few students would stride all around after him to hear while most of them were working.

This was, however, a public critique—[inaudible]—and there is where you would see the Abstract Expressionists coming to hear Hofmann. Pollock was there at least twice, Rothko, I can't count the times, Barney Newman I do not think ever came that I could see, Kline was there. Still, Jimmy Brooks—not all at once, you know, but different weeks. So there was a sense in which these were older people and you wondered what they were doing, and gradually one time or another a show here and there, I got acquainted with what they were doing and I found it very exciting, very exciting. But I was going through a funny period of trying to do everything, not only go to college, but also in art. I was copying old masters at the same time and reading old recipe books on how Titian painted, how Hals painted, how Rembrandt, and going to the Metropolitan Museum and making free copies of the old masters there. Then I tried some audacious things like huge canvases in which I would grind my own paints, prepare my own linen canvas, make my own stretchers, even make my paper and ink and quills to draw with, and I tried to make modernistic versions of Titian. Can you imagine something that looks like a mix between Oskar Schlemmer and Titian?

MOIRA ROTH: Only with difficulty.

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, I did this. I think I even have a photo of it somewhere, a painting, a huge—as big as that wall, with the glazing of Titian, of a bathing scene. It looks a little bit like a Renoir, however the figures look something like Oskar Schlemmer's, simplified volumes, you know. It was absolutely absurd. I spent the whole summer doing that. So here I was, if you can imagine somebody trying to cover all bases at once, wanting to maintain continuity with the past, insisting, even then, on being the most radical artist that ever lived, and trying to figure out how you do that.

MOIRA ROTH: Did you have friends your own age who were artists, aside from Wolf?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yeah, but I did not spend a lot of time socializing because—

MOIRA ROTH: Allan, you didn't have time.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yeah, I was going to college. So I saw the Abstract Expressionists from time to time, and once I went to Peggy Guggenheim's place where I saw Pollock. I did not know it was he until later on, but they were having an avid discussion with an office client about some Picasso Cubist thing. And then another time, later, a little bit later, while I was still going to college, I had a job in an art supply store in the downtown area near NYU, as many of us, in fact, did. We worked at this or that, and that was a good job for part-time work. Larry Rivers worked there, Alfred Leslie worked there, and we sort of gave each other whatever hours were convenient. It was quite congenial; we'd get our supplies cheaper.

Well, during that period, I delivered paints to Hans Hofmann, who had a studio across the street at that time. And on this particular occasion—I would always bring grosses of paint—can you imagine anyone painting literally ten tubes for every brush, every palate knife stroke? Hofmann did it and it was always appalling to me that he would waste so much paint, but nevertheless, he did.

So I made a delivery one time and there was Jackson Pollock, getting a lesson. Pollock had a studio underneath and Hofmann saw him more or less frequently, and this time Pollock brought up something, watercolors or something. They were on the floor I didn't look, it was impolite, but from distance, they were across at the other

end of the room, and Hofmann was giving a typical critique about the “shpace” and how it “vorks”—[inaudible]—that is wonderful, and I said "oh golly, old time, old home week around here." And Pollock was listening very carefully. And it is always asserted by Clement Greenberg and others that there was absolutely no relation between the two, and that the drips, occasionally, something which Hofmann had done earlier, had nothing to do with Pollock. That's not true, because I remember that Mrs. Hofmann told me years later, when I went to their Provincetown house, she had a little thing of Pollock which was dedicated to them, but it was in the Hofmann’s, and you could see very clearly the kind of devoted “mannerising” that the Hofmann idiom, the free form Hofmann, not the plainer or geometrical Hofmann, which Pollock was picking up and in a certain gesture of friendship however, he was putting in more than he might. So it was very clear that there was a kind of teacher-student relationship.

MOIRA ROTH: Speaking of teacher-student relationships, how did you meet Meyer Schapiro?

ALLAN KAPROW: Meyer Schapiro was recommended to me by my philosophy teacher, Alfred Hofstadter, who was my main philosophy teacher, who ended up in UC, Santa Cruz.

MOIRA ROTH: And I have an office next to him in Santa Cruz.

ALLAN KAPROW: So he's still there?

MOIRA ROTH: Yes.

ALLAN KAPROW: And he is a dear man.

MOIRA ROTH: Yes, he is.

ALLAN KAPROW: And I was thinking to go on for my master's degree in philosophy and was specializing in esthetics, as you might imagine, really easy to do, and I got very frustrated with esthetics because I found it all remote from all but a few kinds of art works. There instances of artworks, but it was too abstract, and that I sensed a lack of real experience in art on the part of the philosopher. We usually in those days, it was a tradition, went after the book on morals, the book on logic and the book on metaphysics was written, we would go into esthetics. You had to go to ethics and then esthetics. And Hofstadter said to me, "You know what I think would be good for you? Study art history. Then your esthetics will be much more rooted in real things." And Albert knew something about music, you see, so he had an idea of what I was talking about. He said the best thing about Suzanne Langer, for example, is that she knows something about music. So, “You should go up and see Meyer Schapiro at Columbia.” And I did not know who Meyer Schapiro was, and all my experience with art history at NYU had been black, really terrible, you know, real clunker stuff. So I went to hear a lecture, in a sense, to shop first, and it was incredible.

Schapiro was just like a breath of fresh air. He was knowledgeable, he knew all about philosophy and I remember Alfred Hofstadter said, “You know,”—and Alfred Ayer told me the same thing, they both knew him very well, he said, “You know, Meyer could be anything he wanted to be, he could put a shingle out as physicist or magician or philosopher, rabbi, anything,” he said, “He is very brilliant.” So I had heard all of that stuff and it was a very lovely, warm, enthusiastic way of somebody caught up with his curiosity and just delighted with what he is finding out and wanting to share it. There was none of that pontificating stuff that you get from some of these old coots, and I was sold. So I came up to his office afterward and I said, “I have been recommended to you” and he says, “I know already.”

MOIRA ROTH: The Zen Master.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, and he says, “I know you are a painter. Did you bring some of your work? Wow! So I did and he gave an incredible and perceptive critique in a few minutes and said, “I think you’ll do very well.” So that is how I went to Columbia.

MOIRA ROTH: So you packed your bags from N.Y.U. and moved up to—

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, I went back to Albert and Paul Edwards and Sydney Loake, and I said, “Listen, I am shifting over to the other camp,” or something to that effect. Oh, I had tried, with very grave doubts, NYU’s Institute.

MOIRA ROTH: In art history?

ALLAN KAPROW: In art history. I enjoyed Panofsky’s visiting lectures, because he was wonderfully brilliant. But there were a handful—I won’t mention names—that were just dull as dishwater. And I went for an interview there and told them something about my background. I said I am interested in philosophy and I am a painter—I was a painter at that time—and wish to make a profession out of it, but I also am interested in art history and I

anticipate teaching. They said—whoever it was, I can't remember now—said "You'll have to give up painting and we do not encourage thinking until after you have mastered"—and they pointed to all those slide shelves there —"all of that." It was one of those insufferably stuffy pretentious kinds of discouragements, rather than the challenge which it was intended to be.

MOIRA ROTH: And here was Meyer Schapiro saying, "Bring in your painting."

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, and that is why I thought, My God, this guy is twice as smart as they are. And he knows all those facts, abundantly, but he's got delight in him, and they did not have any delight. And I thought, fuck you, and I just never went back. Knowledge seemed to me worn very badly on them. Now, you know, in retrospect, I can see a lot of them as victims of the Nazi purges, left their homes and probably felt culture shock and everything else, and bitterness, and lost the life in them, and that all they had left was this dry dust of methodology, with no spirit. But, you know, in those days, why should I give him the benefit of my compassion? They were turning me off, and maybe they couldn't do anything else. But Phil Pearlstein stuck it out, he went there. And I asked him how he could stand it, and he said, "Well, I am learning a lot. Besides, they're even letting me write my thesis on Picabia" Can you believe it? Joe wrote his thesis on Picabia. I said, "Well, who are you working with?" I can't remember now who it was, but he did it.

MOIRA ROTH: And you were thinking of writing on Mondrian, or that came later?

ALLAN KAPROW: I can't remember Moira, any more, how that happened, but I was—always interested in Mondrian, as far back as I became aware of, say, European modern art, always avidly read everything I could and looked at all those paintings for hours, and I guess it just happened that that was in my mind from the beginning.

MOIRA ROTH: What drew you to Mondrian so particularly?

ALLAN KAPROW: That he wasn't an artist! That sounds very crazy, doesn't it?

MOIRA ROTH: Slightly.

ALLAN KAPROW: I mean, he was a very good painter, actually, but I thought that Picasso was a better painter, and Matisse was a better painter in the sense of the visuality of the means, although he was no slouch, he was, for example, much better than Von Duisburg or disciples since—[inaudible]—or others. But nevertheless, I felt that was not what he was about. He was a theosophist, and although I was not particularly attracted to Madame Blavatsky, which I dipped into because of knowing what he was interested in. I was struck by the fact that if, as I suspected, you look at Mondrian for long periods of time, and as he took long periods of time to paint, in what amounted to a staring, nearly unblinking way, from part to part, that the visual disruptions, that is, the clarity that you first see in the work, in the sense of measurability and balance and so on which are so often described as the key of his art, virtually dissolve in the most ambiguous and disconcerting ways: the lines bend, black lines which seem to be things on fields, figures on grounds become empty holes behind two planes of light that are pulled apart. Like Barney Newman would say, "The doors of an elevator just about to close." Planes, which are straight, warped. The top of the picture appears to lean towards you and the bottom leans away from you, and the longer you look at it–

MOIRA ROTH: Mondrian is not [inaudible]?

ALLAN KAPROW: Um, the longer you look at Mondrian, as I think the way he looked at it, and as I could glean even from his own statements reading between the lines; the more unstable these so-called stable divisions became, and it became virtually an undecipherable set of sliding, slipping serpentines. The sum of which was that the observer, me, in this case, became an equivalent of those elements in the painting; very abstract, very at first, very clear and stable, very clearly measuring, but then, like them, moment by moment, losing the ground under my feet, where I became like all those elements; an unmeasurable, unfixable entity. So I thought, holy smokes! this is almost like a philosophical exercise beginning in clarity and ending in some kind of blurred, transcended, highly unstable state. What's this got to do with painting? Nothing, except provisionally, or I could have concluded but I did not test it out; that's what all painting's about! All really good painting, anyways. But there is a sense of difference, if I understood Matisse compared to, say, Mondrian, I like them both, but Matisse had always— he always left you returning to the deliciousness of paint.

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MOIRA ROTH: Did you and Schapiro talk a lot about Mondrian?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, I had to, because he was my mentor. Probably not as much as our students talk to us. I didn't dare go ask him something every week. Probably I talked to him more about my work, and about friends' work, and about art going on, and Pollock. His considerable interest in the young painters of that time was very

inspiring. My God, if a great historian like this could be up to date, that's what I want to be. And he would tell stories of his admired mentors or role models, like Alois Riegl, who in the heydays—

MOIRA ROTH: —The Viennese art historian?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, they would just hang out with Oscar Kokoschka and everybody else, high old times in those days. And I thought, gee, NYU is so bloody dull they don't know one end of the stick from another. How can they be so isolated after growing up, most of them, there?

MOIRA ROTH: So why did you give up art history if it was so perfect?

ALLAN KAPROW: I didn't give it up, I taught it for years.

MOIRA ROTH: Do you think of yourself still somewhat as a blender of artist and art history?

ALLAN KAPROW: Not really, because as I began thinking of giving up art, I thought of giving up art history too. It is really giving a priority to the reverberations of those fields, not to them in their letter. So it is not a rejection, it is really a conversion. Hence, at the College Art Association, I never go to the artists' panels if I attend any at all, I go to the art historians' ones because there's some information or exposure to real art works that I can learn something from.

MOIRA ROTH: What happened toward the end of being at Columbia? [Cross talk.]

ALLAN KAPROW: It was a question of going on for my PhD or not, that was really crucial. And I think a mixture of having to live partially at home, and support a studio made me confront the reality; I had to get a job.

MOIRA ROTH: Are you talking about money?

ALLAN KAPROW: I'm talking about money. Also, I did not want to really be that close to my folks, living nearby whenever I needed to take a shower or get a good meal at their house.

MOIRA ROTH: Had Miriam started to go to school, too?

ALLAN KAPROW: She was in college by that time. I guess she was teaching in a grade school. She first got a master's degree in literature, but she was living at home. And I really wanted to make the final move away. It seemed that it was necessary, and I do not remember how old I was, maybe I was 23, 22. And I couldn't do that unless I had some money, so I had to have a job. And I had already begun to take my coursework toward the doctor's degree. I had most of them, I think, already taken. And I had a talk with Meyer about that.

MOIRA ROTH: You got an M.A. thesis on Mondrian.

ALLAN KAPROW: You could either, in those days, do an M.A. thesis and then get your doctor's thesis, or forget about the M.A. and just go on right through for the doctor's. And so at a point where I was not sure, I talked to Meyer and he said, "Well, get your M.A." Then I continued for another year, going toward doctors and then I realized I really didn't want to go any further because it would keep me at home. And I suspected it might keep me at home for several more years just because you don't know how long these things go on. So I had talked to him, and he encouraged me. He said, "Why don't you not take off for a while and see if you can get a teaching job for a while, and then consider coming back if you want." He was very understanding.

MOIRA ROTH: So you decided to leave home.

ALLAN KAPROW: I decided to leave home, which meant leaving school. And for one year, I tried to get a job without success, although after the war, I think it was easier than in the present situation today for a young person without too much education. Schapiro said that he thought in my case that I should emphasize my various roles. I could teach in the studio as well as in the theoretical, philosophical area, and in art history, at least I am at the graduate level. That very few at that time had that range, and therefore, I might have a competitive edge over other candidates who could only teach one of those areas. Indeed that turned out to be the case when I got my first job at Rutgers.

MOIRA ROTH: That you taught both?

ALLAN KAPROW: That I was able to teach both the history area and the practitioner area, and also could join some experiments in team teaching of the philosophy of art.

MOIRA ROTH: Who else was teaching there?

ALLAN KAPROW: At Rutgers? Well, until later, nobody. Some years later Roy Lichtenstein came and Jeff

Hendricks and Bob Watts. Bob Watts was teaching at Rutgers, but at that same time, we were in the same art history school but he was an engineer and only then afterward moved into the art department. But when I first went to Rutgers, he was there in the engineering department; which is sort of interesting. And then later, more and more interesting people came. But in the beginning, there was hardly anybody. It was a very small department. We had a little house on College Row there.

MOIRA ROTH: By this time you were married?

ALLAN KAPROW: No, that was 1953. I got married a year later. And I had a little cottage about ten miles from the school on a lake in a chicken farm area. And one day—that is where I painted and lived, it was very charming and nice. I'd hear "cluck-cluck" around all the time and you would get fresh eggs. And I'd sit up all night preparing my lectures, as young teachers often have to do, just to keep one step ahead of the students who were scarcely younger than me. And one day I was sitting outside drawing, I had converted one room into a studio and this time I was sitting outside because it was warmer than you would think, and a brand new Buick drives up and a man named George Segal gets out and says, "I heard from Larry Rivers that you were here. My name is George Segal. I am a painter." And I liked him immediately, and I said, "What do you do, George," and he said "I paint, but I am a chicken farmer." So we became very close friends, and that whole first year and subsequently I kept bringing out the New York School to the farm because it was very charming and novel in those days for anybody to leave the city. Not like it is now. And they would all come out in droves, on the train or the bus, and we would pick them up and have picnics on the farm or they would come to my little shack. It was a great, bucolic French scene there.

MOIRA ROTH: Who used to come visiting?

ALLAN KAPROW: Everybody in the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, for example, that I used to be very friendly with.

MOIRA ROTH: And those were—

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh, Grace Hartigan, Larry Rivers, Bob Goodenough, Harry Jackson and all of the people—he was still painting abstract pictures, Helen Frankenthaler—I can't remember all the names now. And all the people from the Hansa Gallery, which of course included Wolf and Richard Stankiewicz, and a lot of people from the Hofmann School that were in the James Street Gallery, the Tanager [Gallery], and all those names that are fabled now from that period, they would come out and we would have picnics. And it was just wonderful.

MOIRA ROTH: With the chickens running around?

ALLAN KAPROW: With the chickens running around. And George, of course, got a lot out of this because he had virtually discontinued his connection with the art world once he left college. He was a student of Baziotes and had been in the Ninth Street show and was connected at the time when he was going to college at NYU himself, before I was there, very much with the scene. And then, since his daddy and all of his relatives and his wife's relatives were in the chicken farm business, having migrated from New York City in the 1930s, he was given as a wedding present and as a natural kind of step for him; as the oldest son, a chicken farm across the street from his folks. And so he had to make a living, and that is what he did, you know, some years later. And I think I was the beginning of his change, because it was as if he came to me to recapture that link that he had broken. He was delivering eggs in New York and he met Larry [Rivers] somewhere and Larry said, "Well, Allan's out there, you should look him up."

MOIRA ROTH: Aside from your bringing people out to New Jersey, you also used to go in.

ALLAN KAPROW: And then George and I used to go in regularly.

MOIRA ROTH: To the Hansa Gallery?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, first before he made any show there, we would go to see the shows. And for a year or so I tried other fly-by-night galleries and they did not work and I went back to Hansa with George and we would go in to do our proper business with the gallery. It was cooperative and we had to sort of do these mailers, publicity, and baby-sitting the shows and that sort of thing.

MOIRA ROTH: What sort of paintings were you doing then?

ALLAN KAPROW: A mix of about six different styles. Still in that swing between "Matisse-y Hofmann" and "Constructivist Mondrian," with occasional forays into a somewhat naive mystical style of painting that I picked up from a short friendship with a guy you may not remember, named Gandy Brody. A wonderful kind of self-taught painter who was excellent, incidentally. He would probably have killed me, he is dead now, but he would have killed me if I said this. He was probably the heir to Bonnard, the most crazy Bonnard, you know, the Bonnard that dissolves in monsters, only supported by a film of delicate, beautiful, delicious smelling paint, you

know, like the drowned woman in the tub? That kind of Bonnard, whose work, by the way, I have always liked. And Gandy Brody—it was an interesting friendship for a while. It would have been so good if Gandy hadn't been so fucking arrogant. But he tried to tell everybody what to do and to suck them in and play power games with marvelous seductiveness, inspiring you on and at the same time sucking you in. So there was a little bit of that in my experimentation at the time, but basically it was those two polarities of the Construction style that is ultimately transcendent, that is, what we would now call a Minimalist esthetic, it is really about Minimal, it's Essentialist and the sensual side, intellectual—but sure, the sensual side that is marked by the French painters, like Matisse.

MOIRA ROTH: You once said to me that around this time, I guess, well early 1950s, middle 1950s that you found then a shift, which I know a lot of other people felt too, going away from the dancing dervish of the Abstract Expressionists—

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh, yes, George and I used to talk about that all the time.

MOIRA ROTH: —and going into the cool, more aloof—

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes. I think that was happening, but the shift was more palpable on the conservative side of things, that is, people were manifesting powerful anti-modernist tendencies then and all the art magazines seemed to be celebrating their return to sanity.

MOIRA ROTH: Did you read modern art magazines?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, there was not very much to read. It was easy to catch everything in one issue of Art News that was everything around. What were you going to do, read The New York Times, or American Artist, or Art Digest, which it used to be called? They were idiots and just way out of it.

MOIRA ROTH: When does your involvement with John Cage start?

ALLAN KAPROW: It starts around 1956 when I really made a breakthrough into what was my real style and when, after one year I was satisfied that I had done it and I quit painting.

MOIRA ROTH: So you met Cage at the end of this year.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yeah, that's when I started doing those action collages and assemblages with sounds and smells and tastes. It happened in one fast year, and by 1957 I stopped and was doing environmental work. At that point, using sounds in a mechanical way that I had, to occur in corners of the ceiling or underneath things, made from little electrical gadgets in Japanese toys and so on that I would gimmick up. They were controlled by random circuits that Bob Watts had helped me make. I had reached the end of my tether and I did not know what to do with those sounds. I knew they were inadequate because they seemed too mechanical. Their currents were random, but their individual sounds were expected, so I wanted more range. I had met John Cage many number of times before that over the years and had gone regularly to concerts of him and his circle.

Morty Feldman, for example, I had gone to high school with him, although I didn't know him very well he was, I think, a year ahead of me; we were about a year apart. But I was aware of him as a musician, and so he was another link to the Cage group. And I went to John to find out how could I use tapes because I figured tapes could contain a lot more sound on them, that I could do much more with them because I heard a lot of his work, and everybody was doing pre-electronic music in those days, calling it "musique concrete," which was in the mid-50s. And so he said "Come by the class that I am teaching at the new school. I come in from the Hudson River where I live and teach this class. Why do you not come in and we can talk." So I came in and asked him these questions and I was so fascinated by what the class was doing, that he answered the questions very quickly and, probably in ten minutes—I talked to him before the class or after the class—the class itself was so fascinating that I decided to enroll.

MOIRA ROTH: Was that the people in the class, because it was an incredible group of people?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes. The whole scene there, very small, choice, and John was at his finest energy, and he knew he had people that were eating up everything he suggested and giving it back in ways you could hardly even expect. And that is where I did my first happening, and he encouraged it. I was not a musician, I just wanted to make noise.

MOIRA ROTH: Who took the class that you particularly noticed?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, there was Lucia Lukochewsky, a very interesting dancer, she was there for a time, a lot of painters, one by one, used to come in, George Brecht was there about a year after I was there, and he was one of the key students, of course, eventually—shifting the whole thing around to events. But there was Al Hanson,

Dick Higgins, and Scott Hyatt, a photographer.

MOIRA ROTH: Jackson Mac Low.

ALLAN KAPROW: Jackson Mac Low, of course, he was there even before I was. Toshi Ichiyanagi was there, Japan's foremost electronic music composer, and he was the first husband, by the way, of Yoko Ono. And that is how I met her at that time. Then they divorced and she married Tony Cox and they divorced, and she married Lennon, but that is another story there. Gosh, the list was enormous. And George Segal would come in and Oldenburg occasionally would come—not as a full-time student, but they would come in. Whitman, Red Grooms was there.

MOIRA ROTH: How did Cage conduct his class?

ALLAN KAPROW: He would ask people to bring in work and it would be done in the class every week, you would come in with new pieces. He was very modest in his requirements and everybody was working at top form. You couldn't wait to come into the group with pieces. So I did things that were proto-happenings, for example, I would bring in a lot of tools like circular saws and hammers, knives, and forks, which I could bend and bang. And wood to saw and glasses that would be filled with water that I tapped at different levels. That is the same things which, when used, would make noise and if they occurred here or there or somewhere in their very useable-ness, then it was an event that happens to produce a sound rather than the idea of a sound as pure occurrence, made with an instrument made only for music.

MOIRA ROTH: And when did that officially become a happening?

ALLAN KAPROW: We did not call it a happening. [Laughs.]

MOIRA ROTH: Well, you have done it very often before. Do you want to describe the first happening?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, I had these chords from Cage's class. I do not think I called them that, I did not have a name for them. But I think that the first consciously called happening was much later. Unconsciously, I described a kind of proto-score in 1958, which I published in Rutgers Literary Magazine called *The Anthologist*, or something like that. And it was a long score that would prove to be, the next year, the basic sketch for *The Ancient Happenings in Six Parts*. *The Ancient Happenings in Six Parts*, I think, was the first time I consciously used it as a title, and then afterward, the mode itself became a happening. So it was somewhat later when I began with Cage, two years or so. In fact, I have even used the word in a Jackson Pollock article I wrote in 1958 ["The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *ArtNews*], in which I described two options, after Pollock, by looking at Pollock's work as process, rather than only as process leading to results, which was the customary way to look at it at that time. I said you could take off in two directions: One is toward pure action without painting, and one is to continue painting in one way or another, and I said, giving a kind of imaginary scenario at the end of that article, which I haven't looked at in years, but I remember it went something like this: These would be the happenings of the 50s or whatever, something like that. Well, it is just a plain English word, meaning events or currents, I suppose. It stuck. There was something about what I described there that seemed rather Rimbaldien and lavish—the gorgeousness of all things possible.

MOIRA ROTH: Did a lot of people react to the article?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, a lot of them did. In fact, Tom Hess, who was then the editor of *ArtNews*, that published it, kept it for the better part of almost two years before he published it. It was written in 1956, right after the death of Pollock, just at the point where I was leaving painting. And Tom had it and I kept bugging him, "What are you doing, it is the first article I ever published," at least in a professional journal. He was nice about it, but very evasive. I think he just wanted to keep it until he felt it was the right time, for whatever reasons, because he was always a reluctant admirer of mine, and really reluctant. He just could not quite understand why, on one hand he liked me, and on the other hand he disapproved of what I was doing. So he kept it until he felt comfortable enough to do it, and that was in '58.

MOIRA ROTH: So in terms of timing, in a sense, you provided a history, a theory and history at the same time as you began doing happenings, or the antecedents of happenings, as an historian just as an artist.

ALLAN KAPROW: Something like that. I think at that time I tended to formularize, or formulate first, and then formularize what I would do subsequently by imagining it in advance—now this seems like a good idea and tried to articulate that. But I'd still be doing something less than that, and then gradually I'd catch up to what I enunciated earlier. And I did that, without quite realizing it, for a number of years, almost stating my next case before I got there, acting as my own prophet. I don't do that kind of thing anymore. I am much, much more interested in putting one step in front of the other. It may change eventually, but I don't have any programs any more.

MOIRA ROTH: But you did at that time.

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh yes. I even put maxims up on the wall, the way I read Tintoretto used to do it, you know, he was reputed to have had a maxim, like those words, on post offices, “The Drawing of Michelangelo and the Color of Titian,” and if you put those two together, you have Tintoretto. So I had my equivalents, whatever they were, I can’t remember them. It would be embarrassing to try and think of it right now.

MOIRA ROTH: Well, you have the sound of John Cage and the paintings of Piet Mondrian, the presence of Marcel Duchamp.

ALLAN KAPROW: Duchamp didn't really enter my mind very much. Curiously enough, it was much later. I was aware of him, and you remember that interview we had when I was in Pasadena, I actually met him.

MOIRA ROTH: Right, on the stairway.

ALLAN KAPROW: On the stairway of my friend’s summer apartment, which was Duchamp’s house on Tenth Street. And yet he really did not figure in my regular thinking until, I guess until I started doing those environments, in '57. Then I realized, holy smokes with all due respect Matisse and Mondrian and Picasso and those nice people: that ain't where it's at. And even Hofmann, you know. It really was an eye opener.

MOIRA ROTH: What did you see when your eyes were opened to Duchamp?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, I went and bought Motherwell’s book, which I had seen around. I think it was published around—

MOIRA ROTH: Oh, *The Dada Painters and Poets*.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, it was published sometime in the 1950’s.

MOIRA ROTH: 1951.

ALLAN KAPROW: So we’re talking now about six years later. Maybe I bought it just before that, I can’t remember, but I really began to look at it carefully and read all this stuff, which I had just skimmed, with fascination. So that shifted everything, and Cage immediately made more sense. It's only recently, to somehow restitute the case for Mondrian, but he's interesting me again.

MOIRA ROTH: Well, you mentioned this evening earlier on, the exhibition of Mondrian’s brilliance and political-ness.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yeah, he interests me for precisely the reasons that he interested me initially, that he is more a philosopher-mystic than simply, the sensitive man, the thoughtful man that makes wonderful paintings; it embodies that. Although indeed that is what he did. But it is the sense in which he leads the painting into that curious, funny realm of non-visibility.

MOIRA ROTH: What do you think Duchamp stood for in the late '50s for you?

ALLAN KAPROW: Duchamp immediately stood for the mess that I had left in philosophy, that is, he was the answer, had I really looked at him earlier, to the problem that I was having in the excessive verbalization of the philosophical discipline, because it was that “verb-y” visual pun that resolved everything into paradox that seemed to be the only solution to questions about how do we know anything.

MOIRA ROTH: And he was so crisp.

ALLAN KAPROW: And so crisp and, you know, Frenchman that he was, so elegant. I didn't really have that at the edge of my consciousness when I was in philosophy in the 40s. I didn't know about him. I knew about him, but it wasn't connecting. My art history teachers used to pass off Dadaism as a word. That was it. Oh yes, there were the Dadaists. They made jokes about art. And I had seen the Gallatin Collection, incidentally, when it was at NYU.

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Young art students and artists living in Greenwich Village, that NYU was given the Gallatin Collection and the Arensberg Collection became one thing and turned down the gift after a year in which these things hung in the library and around the ground floor of the building there, gave it all up, the dummies! And so Philadelphia took it all over, and there is where I saw Duchamp, among others. A lot of Gris, Mondrian’s—but the Duchamp did not connect. It was like something lying out there that I was impressed with, but I did not know for what until around 1957.

MOIRA ROTH: Well, after you, as it were, officially began to do happenings, in other words, not to do these events in Cage's class, but to actually do something.

ALLAN KAPROW: Well. [Cross talk.]

MOIRA ROTH: Did that put you on a different footing with other artists?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, immediately, divorce. I never saw people vanish so quickly from my crowd as they did then, leaving me feeling a bit queasy.

MOIRA ROTH: —I know we've talked a lot about it before, but how do you describe happenings?

ALLAN KAPROW: How do I describe it? I have a terrible problem.

MOIRA ROTH: I know, I have phrased it badly.

ALLAN KAPROW: No, you didn't. There's no way to phrase it nicely. Anyway you ask it, there's going to be a problem. Moira, maybe you could quote me from Michael Kirby's book or something, you once asked me that and I answered—

MOIRA ROTH: Well, I'll go about it a different way

MR.KAPROW: Okay.

MOIRA ROTH: What did you find in the meaning of the happenings that kept you with it for quite a long time?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, it wasn't art.

MOIRA ROTH: Although it has become art.

ALLAN KAPROW: It has become art, that is, it was sufficiently out on a limb, without models that were in front of me to compare it to, except those kinds of models in the everyday world. Like carnivals, or what I thought was human behavior in general, or children's play, among the models I consciously considered. Those were not art, or not high art, anyway. So what I liked about the idea was that I could be beyond the question of esthetics. Now of course I knew that it was art in the sense that I couldn't divest myself of my background, or even for that matter, the immediate foreground of all my colleagues and their real interests and the teaching I was doing. So art was there, but it was an example of keeping one step ahead, like doing your lecture is one step ahead of the students. Keeping one step ahead of my own background as it was catching up to me every day. That is what I liked about it.

MOIRA ROTH: Was there anything you disliked about it?

ALLAN KAPROW: A good question. Let's see whether I remember what I disliked. In the beginning, no, but given a year or so, when public attention started to come around in articles, or critiques appeared in the newspapers, I think I found it disturbing, because then I found myself in the position of the very avant-garde artist that I once promised that I would be. And while that is very nice on the one hand, it's a responsibility that I did not care to have on the other hand because I had to answer to these expectations and criticisms.

MOIRA ROTH: Was this when the divorce started?

ALLAN KAPROW: No, that started earlier. It started earlier in the first of the environmental presentations I had at the Hansa Gallery. It seemed to turn there. All the materials, plastic, strong bells, lights, smells, buttons to push and all that stuff. To most of my old Hansa Gallery friends and Hofmann co-students it seemed too far removed from what we all once celebrated so warmly together. And I remember Elaine de Kooning gave a panel discussion at one of the Ninth or Tenth Street galleries, The Grotto, called, "The Art Hijackers," of which I was apparently one. And I didn't go to the lecture, not out of lack of curiosity, but I happened to be teaching that night. I think I even have the announcement sent out by the gallery somewhere in my records about the Art Hijackers. As though there was something that was being—I got this image of somebody in a great big trailer truck barreling down the highway and there's an art work at the side somewhere, the moon is shining and it is dark otherwise, and he is stopped and he is put his fingers—the Art Hijacker, they take this art work off the side of the road and they dump it somewhere. An Art Hijacker? I couldn't have cared less to hijack art. That was the last thing in the world I wanted to waste my time on doing.

MOIRA ROTH: Well, if you had a divorce, did you also have a new marriage?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, with people—at a distance, like Cage and Jack and Bob whom I'd gotten friendly with quite a few years already by then, as early as 1953. I used to see Bob out in the streets working with these

models, black and white pictures. And I met Paul Taylor in the 50s as well—

MOIRA ROTH: The dancer.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yeah, when he was doing those minimalist dances. Very, very interesting, although he turned into a “dance-y-dancer” and was trained as a “dance-y-dancer.” There was a brief period when he was incredible, just doing simple movements. And so they were my alternate family, Cage from a distance, but I took his class regularly, I did not socialize much with him. Then of course I told you that I would see Marcel Duchamp from time to time and we would have a two-minute conversation on the street. I never received him socially, but in that casual way he was very steadfast, in my mind, and also would come around when I did, so toward me he was too. And he was remarkable in his interest toward the others, the younger artists around. But I became friendly with Alfred Jensen and I am still friends with him, who, as a much older man at that time, than all of us, and then close friend of Mark Rothko, had returned to painting after many, many years. I remember it was twenty years, of not painting.

You know, he was the lover of Sadie May, who, I think, must be related in any way, but part of that family circle of rich Baltimore art lovers that the Cohen sisters were part of, and was one of the trustees of the Baltimore Memorial Museum. He had been one of the earliest students of Hofmann in the days of Munich where it started, and had led a school revolt, and according to Alfred Jensen, Hofmann in those days was tyrannical, he seemed to lean too hard on his students, and so Alfred pulled a small cadre out and went to the desert with Sadie May who was recently divorcing her husband or something at that time. And in the desert, as he described it, this was in Tunisia somewhere, with camels and tents and all toured in the middle of nowhere, it seemed he had to get rid of the competition and one by one he got rid of the other young men and became the lover of Sadie May, with whom he lived until she died.

Now Alfred Jensen then decided to go back to art and began to live with Lil Picard in a ménage a trois with Lil’s then very, very devoted husband—he was a nice guy. And Lil, of course, she always has been an artist, she got a big charge out of this youthful Al Jensen who was bubbling like a twenty year-old, and they hung around all the “happeners”, the young people, Cage, everybody like that, and Rothko began getting upset and stopped seeing Alfred because he did not quite feel that comfortable with all these new things, although he tried, I gather.

MOIRA ROTH: Was that a time in New York when there was a real generational split?

MR.KAPROW: Yeah.

MOIRA ROTH: [Inaudible.] Because it seems every now and then, there’s a bell, and people take different sides like in a boxing ring.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, there was a really clear separation, because in the Ninth and Tenth Street East Village area where all the galleries of that period were springing up as cooperatives, fly-by- night operations, of which, I would say, Rubin Gallery was one. Then I remember de Kooning and Wilks and other people all had their studios right around in there, Kline. In the early days, it was like the scene was gemütlich because all the young people were sort of disciples of the Abstract Expressionists in a kind of nice sense, and at the openings you could see versions of this and variations of that earlier kind of form. When the Rubin Gallery came in, I think it was one of the first to do that, not Hansa, and started off with my "Eighteen Happenings" and all kinds of things with Brecht and the rest of them.

MOIRA ROTH: That was the very beginning—

ALLAN KAPROW: That was in 1959.

MOIRA ROTH: When it opened?

ALLAN KAPROW: Right from the start.

MOIRA ROTH: So it was the theater for happenings.

ALLAN KAPROW: It was. And then it spread to the Judson Church, or almost simultaneous, because a lot of the same people, like myself, did things for Judson as we did for Rubin. But that's when the generation split took place. A lot of the younger people who still were thinking in the older style of the action painters couldn’t stomach us. The older action painters tried it out now and again to cover these things, but they didn't like them. That is what happened when Claes [Oldenburg] and Rosenberg found themselves. Also, of having to take sides and defend the old, you know, heartfelt, gutsy, committed art. It wasn’t that there was a lack of commitment, if we look back in retrospect, or that there was no guts, or for that matter, that there was only guts in the earlier stuff. It was not that sort of simple, good and bad guys. But it seemed so at the time. It was like you choose between tragedy and hijinks.

MOIRA ROTH: Were the younger critics who began to support the new hijinks?

ALLAN KAPROW: Some of them tried, like Irv Sanford, you know, he really couldn't quite get with it. He still has difficulty.

[Tape stops and restarts.]

MOIRA ROTH: February 18, 1981. Continuation of the interview with Allen Kaprow. You said that you felt that one should look at the prototypes, or antecedents of things.

ALLAN KAPROW: We were just talking about artists who do performance, how many of them do not really know where they come from, that a roots movement in art might be needed just to clarify where it comes from. That it is very good, for example, to know what your prototypes are if you think you are innovative. A lot of performance today is a form of theater, not of stage theater, of major plays like *Ibsen*, but of the kind we now have: skits, cabaret entertainment, or what we would call "small nightclub entertainment sports:" like boxing and wrestling, aerial shows, automobile races, things of that order. Including television demonstrations, which are another form of theater, condensed for that small screen.

But I think if you know that, then you can indeed mine that prototype much more than you probably are doing, and certainly innovate the possibility much faster, because you do not need to do the same thing. What happens is that most of the time people think that they're seeing something new, which may be new for them, but they are re-inventing a mousetrap as far as most of the others are concerned.

MOIRA ROTH: And the mouse is totally not attracted?

ALLAN KAPROW: That's right.

MOIRA ROTH: Well, speaking of mousetraps and current performances, I notice that you did not mention happenings as an antecedent that performance artists now might respond to or at least know about.

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, I assume that they did because that is at least part of the art background, but perhaps they do not.

MOIRA ROTH: How do you think performance artists think of happenings? Do people ask you questions in the sense of how they imagined happenings now?

ALLAN KAPROW: It is a curious thing you ask, because I think back now, reflecting on it. Students that have gone through our classes have studiously avoided asking me, lest they be found wanting, perhaps, or embarrassed or something?

MOIRA ROTH: I find it fascinating that when you came to my "History of Performances" thing, although a lot of people had worked with you, surprisingly few seemed to have spoken to you very directly about what you used to do.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, that is unusual. I remember the earliest classes we had here in the area of performance art, I had a booklist of some, let's say, forty to fifty items, and the library got quite disgusted with me after a while because while I had them put on reserve, no one used them. And in those books, there is a lot of material on happenings, the stuff that you and I take for granted. So I guess they did not look at them, because the library slapped my wrist one year by sending me an account of how many visits during the whole year the students had made to that collection. It turned out that five times the students came to look at the books. They urged me strongly not to use their facilities again.

MOIRA ROTH: The story unwrinkles.

ALLAN KAPROW: That is right. So I think the answer to the question is, I really do not even know that. That is too bad, and I think permissiveness has been the mode—and may be no longer useful. That is, I assumed they would. I spent a whole time in the classes analyzing the value of each book according to what it would offer, recommending this a little more than that, trying to organize the value of the whole set, and then not really doing anything about it when I found out it was not used.

MOIRA ROTH: Well, given that you think people who are involved in performance now should at least know the prototype, what do you think, in an idea realm, would be the good thing to know about happenings, in the sense of current events, current performance?

ALLAN KAPROW: Moira, that is very hard to say, because they seem so antique to me. All history and prototypes are useful just to know where you come from, I suppose, before, but what should be known other than those that have been most documented, I do not know. You can't get the feel of it the way you might from

a painting that was painted in 1910. It still exists, and it would be an antique, but at least you'd know the painting. There is no way except through the stories about happenings that you would get any idea about them, the same way as there's no way the stories about the Futurists and Dadaists and the Russian Futurists performance can be really experienced. All we have are fragments of stories, a few photos here and there. Let me draw an analogy, Moira, I read Michael Kirby's book on Futurist performances, and was so enthusiastic about them, because they were unavailable for a variety of reasons, and at that point I could not read Italian that well anyhow. I called him up immediately upon finishing his book and I said, "You know, if I had had this book it would have saved five years of my experimentation." He said, "If you would have had this book, you might have saved yourself some time, but you would have lost all that experience." [Laughs.]

MOIRA ROTH: That is a very nice epigrammatic exchange. What were the circumstances that you did the book on happenings? That is, were you were covering the happenings before Kirby?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, we were in touch with each other. We were preparing our books more or less at the same time. Mine was a little earlier, but I couldn't publish it until later. I actually wrote the essay in there around 1959. I slightly changed it when it finally was published, but not substantially. So it's thinking of a very earlier period.

MOIRA ROTH: So it echoed the sentences at the very beginning, as opposed to being a summary after the audience.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, because you remember, it came out in the mid-1960s, and the design was certainly of the later period, the actual photographic and thematic arrangements and the kind of format they would have. That all came out a year before it came out. And my mind had changed a good bit in the meantime, but everybody felt there was no point in disturbing the text to redo it. I think my intent at that time was pedagogical. I say that with some amusement, because as a younger teacher in those days, I was feeling as though that was needed, especially when in the beginning, nobody knew what it was about at all, nobody. And I thought, as a young teacher, I could do the job of teaching that.

MOIRA ROTH: Seeing as you'd done the job of making that.

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, I was in the midst of making that, that is, scarcely had I begun then. The earliest ones that I could call happenings were done somewhere in the middle of the winter of 1957 in John Cage's class. So that I then wrote a text for *It Is*, and there, at the then-editor's invitation, Phillip Pavia and it was very formalistic, that is, how to do a happening, and I went through various kinds of mechanistic ways of making events, beginning with what I still find comfortable, that is, a kernel in real-life, containing all senses and which, because it's a kernel of real life, for example, eating a sandwich, that moment, which is completely multi-sensory, but absolutely natural—you don't think about all the elements, you just do it. So I said, well, to make a happening out of this, you do not just do it, you break it into all those elements, the way one would analyze in those days, a painting, or anything, to try and find some elemental configuration and you then analyze the interaction of all this, its moves from stage one, to two, and so on. And so I prepared some totally impossible set of moves for eating a sandwich, taking it out of your lunch box, unwrapping the paper, lifting it to your mouth, smelling it, breaking those into sub-parts, hesitating, prolongations and retardations, reverses, inversions of long themes, codas, much like I imagine Stockhausen was doing it without logarithms in those days in his music. And it was impossible to perform, of course. And in fact I never really did that kind of thing in those pieces that I did perform.

MOIRA ROTH: But that was, as it were, a didactic model for the kinds of things you did with more exuberance.

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, that was the beginning of it. I thought, well, how wonderful to theorize and instruct, and so I began about a year after that—this silly article was in '58—about a year later I think I—with a little more experience, and the first public one to my credit was done in New York at that time. I really now knew a good bit more about what was at stake, so that that was the beginning of the book. It was really a long essay. It wasn't quite an answer to your question about why, but the pedagogical impulse was there.

MOIRA ROTH: Do you think happenings and sounds have a kind of logical input?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, one of the assignments in our present course, Sculpture and the Transient Environment, which is largely a class in performance, because the minute you introduce time into sculpture, you are dealing with a performative situation, has been the resuscitation, at least, in my teaching, of the concept of utility. To do a practical work, it is one of the assignments, that it accomplishes something. Only now the spectrum of what accomplishments may mean, runs from the usual political thing or the practical one, like how to get your house cleaned, or how to change the world's politics, to such things as the utility of ideas, of self-transformation, things which have been called more or less mystical or personal, or subjective, are now considered part of the domain of utility. So by that token, the word "utility" almost becomes meaningless. It can be used for almost any end, including an esthetic end. But it's serving as a way for us to actually deal with goals, and to not make nonsense out of words, but rather to see how we may now define purpose, and if indeed, we feel, each one of us, it's

sufficient now as a purpose the end itself of art, without defining it, then at least it is clear. That is what one wants to do.

MOIRA ROTH: And, pray tell, what is the end of art over-compassing? Or the purpose?

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh, I do not know. I am proposing that each one of those in class deal with that question, rather than leaving it up to somebody else, or not even facing it. So that if, indeed utility is a way of dealing with goal? Fine, then it is worthwhile. That is another way of saying I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to accomplish.

MOIRA ROTH: What did you accomplish?

ALLAN KAPROW: What did I accomplish? The way you pause when you don't know what to answer, as you repeat the question: What did I accomplish?

MOIRA ROTH: You did a lot of sort of individual sets in particular performances and then the—[inaudible]—

ALLAN KAPROW: One obvious thing is that I introduced a mode which became reasonably acceptable as what I do, as one other way of doing art. And some people were attracted to it. They were dealing with other things, I believe, though at first it was hard for even myself to quite say what it was that was different; certainly impossible for observers at large. It was all lumped under one word, that terrible word, happening." But if you now look back at what Oldenburg was doing or Red Grooms or Bob Whitman in America, and then consider what Vostell was doing in Europe and Jean-Jacques Lebel and others like that—[inaudible]—in South America or Lenore—[inaudible]—Brazil, she was Argentine, they're all very different. Ken Dewey on the West coast is doing something else. I think it would be a very difficult job to bring them to some accord.

Michael Kirby tried to do it by isolating the New York group first of all and saying that they were joined by a common disregard for plot, which was helpful, to see them simply as a set of loosely interrelated activity without what he would call 'matrixing' them in a story sense. But that is not enough now, we have to really go a lot deeper, and he would be the first to agree if you would look back on that period and see what indeed made the thing called an accomplishment. I mean, that is what I am going back to. If I think those happenings accomplished something, they introduced a performative aspect, once again into modern art as an increasingly prominent mode, that much was true, and I think Cage has to take a lot of credit for that because he spoke more to the visual artist at that time than he did to his audience.

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[Side conversation.]

MOIRA ROTH: Well, did you have a sense of an international community?

ALLAN KAPROW: I thought so, that is, it was nice to receive a letter from Nam June Paik at that time in Germany, speaking for Asia and telling me about the Hi Red Center and other groups beyond the Blue Tie. It was nice to hear from [Wolf] Vostell and Jean-Jacques Lebel and Martin Levin.

MOIRA ROTH: Which you qualified, you said you felt you had that international community?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, I felt there was a community of mutual energies, and to some extent, overlapping practices, but even then, I was quite aware and had discussions about this, at least with the New York group, of how I did not really think they were doing the same thing I was doing. There was a sense in which I was holding off both the role of progenitor, which I was given credit for, I think mistakenly, and also the responsibility of caretaker, which I didn't want. So I remember one time I was walking down the street after a wonderful performance of Claes [Oldenburg] and talking with him, because he heard that I did not consider what he was doing a happening. I said, "No, it is theater," and I said, "But it's all right."

MOIRA ROTH: Why did you rule out Oldenburg's core happenings? What—did they feel too "scriptive?"

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, it was not the scripting, I mean, a business organization in the war is scripting. It was that they were specifically and rigidly—I do not even know that is the wrong word— they were specifically theatrical; they had a very clear marking line between those who watched and those who did, they were rehearsed and they were repeated. And there was a lot of verbiage.

MOIRA ROTH: All of which was not applicable to your pieces.

ALLAN KAPROW: Most of which, because do not forget, in the beginning, I did not know any better either, and I had to work through a stumbling and rather disagreeable loose form of theater in order to see what it was I really was looking for.

MOIRA ROTH: Did other people doing happenings go as extensively as you did into communities?

ALLAN KAPROW: Michael did—Kirby. We usually had a mutual referral system. When I couldn't make it, he could.

MOIRA ROTH: Did that affect the kind of happenings?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, both of us were schoolteachers, you see, and the rest of them weren't. And it made a difference in the kind of access we had to gigs, first of all, and then second of all, to the kind of community that we could immediately establish with our hosts. We could move into a—if a commission was from the middle west, we could move into the academic community without any problem of communication on their level to teachers, most of them in the arts, but who had never done this kind of thing because we were teachers, too.

MOIRA ROTH: What would you do after the initial invitation? How would you set things up in advance?

ALLAN KAPROW: A lot of it at first had to be advance work,—finding sites, getting insurance policies, making sure the whole community was aware of it, campus police, parking areas, all that sort of thing that anybody inviting a rock group would be responsible for, I had to be. So there was a lot of telephoning, and letter writing, and more or less these things got done. Then there was the actual "productional" works which, unlike now, when I go virtually with nothing on my back,—ah, no props, very, very minimal plan.

In those early ones, I am thinking now of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, where I did a very big class to order, quite a lot of material, huge backdrops hung from an over-hanging roof to create a performance space, lots of electrical work, barrels, big drums that would have to be brought there, sound, lights, loud speaking systems, the whole stuff theater people, in fact, deal with, or rallies have to deal with, since these were usually out of doors half the time and would involve a lot of people.

MOIRA ROTH: How many people? In that case?

ALLAN KAPROW: In that case, I think there must have been 200, not all equally involved. You see, there was that early period up through about 1962 or so, and I did not know quite how to get out of the theatrical mode, and so there were people who were—

MOIRA ROTH: Meaning an audience versus participants?

ALLAN KAPROW: —yes, there was an audience that came and was given rather simple tasks to do. I think I have mentioned this, things like cleaning up or moving something from here to there, or carrying somebody over their shoulder who was passed over a headlight, a piece of baggage, whatever it was that would involve them in a kind of milling, free-floating way was what I could do then, not knowing the simple step that occurred to me over the years, so that I could just simply eliminate the audience and begin to plan for a group of—and I was prepared to do it from the start. So there were lots of people and therefore the communications between me and the institutions, the documents that had to be signed and the lawyers that had to be involved were extraordinary.

MOIRA ROTH: And when you began only to work with participants, around 1962?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yeah, more and more. It started around that time.

MOIRA ROTH: Did that simplify the organizing side of it? [Cross talk.]

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh God, yes. Everything. By a year later or so I could then say I'm just coming and I'll figure it out when I get there.

MOIRA ROTH: Did it increase the pleasure for you?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, much. The managerial part was eliminated instantly, or at least reduced to such a small minimum that it didn't matter.

MOIRA ROTH: So the artist could enjoy himself.

ALLAN KAPROW: The artist could enjoy himself and hopefully, in most cases, so could the participants and the sponsors.

MOIRA ROTH: Were there other people from the earlier happenings beginning to move in the same direction, to rule out the audience?

ALLAN KAPROW: None, not at all. I think not. To some extent, Michael [Kirby] did, because he made a workshop situation. But then, that intensive work would follow a performance in much the same way that a theater

workshop would then make a piece for its audience at the end of its period of work.

MOIRA ROTH: Were there a lot of discussions then as to theories behind the event? You mentioned discussing with [Claes] Oldenburg that you felt that he did theater happenings. Were there a lot of those kinds of discussions?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, mostly around me, because nobody else cared. [They laugh.] At least that is my impression, that there was a kind of vestigial Abstract Expressionist no nonsense do and don't talk in the air then. You—[Cross talk]—talked about life, you know, that was fine.

MOIRA ROTH: And drank.

ALLAN KAPROW: —your troubles,—and drank, and ate.

MOIRA ROTH: How did that affect personal relationships with other people doing their happenings? Was it just a question of different attitudes to one feeling, or did that distance you?

ALLAN KAPROW: That distanced me, but I think that I probably contributed to it as must by my temperament as I did by what I did.

MOIRA ROTH: Allan, what is your temperament?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well,—[laughs]—my temperament—I was probably a little more circumscribed in those days. It was ideological, it was standoffish, it was pedagogical, it was manifestly intellectual, and I probably gave off a certain vibration or aura of impatience—

MOIRA ROTH: Phooey.

ALLAN KAPROW: —I was younger.

MOIRA ROTH: Were other people, perhaps not within the happening group, but outside, that you really did discuss ideas with?

ALLAN KAPROW: It's an interesting question. I cannot remember. Maybe I was so filled with myself that I did not worry about it. [They laugh.]

MOIRA ROTH: Well, did not you write as the very basic reason why you began to write, that you needed—[Cross talk]—seriously.

ALLAN KAPROW: —somebody to listen to me, my writing listened to me. It's possible. I would talk a lot, yes, and I do remember this, to George Segal, who was always a very good listener. He certainly did not share my goals. He was fascinated with the whole thing and was a very good replier to points that I would raise, usually bringing up something like the longevity of traditions, with which I was most impatient. I didn't give a damn, you know, but he kept pointing out the weight of those traditions upon people's attitudes, aptitudes, and if I was still dealing with the art world, well I must really recognize as the kind of resistance, or the inability to even think this way that I thought was so easy. So he did—he was a good companion to talk to and he lived nearby—and we both lived in New Jersey. So I did not really have all that much time in New York to sit around and discuss—

MOIRA ROTH: —even if there had been people to discuss with—

ALLAN KAPROW: —right, because I was usually there to see what was going on, to see shows and concerts, see my family, my mother and father lived there, and put on my own happenings, and that was a busy time and there wasn't talk time.

MOIRA ROTH: Was Vaughan at all involved with the happenings?

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh yes, she was very much. She was very supportive, and as often as was possible we would both go in together to see them, particularly those at The Rubin, Judson Gallery—for a minute I forgot what it was called. [They laugh.]

MOIRA ROTH: Did you at that time go to a lot of, say, dance concerts?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yeah. I went to a lot of those and to the Living Theater, and to the new films, especially the multi-media things, you know, Bob Whitman's wonderful—[inaudible]—Michael Kirby, experimenting with the combination of live performance and projected image, sometimes deliberately merging the two.

MOIRA ROTH: Did you see early dance—Simone Forti or Yvonne Rainer?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, when they were doing *the Mountain People's Lofts*. It was wonderful.

MOIRA ROTH: Carolee Schneemann.

ALLAN KAPROW: Carolee.

MOIRA ROTH: And Yoko Ono.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yoko Ono. Did I ever tell you about Yoko's loft on Chamber Street? I am hoping she'll get back into that world again. She's always kept contact with her artist friends and I think now that she won't be recording so much after the death of John,—she'll probably find it easier to do that. But at that time she was recently divorced from Toshi Ichiyanagi, who was her first husband. Then she was either getting married to or in the process of getting a divorce, I am not sure, to Tony Cox, a very brief marriage after Toshi. And it was with Tony that she had the little baby. I guess that marriage was—[inaudible.]

I am confusing the periods but in this early time, this was around 1960, she had a loft on Chamber Street, a walk-up loft, very, very big walk-up, it seemed like endless steps, and it was in that place where a number of pre- or proto-Fluxus performances was held regularly through her invitation. She would give the place over to her musician or artist friends for as long as they wanted it and they could do whatever they wanted in there. And one of those was just ever so memorable in my mind. Bob Morris was given the use of the apprentices and a few of us through the local mailing got an announcement that he had something up there. And so George [Segal] and I and maybe one of our students from Rutgers at that time went in one weekend in his panel truck. He used to have his old truck. He delivered eggs. He was an egg producer before he became a full-time artist.

We went up the steps and huffed and puffed to the top and we opened up the door to Yoko's loft, and instead of revealing the inside of this huge big loft that we were all familiar with, there was a confrontation right there in the doorway with a structure that had been built right into the door that was very much—reminded me very much of that scene in Alice in Wonderland. Where suddenly an entranceway to Wonderland becomes very small and she becomes as small as a rabbit. So this was—a curved alleyway that virtually dropped and converged very rapidly, it was all done in gun metal grey—moved from straight ahead and within about two and a half feet curved to the right and came to a point. And one single little twenty-five or so watt bulb illuminating it, and that is all. So, of course, the curious like me would poke their head in and see where it went to only to see very abruptly that it all converged—[laughs]—and we slowly closed the door and went downstairs.

MOIRA ROTH: And that was the end of the rabbit door piece.

ALLAN KAPROW: That was it; you couldn't go into the loft. In order to get into the loft, I guess Yoko went somewhere else. You would have to tear it down.

MOIRA ROTH: That's wonderful.

ALLAN KAPROW: It was just wonderful, because the doorway in those lofts are all metal doors; great big, heavy metal doors. It was great normally, and you opened up to find that it went nowhere fast. So she would invite people to do that. Another wonderful thing she did was a piece by La Monte Young; which Bob Morris and La Monte did together. It went on endlessly, perhaps the whole day. It was one of those pieces which was—described by a simple instruction: draw a line and follow it. Draw a straight line and follow it. A real smart-ass kind of thing, you know, it's like one of those—what is the sound of one hand clapping questions, and I just thought, oh—[laughs]—that is really cute and thought nothing of it, really, except that it intrigued me, it would lay in the back of my mind like so many of his think pieces of that time. It was wonderful, but what was I going to do with it? I didn't know.

So he [La Monte] and Bob Morris did something with it. They set themselves up in the loft, and one sort of down at one end and one at the other, and for the whole day, with two pieces of chalk in their hand, they kept drawing lines to each other, sighting along as if they were surveyors, quietly talking and giving each other guidelines on which way the line went, how did it join up with the one that the other one had just drawn, erasing it and redrawing it and erasing it and redrawing it. It occupied them a whole day, I think. And one came in and simply stood there watching these two fellows who were not interested in you at all. They were so totally focused on what they were doing that I have never forgotten it. It was just a wonderful kind of—what I then thought was a true happening, and what I subsequently felt was a meditational piece.

MOIRA ROTH: Were there a number of such events that—[inaudible]—meditational? For instance, did you go to George Brecht pieces?

ALLAN KAPROW: George was a neighbor. In fact, he was one of those I should have mentioned that not only was a colleague in the sense that his think pieces were far closer to what I was interested in then than anyone else's, but he was also a co-student with me at John Cage's class. And he did at least one real happening, that car

piece, which was called "Auto something or—other *Sundown Event*," and it was really fabulous. I mean, just a lot of noise and silence and people getting in and out of their cars quietly and slamming the doors.

MOIRA ROTH: And you went to that?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes. It was mostly silence.

MOIRA ROTH: Did you go to Europe at this time,—or did you get letters from them?

ALLAN KAPROW: I had been in Europe much earlier as a painter, but not with all the art work, in the fifties.

MOIRA ROTH: The traditional trip to Paris?

ALLAN KAPROW: To Florence. Vaughan and I went there for a whole summer. And it was wonderful. I looked at all the old masters and did a lot of bad painting.

MOIRA ROTH: Whom were you most drawn to?

ALLAN KAPROW: Piero della Francesca, always, one of my favorites, and to some of the medieval work that I saw in—– what's the town? It had some very beautiful Romanesque church there. Yes, I liked Piero. I still do, I like the—

MOIRA ROTH: —because he is meditative?

ALLAN KAPROW: Perhaps. A certain austerity about his meditative forms. They remind me of Leger.

MOIRA ROTH: Interesting, because at that time it seemed another choice would be someone exuberant, like Uccello.

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh, I like him, sure, of course. That battle picture's terrific. I also like Masaccio. I was disappointed by the amount of restoration on the picture, though. Tribute money.

MOIRA ROTH: When did you go back to Europe, because now you have all these connections?

ALLAN KAPROW: In 1963. I went there at the invitation of the Theatre des Nations to do a happening. It was my first exposure to international disaster. I mean, the administrative foul-ups were enormous, and I didn't know how to get along with what was obviously a kind of traditional theater type management.

MOIRA ROTH: When was this?

ALLAN KAPROW: This was in the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre in Paris, and I first told them I didn't want to use the theater, and that threw a monkey wrench into everything because they had a program of international presentations, including African dancers, peasant dancers from Tyrolia, you name it, American Indian tomahawk displays

MOIRA ROTH: —and a Kaprow happening.

ALLAN KAPROW: And I said I do not want to do anything in the theater. Well, you cannot, I mean, we have invited you. I thought you knew what I was doing. It turns out that that was an eye opener. So they put me off and put me off and wouldn't see me and made appointments and never showed up and the whole summer went by until—[inaudible]—finally came to the rescue. Jean-Jacques Lebel was very helpful. I had already become friendly with him. And they agreed to sort of take the burden of getting things done away from the Theatre des Nations. And so I went through with it—and it worked out very nicely. I used an old department store. I don't know if you know it, but it is a traditional old place called, Bon Marché, le Grands Magasins Bon Marché, and the director, or assistant director, befriended me after I—[inaudible]—introduced me and it turned out he was a very nice guy, interested in art, opened up the place after dark to me and everything was shrouded in and covered with that covering rag. It looked like the most frightening morgue you can imagine.

MOIRA ROTH: What did you do there?

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh, it was very ritualistic kind of thing which involved Letty Eisenhauer and others. The audience slash participants were asked each to bring a stone from somewhere, I do not remember whether we, Jean Jacques got them for them, I think something like that, from a river bed outside of Paris. But we brought them to a theater to please the Theatre des Nations, that it was on record, the sponsor, and there everybody was given a stone and thanked for coming to the theater. We were led as a group away from the theater directly to have a walk in the city carrying these stones, which had been wrapped up in paper with little ribbons or something, to the department store; where they were let in the back door and went up the elevator to a floor

above which I was using. They spread throughout the covered displays and covered mannequins where you could see, just barely, a foot sticking out, or a hand outlined against a sheet. They were kind of a collage of slow events that took place in dim light. People were free to wander about through the aisles, like somebody was rolling inside of an automobile tire and variously falling on the floor with the tire over him. Another person was like a mannequin, standing on the tops of tables, covered partly with a sheet.

Letty Eisenhauer was being bathed in some kind of colored liquid glue or something by a wonderful artist whose name was Danielle—[inaudible.] She was sort of a Martial Raysse type,—French pop artist of that period. Jean Jacques was wheeling a person back and forth in a shopping cart down the aisles. It was really very weird and hallucinatory, the whole thing. And then at some point, the people were left carrying these stones, and were announced or asked to bring them to this rubber kiddie pool that Letty was standing in,—and deposit them as a kind of offering.

The whole thing went on for about an hour and a half and they were all allowed to leave, one by one, back down the elevator and through the back entrance. And unlike today, when I do feel the need to communicate with those who are taking part in it, I did not in those days. And so they all went out not knowing what the hell had happened to them—[laughs]—and me not knowing what they have lost.

MOIRA ROTH: Even if you did not communicate with the people who participated, did you communicate with, like the inside group? So that within the participants there was an inside group of participants and an outer ring to this.

ALLAN KAPROW: What it could be called now, looking back, is that there was a performance group who were like actors, and there was an audience that was invited in various ways into the piece. Now that Paris work which was called *The Bon Marche Archive*, was a holdover from an earlier style, because by then I'd already begun to eliminate the audience. This was a kind of compromise with the real situation there.

MOIRA ROTH: —that you would been invited by—

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, and I could not—I was getting nowhere after nine weeks of corning to the office and sitting there and nobody to receive me, and I became quite—agitated that I was such a damn fool for waiting this long to make a decision about something. I should have just simply said, "Well, they paid for my ticket. That is their problem now; I am going to do what I want." Clearly, they weren't that interested, anyway. But I did not, out of a sense of fear, or embarrassment or uncertainty, or plain naiveté, I am not sure what. And so I made a compromise with that situation by saying, "Okay, you are theater people, I am not. I am going to invite everybody to the theater to take them out." There was some press and a few audience reactions to that, as a kind of strong-arm move on my part which was not considered very nice and I did not give them what they paid for. But since I let everybody out the back door, I didn't ask them what they felt or think. I do not know what they really experienced. The group that you ask about, of course, but they were all my friends.

MOIRA ROTH: When did you start to ask the participants for input?

ALLAN KAPROW: Moira [Roth], that must have been years later. I did not get smart until years later, and it was really the direct result of what was happening in the feminist art classes at California Institute of the Arts.

MOIRA ROTH: We are going to jump.

ALLAN KAPROW: I had to jump that far because I kept my eyes closed and my ears closed for that long, even as I was doing something that would logically seem to anyone else to invite exchange, it did not in my case, and that is a curious kind of lapse. So it was the CR [Consciousness Raising] group form that actually loomed one day very clearly in front of my face and I said, "That is it!"

MOIRA ROTH: This is when you were at Cal Arts [California Institute of the Arts]?

ALLAN KAPROW: This was as late as 1971.

MOIRA ROTH: Judy Chicago and Miriam *Schapiro?*

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes.

MOIRA ROTH: And you probably had a very definite feminist student who took both your classes

and classes with the feminist class.

ALLAN KAPROW: Sure. And nobody came up to me and said, "Why do not you do it?" It just occurred so fast that —I began doing it instantly. It made quite a difference. It fit right into the actual classes of the performance curriculum. And I took it over immediately as the necessary part of the whole form of many pieces that I did

outside of school.

MOIRA ROTH: So then at that point you would do a piece and then you would discuss a piece afterwards. What about before?

ALLAN KAPROW: I never did. I would discuss them before—

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MOIRA ROTH: Could you bring us sort of up-to-date in terms of where you were, and jobs and places as we move through the 1960s. You'd been at Rutgers.

ALLAN KAPROW: Okay. At Rutgers University I was—let's see, how many years—I think it was eight years all total. One of my most interesting students was Lucas Samaras and a little later on, Bob Whitman. There were quite a few very talented ones, but Lucas Samaras figures very strongly in the events up to the time I left. He was an honor student and had a very high ranking academic record. In fact, had been invited as a high school graduate to a four-year scholarship which was very, very distinguished.

As an honor student in his senior year, he received a grant to do a special project for which he applied, this being a hand-made book of poetry and illustrations by him, since he both wrote and painted. And the photos would be a kind of biographical, autobiographical account of himself, photos of paintings, actually, in the nude or the life of his apartment at the time, still lifes, scenes of the room. And the poetry similarly was about his life, mostly his inner life. Some of the material was what we would today not even bother worrying about, but it had words like, "shit," or descriptions of masturbation or fantasies of sex acts, and one of them was a kind of lecherous or concrete poem which had, I believe, either "fuck fuck fuck fuck" all over the page like a texture, or "shit shit shit."

In any case, it was then introduced into this hand-made, rather large volume of beautiful, very thick paper. It was like a medieval manuscript, it was so elegantly done, that its sheer beauty impressed everyone on Senior's Day, when each of the honor students in the various disciplines were asked to make a presentation. Lucas in fact read some of these things to mothers and fathers and deans assembled, and nobody raised an eyebrow, or if they did, they kept control over it. So, after this, some of us—I was his advisor—but those around him, other teachers who were also interested in him, held our breath and then we relaxed, we breathed again.

And about a week later, when the thesis, or his book you would call it thesis, I suppose, when the projects of different students were honored on Senior Week were to be recorded in the Dean's office and then moved to a special place in the Library of the Dean. Who had not been present up until this point, looked at the material, and Lucas was attractive because the other kids—[inaudible]—and leafing through it, he was aghast. This Dean has since departed, and was not a friend of mine, for reasons that are irrelevant at the moment, pulled me into a high senate court and threatened to dismiss Lucas and asked both him and me to pay back the money that he had gotten for his project. I was tried and convicted. Lucas at least, by my request, was left alone. I said, "Look, he is innocent, it is my responsibility, I encouraged this."

Those professors who had been supportive suddenly vanished like rats on a sinking ship, and what actually did happen is that the Faculty Senate was provided with totally manufactured false information by the Dean. Letters, for example, were solicited from total non-entities in the community who were called artists to comment on my irresponsibility and lack of solid responsibility as an artist, people who had neither the reputation nor even knew me for what I did. And letters from my side, like from Meyer Schapiro and Harold Rosenberg and Tom Hess were suppressed and refused to be—they would deny that they even existed though I had copies of them. The court examination refused to admit them as evidence. So it was a kangaroo court, and I was found guilty and told that I had better just get out because I'm fired.

MOIRA ROTH: I had no idea this had happened.

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh, really? So I got a job at Pratt [University] for a brief period, and Stony Brook [University] directly after that. This was in 1961. It was a blessing in disguise, because although by that time I had lots of friends, George Brecht and George Segal and Bob Watts and, of course, Roy Lichtenstein, who were teaching there also, it was time for me to move on. I was meeting so much opposition, even within my department—that I am glad that it happened because it made me find a whole new world.

MOIRA ROTH: When did you go to Stony Brook?

ALLAN KAPROW: 1961, the same year [Cross talk.]

MOIRA ROTH: So that was a reasonable academic world.

ALLAN KAPROW: It was at that time. We were then—that is, Stony Brook was not Stony Brook, it was in Oyster Bay as a small experimental school that was using as its model the University of Chicago in its early day. Most of the early staff came from the University of Chicago, kind of an inter-disciplinary core program and it had no Art Department, in fact, it was non-departmental, you know, in that kind of neo-Aristotelian way that Hutchins used to cut, and I thought that was really fascinating. Of course, it only lasted one year because the state legislature in New York then voted that it should be a big university downstate center, and designated as its new place, Stony Brook.

MOIRA ROTH: So it left Oyster Bay?

ALLAN KAPROW: So it left this magnificent estate, which was an arboretum, and the old, wonderfully "Europeanized" buildings that we occupied with a handful of students, maybe a hundred students altogether, all of that disappeared in one year. And then Stony Brook became another headache to me. I left Stony Brook after about seven years.

MOIRA ROTH: And then?

ALLAN KAPROW: And then came—well, the cause of my leaving directly was that I had become interested in education, that is, using performance, or what we called 'Happenings,' and art in general, all the arts, as a main ingredient of education, not simply as art education, but rather as a core part of the curriculum which would include all the usual disciplines as well, informed by artists in some way, but I did not know what they would, what those ways would look like, but where I conceived a program in which artists would be introduced little by little into the schools.

This came about in 1963, when the Kennedy—the last year of the Kennedy administration. As a result of Sputnik's effect upon science, teaching in this country had to be revamped very quickly. They now had somebody in the president's administration there who thought that it would be very good to have the arts and humanities also reconsider what they were teaching. So this man, whose name was Joe he was a physicist—[inaudible]—called me up one day and said, "Listen, I am inviting a group of artists to Washington for a meeting, and included George Segal and Bob Motherwell number of others who had been always interested in education. Would you like to come?" And I said, "Sure." As a result of that—I devised what I and the rest of the group devised what was the model for the Artists in Schools program that has not—[inaudible]—for long ever since in this country, you know, because it is—[inaudible]—with more or less success. And I think this chap is coming to our conference tonight may be one of the early people in that kind of program.

But it was conceived in 1963 and implemented to some extent even then with a teacher training program. We actually went all over the country for the next ten years armed with introductions to principals, meeting with interested teachers, setting up workshops, how they could train other teachers, use community resources, like the local artists in the community, get past the janitor or deal with such things as advance credits, and we got the College Board with its AP [Advanced Placement] program to approve things, and during this whole period, I became very, very much involved in getting grants in order to promote such things.

For example, in Long Island, NY, where my school was at the time, I thought, well, it's one thing to travel all over; it is quite another thing to actually do it and be close by to learn from it. So I got Nam June Paik, Stan VanDerBeek, and a few others to come in on special grants to work with the school systems on Long Island, NY. Stony Brook was very upset with me. I didn't quite understand the reason for it, but they were having a big hassle out there in Albany at that time as to schools of education compared with schools of higher learning. And Stony Brook didn't want to mess around with the great pressure being put upon it to introduce a pedagogical college. It seemed with the work that I was doing that it might be used by the opposition to justify their pressure to set up a College of Pedagogy, when Stony Brook wanted to stay Art and Sciences.

MOIRA ROTH: Wanted to stay, quote, academic.

ALLAN KAPROW: Academic. And I said I could not care less for what their problems are, but this is a taxpayer political issue in any case and not mine, and they said it certainly is yours. They were very unpleasant to me, although I finally had tenure after some great difficulty. Nevertheless, you know, with tenure, your life can be just as miserable as without it. [Laughs.] You know, you are held back, you are not paid as much, you are given bad teaching schedules and no office space, whatever it is, and those are ways of making you feel like leaving.

Just about that time, as part of the story is very interesting, during the sixties there were a lot of big drug busts on campus. The state legislature of New York, for its own reasons then having to do with the upstate power that was pressuring Rockefeller who was Governor at that time, to put more money into the upstate rather than the New York City region. They wanted to embarrass Rockefeller; that he would give a lot of money to Stony Brook and prove that it was a den of iniquity at Stony Brook.

So a raid of some astronomical number of policemen and cars was organized one night when I had a sabbatical

leave. I was in Texas at that time. And probably great crimes were committed that night because there were no policemen around. They zoomed down instead on the campus of Stony Brook at four or five in the morning and raided all the dorms and managed to find some dope, probably not a remarkable amount. There was then a big raid of all the professors, who were brought before the Senate Investigating Committee on television and it was broadcast to the entire community of New York City and outlying areas on one of these Kefauver kinds of investigations of 'Crime on our Campuses' and people were hauled in from of the television cameras day in and day out. I received a subpoena in Austin, TX, not knowing anything about all this because I was away—it was not a sabbatical, it was a Guggenheim—and so I was doing a lot of art work that year and I would be doing a commission at that time in Austin, TX for the University of Texas there.

And I received a call from, State Senator so-and-so's office and they said I should expect a subpoena letter which had been sent to my house. Since I wasn't there, they'd received my address from my wife who was sending it to Texas. And Vaughan [Kaprow] was very upset, of course, and said, "What have you done?" and I said, "I do not know." But I had to appear on pain of punishment if I didn't. I said, "I am in the middle of business, I haven't even been there. What's this all about?"

MOIRA ROTH: Why did they want you to appear?

ALLAN KAPROW: Because I had a beard and was friends with a lot of the students, some of whom were actually picked up. And there were three or four professors there, one of them who was, I think, a law professor, but we all got nailed and we were going to be prime evidence. We looked good on TV, we're an artist, and I had to hide —the University—I went back home, I should say this, as soon as I could. I terminated my business very fast in Austin, TX, went back in order to answer this subpoena.

I called up my father who was a lawyer and he said, "You'd better do it and we'll deal with it when you get here. You've got to get the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] to help you, but first try the University. They must have a representative there." So I went to my University President and Vice-President and was told they could not help me, that is, they said they wouldn't, clearly telling me that I was not their responsibility, even though they understood I was not anywhere near this place for the last six weeks, I think it was

So—I saw than I was not going to get any help from the University, and I had to go out and get my own lawyer. It cost me thousands of dollars and meetings with the State Senate Investigating team, with their lawyers, with Secret Service agents who in hotel rooms interrogated me endlessly with my lawyer. And I remember one meeting in which I just said, "Listen, you picked on the wrong guy. I am just not interested in drugs. I am terrible in everything else, but the one thing that you are looking for you are not going to find on me." "Have you ever taken drugs?" I said, "Yeah, but I don't like them." "Do you have friends who take drugs?" I said, "Thousands of them, and so do you." [Laughs.]

MOIRA ROTH: What was the outcome of that in terms of Stony Brook?

ALLAN KAPROW: Stony Brook was, as far as I was concerned, a dead end. I said to myself, you know, this is like Lucas Samaras again, and am I bringing this on myself, and if I am, am I willing to take responsibility for what I am doing? And I said, yes, I am. I am not going to clean up something I don't believe I should clean up. The act is a good one. So at that time Herbert Blau, who was helping to form the California Institute of the Arts with Bob Corrigan—it was in the planning stage—called me, just at that moment, and said, "Would you like to have a new job?" [Laughs.] And I said, "Well, let me find out about it," saying to myself, "Yes, indeed!" [Laughs.] Because I didn't know what I was going to do. I had tenure, so I had security, but it was hardly pleasant. My department wouldn't look at me. Everybody was going "cluck-cluck-cluck," I have been subpoenaed, and that I was not found guilty for anything didn't impress them at all. I was an embarrassment now, which was reflected, as you can imagine, all community affairs, these kinds of feelings that come up were going to be reflected on the department which had trouble, like all Art Departments in a science school.

MOIRA ROTH: That sounds familiar. [Laughs.]

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, so I went to see Herbert Blau who was then still living in New York and he told me about this Mickey Mouse school. I said, "It sounds so weird, fine." But I was in the meantime having to work—this was going to be a year hence—so I had just applied for and gotten a big Carnegie Grant to carry out this work in education and I went back to that, which was simultaneous with this drug bust. And it was about $87,000, which was a lot of money in those days—this was 1967 or so.

MOIRA ROTH: It is still reasonable.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, for a teacher training program with Stan VanDerBeek, Nam June Paik and I forget who else, and it was going to be conducted regularly every week and then we were going to tabulate the results with a set number of students and really set up an accounting methodology to see what we were doing, to see whether it can be worthwhile. And this could have been something of a real milestone in terms of what we had

been promising verbally that never actually showed.

Stony Brook rejected the grant after having supported it, agreeing in the beginning to be its umbrella and you need that sort of thing to get a grant from these agencies—it then turned around after hearing the news that it was awarded and said, "We do not want it. "So I did not know what to do. I called up the Carnegie people and they said, "What gives?" and I said, "I do not know." They wanted to take the money back and I said, "Could you please not make a decision until a month or so from now, it is not going to make any difference; you are still earning money on it, in the bank, just hold off." So they had a meeting and agreed that if I could come up with some other funding agencies or agency, then they would continue the grant and would maybe support it into its second year.

I teamed up a young poet/philosopher/educator named Herbert Cole, who is very well known as the author of Alternate Teaching Theory, and we tried to do something in the New York City school system with which he had connections. That did not work out because of a lot of reasons, mainly that I did not have the credentials, though we found a lot of teachers and principals who were interested. We tried then the New York State system itself. There were very many interested people there, but again on the lower echelon, on the operational echelon, very difficult to get in, but he said, "We'll take that package because we have enough problems of our own, community up-risings, drug, crime, black-white problems. We don't need any more problems." And so Carnegie was getting very nervous. Then Herbert Cole got a job out at the University of California, Berkeley campus in the English Department, and he got hold of some of the people whom he knew in education, in the School of Education out there, and they agreed, through the chancellor's office, to sponsor the program.

I went, armed with all these letters from University of California, Berkeley, because they sponsored the project, I went to Carnegie and said, "Here it is." The next thing you know, Berkeley turned around and said, "We do not want it." Why? Because somebody in the Lawrence Hall of Radiation sent a message down to the chancellor's office at the University and said, "Listen, these happenings are going to cause sex orgies in the halls." This was a report directly to me and Cole, that we have enough student uprisings and we do not need orgies here. So Berkeley threw it out. Carnegie at this point was getting even more scared. What have they put their money into? Who are these nice people underneath? The politeness? And Cole, meanwhile, was able to pull a rabbit out of a hat by going directly to the Commissioner of Public Education for the City of Berkeley, saying to him, "Listen, how would you like to have this money? I know you are about to leave and you are going to take the job of State Commissioner of Education in Massachusetts. How about you taking this?" They had gotten to be friends, anyway. In the meantime the guy said, as he told us, "If it works, I'll take the credit for it. If it doesn't, I am not here anymore." So he signed it in as one of his last acts before closing up his desk, and I moved to Berkeley on a commuting basis that year.

I literally took an airplane every week, either to California or Long Island, because I couldn't move the family and this was only going to be one year, while working on this California Institute of the Arts deal at the same time. So it was a horrendous year, but I did some of the most interesting performances that year in Berkeley with students and teachers, using the entire environment and it was only marred, of course, by the terrible revolution in that town when all the tanks and the gas kept everything really off kilter and energies poisoned.

MOIRA ROTH: What sort of happenings did you do?

ALLAN KAPROW: Did I ever give you that poster called, "*Six Ordinary Happenings*?" That was part of a kind of festival. It was bound up in the whole educational idea of taking kids in the environment and, by making a happening of a very simple kind, learning something about the environment or about oneself.

For example, the one that you asked about called "*Giveaway*"? That was one of them where a group of kids of different ages went to a variety of Goodwill and other used clothes shops and with each of them given just a small amount of money, they bought some clothes, things that they were rather interested in, for whatever reason. And then we all went to take those clothes to Washerettes and wash them, just as we would our own clothes, carefully iron and press them, put them in a nice little package, wrap them up, tie a ribbon, make a dedicatory card, and took them back to the Goodwill shops where we bought them in the first place and offered them, free, saying that these are for you. The kids themselves did that, it was not I alone. I was just one of the participants. And you would imagine this sweet young thing offering a nicely tied up package of clothes which she or he was willing to open up to see that there was no bomb in it, would hardly be refused, when you cannot imagine the suspicion and the defenses and the exclamations that they do not take clothes from the public, "We have our own suppliers," or whatever.

And the heartbreak these kids felt, that being rejected, because they saw the humor in the whole thing, it was obvious, but that they were returning something that was better than these sort of shabby states that they bought them in, seemed to them not only amusing but rather touching, and why should they be rejected? Well, they learned something about – to talk about – something about the world and about giving and taking. And we talked a long time about what is a gift? Does it have any strings attached?

MOIRA ROTH: —[laughs]—yes, if it is done up with string.

ALLAN KAPROW: So we did things of that order, things like that, and then there were others, such as what does a polling person do in a community when she goes out with a pad and clipboard and asks people in a supermarket what do they think about this product or what do they think about Governor Reagan or President Nixon or the Vietnam War or whatever it is that pollsters do. How does this affect people in the public? Do they like it; do they like to be singled out? Do they tell their true feelings or do they feel put upon and try to escape? So we got permission in some of these super markets, you know, the Co-op in Berkeley, to use their premises to pretend that we were pollsters, and in fact we were pollsters. And we were given a chance to deal with public response, to acquire information, and to make up their own questions, whether they want to ask—naturally, a good number of questions from the older students were directed to the Vietnam War or to the presence of the armed forces or to freedom to use drugs or other kinds of current issues. But some of the littler kids asked wonderful questions like, "Do you not think Cheerios are yummy?"—[They laugh]—or something like that.

We brought all of these experiences back to our storefront and we discussed them, and this is a way of dealing with civics. You know, a class that you take in school, dry as dust, and we learned about statistical methodology and how do you amass evidence, what do you call real public opinion? How many people, John, did you interview? Sally, how many did you interview? Five, two, one. Is that evidence? Do you call that public opinion? And we tried to tell them something about how often newspapers report public opinion when it is based on just a few interviews like this. So the happening form, and I'll talk some more about that tonight so I don't want to go through all of that, was used for the first time by me as a result of having nearly gotten fired from Stony Brook, that I wanted to do at Stony Brook but never got a chance, all because of a Commissioner of Education that was going on to bigger things and didn't give a damn.

MOIRA ROTH: How long did this work in Berkeley go on?

ALLAN KAPROW: A whole academic year. And naturally I did a number of pieces besides the project at that time.

MOIRA ROTH: How did those pieces interact with the project?

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh, they were all of the same kind of order; it is just that I did not spell out goals in those particular ones. So I allowed myself one for the Institute, the liberty of being once more very quiet.

MOIRA ROTH: The San Francisco, CA audience.

ALLAN KAPROW: Right. Like I did one, it was called *Dial*, referring to a sun dial which groups of students along the street of the Art Institute would chalk the outline of the telephone poles as the shadow went across the street, and as those shadows were being traced, of course the sun caused the shadow to move, and we discovered it moves at an enormous rate, right under your line, it is flowing along there past our—

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MOIRA ROTH: One of the things that has fascinated me about that piece is that it seems very symbolic of the idolism of the decade and the angers of the decade and something you've been talking about and I have thought a great deal of, is the idea of rich metaphors in your work or in someone else's work, and that particular piece, *Giveaway*, seems to me a very, very rich metaphor—that's all.

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, that was a very busy year there. [Herbert] Cole and I tried to make our whole experiment essentially of performance with different accents, different features of it. And the discussion group or what we than later on called "COR group" form, largely through the precedence of various kinds of transactional psychology like Esalen and so on, was a common place there. Well, I still didn't pick up on the connection between its thing and my own.

MOIRA ROTH: But you were reading and talking about them.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes.

MOIRA ROTH: Did you see it as something distinct from what you were doing?

ALLAN KAPROW: No, I just didn't connect it formally. I did not use it as it seemed so obviously—could have been used. I would separate the discussion, making subsequent or do it while we were doing it, these productions—all these things were just standing there in the day, so easily into the streets where we were taking the groups of kids in our automobiles that we would always talk. But I didn't see it clearly as being part of the piece, or see how I could then formalize it a little bit more, focus issues rather than let them drift in and out.

MOIRA ROTH: For example, when you took, with the kids, the act of giving away, the suspicion that surrounded that act, you did not think of that as integral to the piece at that time?

ALLAN KAPROW: I must have thought of it, but I didn't admit it to myself, or didn't say it. Or maybe I just took it for granted. John Fitzgibbon and his wife and kids were there. I've got one or two snapshots of them here. They were really moved by that, and I think she was one of those, the youngest daughter, now, a college student—was deeply disturbed by not being able to give her package back.

MOIRA ROTH: Now this was a period when you were rather separate from what was happening with early Bay Area performance, in other words, Tom Marioni, Paul Cotton.

ALLAN KAPROW: Tom Marioni at that time was not performance. He was not doing performance. He was still director at the Richmond Museum, so I didn't see much except that I know [Herbert] Haimowitz, according to John Fitzgibbon, came to see me and I treated him, according to John, very badly, to see me about this—some piece like he did "Taxicab," did not he ?

MOIRA ROTH: No, that was Mel Henderson.

ALLAN KAPROW: Henderson was the one who came to see me, yeah, and wanted to do something. I don't remember what it was, I do not even remember the circumstances, but John Fitzgibbon who was there, very closely connected with Herb Cole and me as one of the teachers that enrolled in the whole project, said that I listened to Henderson—and said that I didn't think that what he proposed, he had proposed something that I thought was unethical, and evidentially didn't encourage him and made him go away. I don't remember it at all, but that's the way John describes it, and he could give you a more accurate description.

MOIRA ROTH: So actually the time that you were given to re-associate with artists who do make events really occurred in Southern California.

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, that year Barbara Smith was doing things down there and so was Judy Chicago and others, and Lloyd Hamrol.

MOIRA ROTH: So you would come down to Cal Arts.

ALLAN KAPROW: Cal Arts wasn't yet.

MOIRA ROTH: But you would come down to the site [future location] of Cal Arts—

ALLAN KAPROW: I would meet with the administrative people, [Herbert] Blau and [Robert] Corrigan every once in a while that year. I also came down here and did a big piece with Paul Brach at the beach and did a number of things in the L.A. area, more private ones.

MOIRA ROTH: And also—[inaudible]—Pasadena Retrospective.

ALLAN KAPROW: —[inaudible]—so there were fallouts from that and more than in the Bay Area. I heard about something that you probably know more detail of from John Fitzgibbon that was going on at that time, a kind of an initiation piece, and maybe it was Haimowitz, for the class of Peter Voulkos. Do you remember that?

MOIRA ROTH: Oh, right.

ALLAN KAPROW: Do you remember that?

MOIRA ROTH: Yes, that was for the MFA [Masters of Fine Art].

ALLAN KAPROW: Right, and somebody was taken on a kind of initiation route with eyes blindfolded and transported—

MOIRA ROTH: —and canoes carried through the street, yes. Well, when you came down to Cal Arts then you plunged into being an administrator as well as a teacher as well as an artist?

ALLAN KAPROW: That's what one was expected to do [They laugh.] Guess what else is new? But I assure you, Moira, compared to this place that was a ball. I mean, administration was reasonable—

MOIRA ROTH: —[laughs]—as opposed to being unreasonable?

ALLAN KAPROW: As opposed to being insane here—[laughs]—I mean this place is up to Kazoo in paperwork.

MOIRA ROTH: Well, when you came to Cal Arts it was the very heady, very beginning of Cal Arts.

ALLAN KAPROW: It was before the beginning, it was the planning year before it opened—[cross talk]—which made it 1969. The Berkeley experience, this educational thing that I was involved in was the winter of 1968-

1969, and during that same winter Cal Arts was being planned to open the next year. Then it got postponed another year after we had moved here, so the planning extended it to 1969-1970, and it opened the following year, partly because the building hadn’t been finished.

MOIRA ROTH: How was it to arrive in yet another school with hopes that at one time you had at Stony Brook?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, the experience in Berkeley was so horrendous that the sheer wrenching of social concerns and personal alienation that I had experienced trying to commute that quarter from one coast to the other, sleeping on a board in our office, experiencing no sense of community anywhere, it was really a terrifying time. Especially, in the Bay Area, that had such a tradition of open sociability; and you know which was being force ably promoted by the commercialization of the Hippie movement. You know, all of the use of love symbols in an aggressive way really upset me very much. I thought of a school situation as a haven, as a kind of respite. Combine that hope with the fact that Cal Arts promised to be something quite crazy. As Paul Bloch would say it, *Easy Rider* supported by the makers of *Mary Poppins.* [They laugh.]

MOIRA ROTH: The most improbable combination.

ALLAN KAPROW: And , of course, it was improbable and eventually, that is, very shortly thereafter, especially when we tried to hire Herbert Marcuse, the shit hit the fan and it blew up and very quickly became a mockery of itself, and its best teachers were like modest achievements. I think that somewhere in the bottom of my spine I—thought I was no longer going to put myself in a position that I had in previous jobs, being a fall guy and not achieving anything. That what I had to do, and I didn't know how to do it, you know, I had no program, was to stay intact, and if I stayed personally intact I might be more effective. Therefore, I approached Cal Arts with bemusement, saying, I think probably to all of my colleagues, the few core group at that time planning it, “This is just too good to be true, don't take it seriously.”

MOIRA ROTH: What did you do in your classes? Your classes you did take seriously?

ALLAN KAPROW: I took them seriously but they were very much in the style of Stony Brook, of the Berkeley situation. Don't forget, we were still in the throes of student revolutions in the country and I had just gone a short time before we started. I had gone to Kent State and had done a big piece there, and Morton Subotnick was there and Bob Smithson did a piece there, and I forget who else. There was an interesting guy from the theater—the Theater something or other. And just right after we left that arts festival, that horrible situation happened there with the students getting shot. And so if you consider that atmosphere as still very much part of the paranoia of the sixties, even though it was the early seventies. And Cal Arts was that way. You cannot teach a class as a class.

MOIRA ROTH: Let me backtrack because it is something I haven’t asked you about. Were you involved with demonstrations—the political temper of the sixties?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, but in my way, which is to say a way that everyone else found obscure.

MOIRA ROTH: Which was what?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, if you consider, as one simple example, “The Giveaway.” That is a political piece.

MOIRA ROTH: But I meant rather, did you actually participate in those demonstrations? [Cross talk.]

ALLAN KAPROW: Not in the official demonstrations. I found their form was much too simplistic, so I suppose the elitist artist in me was offended by the expression of something that I saw much more keenly on too many levels to feel comfortable with. I could not really get out there and demonstrate about hypocrisy.

MOIRA ROTH: But you did feel that in some ways, saying, “The Giveaway,” that you were echoing, if not commenting on what was going on politically.

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh, not only that, I was participating in it precisely as a teacher, because I thought the real way to deal with the world—I was naive then probably, was through positive education, rather than revolt. I did not see any value in getting your rocks off at shooting a soldier. And it probably is political naiveté, because who can wait fifteen years for an educated student to change the world, but nevertheless it was the only way in which my self-respect could be maintained, that I could actually say, “I am doing something in response to the world which isn't hypocritical. If I went and put a flower in somebody’s gun, I would think that is—it's not only bad art, but it is also hypocritical because it is virtually—it's publicity, and publicity does not generate profound human change.

MOIRA ROTH: Now this may be putting words in your mouth, but it seems to me from what you said on the tape and more just in general conversations that when you came across feminism; that it was a political movement

that made sense to you in a way that many of the political activities in the sixties hadn't.

ALLAN KAPROW: That is correct because I felt that it was addressed to human beings on a one-to-one level.

MOIRA ROTH: How did you come across it at Cal Arts?

ALLAN KAPROW: It mowed me over; I did not come across anything, [They laugh] and my friends decided to do something about it.

MOIRA ROTH: Who were your friends then?

ALLAN KAPROW: Judy and Mimi, and they were old friends, furthermore, so I was impressed originally by what Judy had done up in Fresno State, to which Vaughan and other friends had gone, that is, only as women, because men were not invited, and I thought that was rather frightening, to say the least. But they came back with such fabulous stories, I remember one story is Sylvia Simpson's. She wrote *The Death Books*. Other people thought of them. They were so amazing, those stories, although I could not possibly know everything that went on, they really interested me and they did Paul Brach too. And then, I do not know how it happened, it just happened very quickly after Judy's—it was clear that Judy's period of work there was no longer developing further and she just had to get another job, but the work had to be done, that was clear. So it was very natural to think of carrying to this much better place, a school that was touted to be not only interested in the interrelations of the arts and the expansion of the frontiers of all the arts, but more importantly, the social life itself would be transformed, the personal life. It would be approaching life on every front, so why not feminism? [They laugh.] Well, as soon as it started happening, it was clear that it galvanized a lot of tempers. You know, people were for it, were afraid of it, against it, sort of for it, or thought they ought to be for it and could not quite hack it, and the students themselves were caught in the midst of the conflicting emotions, just as Judy and Mimi were. I mean, how do you go home to your husband or your lover? These were interesting and powerful kinds of confrontations.

MOIRA ROTH: Who were the students you worked closely with who were coming out of the feminist program?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, the closest one of the two were Aviva [Rahmani] and Suzanne [Lacy]. There were others, but they are certainly the most prominent.

MOIRA ROTH: Suzanne told me, I guess earlier today, that even she—we are now getting back to this discourse that you are having—

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes. It is a wonderful kind of performance in itself. It seems now to have no particular end. At first it started with my running into her at a College Art Association meeting about two or three years ago. When was it in Washington, about two years ago? And Suzanne, you remember, had given a number of rather impressive presentations, ever so clear, and I—golly, gee whillickers, she sure does talk good! And I was very impressed by the increasing clarity that she had, each year.

We had lunch together one day and I said, "Hey, Suzanne, why don't you and I do an article together on the subject of utility, performance as utility. You are interested, clearly, in a certain kind of utility and I am interested in another kind of utility, but the fact that they both have very defined goals now, and could represent, let's say the whole self, in the sense of the outer person, represented by politics and the inner person, represented by concepts of the self, or self-realization, or spirituality, and how do you feel about that? You and I have learned a lot from each other's example, maybe we can write an article." She said, "Nifty." So without planning on anything, we decided to get together from time to time and outline what it was we were going to write about. We didn't quite know.

MOIRA ROTH: But you knew that something had been going on for years, not even between the two of you, but the two—shall I put it—two schools of thought?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, they're overlapping, it seemed to me. They are two different forms. I don't know if they are schools of thought, but they're rather two different forms of addressing art's role in the art life game. That much Suzanne got out of Cal Arts, I'm sure.

MOIRA ROTH: To get back to something else, this is actually just at the time you started publishing The Education of the Un-Artist.

ALLAN KAPROW: No, that was much earlier.

MOIRA ROTH: But you started publishing it in 1971—oh no, I mean to get back to—

ALLAN KAPROW: —oh, going back to the Cal Arts.

MOIRA ROTH: But you started—in Part 1 it mentions that you'd begun writing it in 1969.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes I did, I remember.

MOIRA ROTH: So actually it came down from the Bay Area with ideas that, rather like you had written the essays for happenings earlier, and then it got published later.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, I think it—it did not suffer the delay that the earlier stuff did.

MOIRA ROTH: Do you see all those articles as part and parcel of the same idea, or did they change a lot as they came out over several years?

ALLAN KAPROW: They are part and parcel of the same idea. I think that there is another article to be written—that may be the final one in that series, but I am just going to let it happen when it does.

MOIRA ROTH: What sort of feedback did you get when they started coming out, because you were arguing that—that life has become increasingly interesting and that art should follow life and that artists should become un-artists.

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, there's a difference between—I tried to make the distinction between the un-artist and non-artist. An "non-artist" is the kind of person that we know who is involved in another kind of life, does not care about or does not know about art and therefore is not being addressed by these articles. I really was hoping that in titling them, *The Education of the Un-Artist,* my interest in education would be directed to those who most need it, not the public, but the artists themselves. And what was that education going to be? The education I proposed was the "un-art-ing" process, which actually is a very difficult one in order to take it seriously, because it means, on the one hand, acknowledging the weight of knowledge that one has about the field, presumably it would be a rather great one, weighed down by enormous masses of art from history.

MOIRA ROTH: What Segal had always talked about.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yeah. And also , a discipline, that it was not one of these haphazard or charming conversions, like walking in and signing up for a class, or buying a minister's button for income tax purposes. It was, it seemed to me, an arduous proposition. Now I wrote it in an ironical mode, or most of those articles, the bulk of them I wrote out tongue-in-cheek because I wanted—I think I was a little bit frightened about the implications. I didn't want to sound too serious because nobody would read them then.

MOIRA ROTH: Well, if one takes the irony out, and one is left with the education of the un-artist, do you think that is what some of your pieces were meant to do for you, or at least the participants at this time?

ALLAN KAPROW: That is how I found out that I really was interested in meditation. I mean, that is a big jump, but why does any artist do what they do, if not to do something for them, for themselves? You might say that is the first utility, the first purpose for a production of an art work, to do for oneself in some clarifying or insight producing way, and then, hopefully soon, not too long afterward, that it will also be of some interest to somebody else in much the same fashion, of course. It doesn't happen ideally, it doesn't happen that way usually, of course, and that's part of the irony of the whole thing, that is part of the irony of life.

MOIRA ROTH: What sort of pieces were you doing at this point, that at least now seem meditative, or got you into a meditative state?

ALLAN KAPROW: Almost every prolongation or repetition that I have used over and over as devices of a piece, the very first ones, have been essentially, for me personally, ways of paying attention, ways of focusing upon the simplest acts. That they have added layers of ironical and humorous meaning is also the case; because I was using those added layers as social devices to make them exist on a much larger, broader plain than just focus. I wasn't even aware that that was the, main thing that I was interested in, but over the last three or four years, it seems to me that it is very clear that that is what interested me the most.

MOIRA ROTH: Well, to take an example, a piece I know, "Easy," which involves the participants, finding stones and in—[inaudible]—and carrying them and wetting them and finding them, that would be an example of repetitious activity.

ALLAN KAPROW: You know, in most traditional meditational practices, if you sit and meditate, what you are first instructed to do is pay attention to your breathing. It's something we don't ordinarily do. Then maybe this will go on for many, many years until you can just breathe, then perhaps, forget your breathing and just be. Well, I don't have that kind of achievement, but I do meditate every day in Zen form. And it is terribly difficult, just to sit and pay attention to nothing except your breathing.

MOIRA ROTH: Which is different from when you have been assigned a word or a concept—

ALLAN KAPROW: That's usually a subsequent kind of step in your development, with the study of kōans. But their purpose is essentially the same, to intensify your focus. Most kōans are meaning less in the obvious sense, when you are asked by your teacher to tell what the meaning of that kōan that you have been assigned is. Any intellectualization is going to be hogwash.

MOIRA ROTH: When did you actually begin to meditate?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, two and a half years ago.

MOIRA ROTH: What happened before that?

ALLAN KAPROW: I was always interested in Zen, but intellectually.

MOIRA ROTH: What appealed to you intellectually about Zen?

ALLAN KAPROW: Its simplicity, its close appreciation for everyday life, that is, that form of Buddhism appealed to me more than, say, Indian Buddhism, which is more – what is the word - monastic, because it meant that, at least to me, I could wash the dishes or I could go on a tram or I could read a book or take a walk or engage in my studies or whatever it was that I was doing in this real world and see the world more freshly and simply and coherently than perhaps I have. Well, that seemed to me very attractive, and I appreciated the humor in which the forms of these accountings were put into books.

For years I would read about Zen Buddhism. I would even perhaps try to practice some aspects of it in the world unconsciously, using paradox, for example, or through Cage's classes, learning about how easy it is to get out of control simply by substituting control and chance situations. And then delight. You know it happened, what happened after theme of resolution.

Yet all of this, it seems to me now, looking back on it, was as many of us have discovered once they start actually practicing it, it was still keeping it all up in the head, it did not involve my whole being, least of all, my body. And by being intellectual, it was only a fragment of it, just the surface. There are probably a lot of scholars who are very, very astute, aside from they do not practice, therefore—[inaudible]—I would guess, from the little that I know, know nothing about it.

MOIRA ROTH: How did you get into the practice, as opposed to the intellectual appreciation of Zen?

ALLAN KAPROW: I had it in the back of my mind for over five years, but I never got up enough gumption to do it. And I do not remember exactly how it happened, but one night Coryl [Kaprow] came home from a visit with a friend and she said, "She just showed me how to meditate," and I said, "Oh, what kind?" She said, "Zen." I said, "Oh, will you show me?" So she showed me and then she said, "Would you like to meditate tomorrow morning?" "Well, mmm [thoughtful] how early." [Laughs.]

Well, in the beginning you are only supposed to do it for a few minutes, sitting for a half hour isn't normal then. An hour or forty minutes is a lot of sitting for a beginner. It hurts, physically. So we got up, and it was just around Christmas time, I guess, early in the month of December. It was dark and shivering we sat there for about five minutes, me trying to do what she barely knew how to do herself. And I thought, oh, this is perfect, this is exactly what I need. So I visited the newly started Zen center, it is just down on Blackmount Road. It is a private home, of one of the professors here and they had just begun. My first step was to practice with the people who lived there.

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ALLAN KAPROW: I decided that I definitely wanted to do this seriously, and so whenever I could I would go there evenings and attend their long weekend sitting sessions. And they were staggering.

Those kinds of long periods are unbelievable for a novice. The pain, the physical pain, and just the spiritual anguish which in the beginning I would experience, I cannot even describe. But the other hand, the artist in me was tickled pink with the extraordinary elegance of the form of the whole thing. The chimes and the chanting, the marching, interviews with the Roshi [spiritual leader], the bowings, all of that—even the way they served food. You'd try the food, the ceremony of the folding napkin and washing the dishes afterward was just so elegant—holy jumping Jehoshaphat,—[laughs]—what a great performance of the traditional kind this is, and I am in it!

MOIRA ROTH: How did that, or did it not, affect what you were doing at that moment?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, it interestingly brought me closer to old colleagues who were taking it. First of all, I found out that Allen Ginsberg had been seriously meditating some years, though he also had interested in Buddhism for a long time and in a sense, learned from it the way I did, but now was seriously sitting. Then I found out that

my old friend Robert [Delford Brown] had been doing the same thing for ten years now and even spent time as a youth in a Zen center in Japan, which I didn't remember. He might have told me but it did not quite register. George Brecht, of course, has begun more and more as an old student of Cage's, and was terribly interested in Zen. And I went to Pauline [Oliveros] who went to it and had been meditating also and I was able to communicate with her about those aspects of her work much more excitedly than before.

MOIRA ROTH: It sounds as if you came to a new community for a long period after the earlier happenings and immediately—

ALLAN KAPROW: —Yeah. I remember reading your interview of Pauline's in that Bay Area book on performance, which I thought was absolutely fascinating, a few years ago or something like that, yes. It was very clear and—

MOIRA ROTH: —She talked about why she got into it and what it means to have been drawn back, both from the electronic movement and—

ALLAN KAPROW: —concertizing. Yeah, I thought that exactly paralleled my experiences. I suppose I could tell exactly the same stories.

MOIRA ROTH: Well, do you think there has been a very strong shift in your work in the last two years?

ALLAN KAPROW: No, I don't think so. I think that the meaning of the work has been shifted, it's like an inflection that reveals what it's been about in great measure that was not there before, and it is an inflection which describes a number of what I was saying to Coryl, the ironical trappings that I used to couch much of this interest in.

MOIRA ROTH: Are you getting more away from the esthetic of indifference?

ALLAN KAPROW: No, I am getting into it more.

MOIRA ROTH: Esthetic difference as opposed to—

ALLAN KAPROW: —as opposed to irresponsibility?

MOIRA ROTH: Sure.

ALLAN KAPROW: Oh, sure. I think that that never impressed me very much. It was the only way in which I could actually account for human beings' foibles, I mean, me included. How could I ever take people and my own ambitions seriously once I start looking at them? There are so many contradictions in my life and everybody else's. There's such a preposterous hypocritical posing going on that that insight was so staggering to me, since it seemed to me too to reveal "rawly" the impossibility of human ambition, or even human realization. Therefore, I had to include that real note in all those pieces. Now I do not feel so strongly about that, I mean, it is kind of a—maybe it is the beginning of a big change, but it hasn't really occurred yet. I am beginning to be not mellow but accepting. I think I was outraged by the hypocritical in myself and in everybody else that I could see, reflecting me, and could not accept it. But I think maybe now the beginning of some sense of comradeship, rather than outrage, could be taking place. So what if we are hypocritical! Does that mean that I really have to be so ironical about it and cynical?

MOIRA ROTH: How did this all relate to the fact that you were very famous as an artist and have been for a long time, and are considered the father of happenings that you have done—[inaudible]—?

ALLAN KAPROW: There is an answer lurking right on the edge of my tongue and I can't get it out right now. I do not quite see how it connects. It seems almost as if I am indifferent to it.

MOIRA ROTH: Were you indifferent in art, or would you describe yourself as ambitious?

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, very, but the ambition is of a very curious kind, and it was—. In the beginning, let's say the late fifties; my ambition was to be the most modern artist of my time. I think I mentioned that to you, which meant that I would have to be judged that way in order to prove that my ambition was achieved, by the colleagues, by the field. And, to some extent, I suppose the record says I was a "comer" in that regard, whether or not the tally was finally made—that gave me permission, I think in retrospect, to be indifferent to it. It's like the opposite of sour grapes.

MOIRA ROTH: Sweet grapes?

ALLAN KAPROW: No, if you've had the taste of the grapes, in this case, the fame, and then either you find that you really need it and need more and more and more, or you find out that it was very nice but you do not need it that much. I think that it is the latter in my case, which allowed me to pay more attention to other things that I

needed more, and I think the more is a philosophical and mystical kind of life process that the art has helped me to understand, which the art world cannot provide.

The art world is essentially formed—it is a collegial world at best—at worst, it is just a race, for a—money you might need or for recognition you might want, and you need more and more of it because life gets more expensive. That doesn't seem very attractive. It's not that I would turn it down if somebody came and said, would you do something for a lot of money for us, we love you. It is only to say that that is not the reason I would do it. If I had no great need for the money at the moment I would not if I did not like them. The fact that I could be promised a lot of articles or chances to do something I couldn't do on a faraway island or something like that, like a conference you went to—[inaudible]—that really isn't that interesting. It might be attractive, but basically it is not why I am interested in doing what I am doing now, and I think the fame was a permission to do it now, so that I would not really be misled by yearning for something I did not have. What, I would imagine; I might have felt if I were unrecognized I could have perhaps still wanted that.

MOIRA ROTH: How does your emotional immersing in Zen affect your teaching?

ALLAN KAPROW: I'll give you two examples. I gave a course which I think was the best course I ever gave in my life last spring, called *Drawing as a Meditational Practice*. The first night a lot of curious graduate students came. The second night most of them were gone. The class had two registered students in it, as far as I know. Two of our graduate students, and there were four freeloaders, friends of mine, who of course did not do my box office rating very much good since they're not on record. But the six of us, and I drew along with them, really got a lot out of it. It was a very disciplined course, that is, I was trying to learn from.

I was trying to transpose some of the formal methods of real meditation and of traditional meditation, into the practice of drawing. The chief and most important one was letting go of the breath. Which was, I mean, when we breathe; some of us hold our breath for dear life. And just to let ourselves breathe, taking a breath in without trying because we need it. Letting it go, you are not worried about it because there will be another breath, is a very difficult—[phone rings]—I tried to do that with the drawing.

[Tape stops, restarts.]

MOIRA ROTH: Two examples of how they effected your teaching?

ALLAN KAPROW: Briefly, it was to conceive a mark as the exhalation of a breath.

MOIRA ROTH: The mark on the paper?

ALLAN KAPROW: The mark on a paper, which would begin, however, like the breath, outside the paper. This I learned directly from the ancient Chinese practices. So that a mark would be conceived as a result of the exhaled breath and you would then land, like a bird, on the paper and then take off again, continuing, perhaps, to the other side. Thus the paper is only part of the whole world; it is not a framed, isolated art work. And through a series of such exercises, which began without making any marks at all, hovering near the page but never making a mark, just breathing, then marks were made, and each one, like a breath, was let go of, would be erased. And finally, at the end of the evening the whole drawing would be nothing but a series of erasures, because the drawing was let go of. And this upset the graduate students no end who felt rather protective about their drawing.

MOIRA ROTH: —and their marks.

ALLAN KAPROW: And their marks in one way or another. Some of them found, to their great amazement that they could not draw in any sense of the word, and that frightened them. Others felt that it was a bit too "booky" for them and not intellectual enough. And so that's an example of a big change in the way I would ordinarily teach, which would be much more intellectual. The other way has been more subtle. The performance class, the baby class things we have, was given last term. There I structured it in a way that was like the drawing class, but never used exactly the same terms or even for that matter, insisted on throwing away the performance as one might just let the drawing go.

But something about the attitude that I had toward each event, or the assignment that I would give, was learned from the drawing class. I would make assignments about time that did not make anything precious about it, that allowed you to just let it go, or about gestures that would be part of the vocabulary of signs between one person or another in a performance, as if those gestures were simply let go like an airplane in the air, and it is just stark, because I have to do a lot more thinking and experiencing to see how in a deeper way than just a methodological fashion, those values and practices can be introduced in a way that nobody even knows that they're there.

See, I have always been interested in the low-profile infusion of some things that is as it were, in the energy,

rather than an explicit. Thus I would never—really, I would not want to say, “This is a Zen Buddhist performance class.”

MOIRA ROTH: But it actually might be.

ALLAN KAPROW: It might be, or putting it in another way, "how can I find Zen Buddhism in a Coca-Cola bottle?"

MOIRA ROTH: The plans you have to go to Europe this summer where you are going to stay with a number of friends and do events for them, is that a shift?

ALLAN KAPROW: That's a definite shift, but not 180 degrees. It's the way I’d always enjoyed doing performance, which is with friends. When I think, I have always done this, year in year out, a few this year, a few next year and so on; in between times when I am not officially doing intentional pieces—works. And reflecting upon what has actually delighted me the most in the years of doing performances, those certainly stand out, the ones that I do privately.

MOIRA ROTH: Presents.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, they’re presents, for no reason other than that we are interested in doing something. And so what I think I mentioned to you another time was that the thing that provoked this decision for this trip was the cancellation of a large project and subsequent projects in Europe for reasons that are tied with the economy, with bureaucracy and so on. And I thought, after getting quite sorry for myself, that this is another blessing in disguise. It's like a Stony Brook situation—or like the earlier lecture situation. I have managed after a while to see big debacles as having quite a beneficial effect on me. That they have been almost presents in a curious fashion, designed by some higher power, I'm sure; one with an ironical sense of humor. Nevertheless, they could have been disastrous blockages in my emotional life, and initially, they were. So these disappointments in recent years really sent me back quite a bit. I did not know what to do with myself and I was planning to go on a sabbatical leave and I would have all this wonderful money and publications and achievements to bring back to my department to show that they were really moving on the right course, you know. Here I was, faced with nothing to do, and I thought, gosh, here I have got this time coming to me—

MOIRA ROTH: —and this space—

ALLAN KAPROW: —and this space—

MOIRA ROTH: —this European space—

ALLAN KAPROW: —and what would I like to do? So it came to me in a flash, actually. I was going to Europe to confer with a newspaper that I was doing a small project for, and on the airplane I thought, by golly, I am going to have fun. I don't want to do any business; I just want to have fun. What’s fun? Fun is doing my work because I want to it. And who would I do it with? My playmates. Who are my playmates? My friends. So why don't I just propose to them in different countries in Europe that I’ll come for two months and stay a few days with each of them and do a piece with them, just because I want to do a piece. All they would have to do is say yes or no, and they were required to do nothing except put me up—

MOIRA ROTH: —and give you room and board.

ALLAN KAPROW: That's all. So I felt like I was just rising out of my airplane. I felt so good and so absolutely like a child’s dream, without complication, no if’s, and’s, and but’s. And I got to Europe and mentioned it to a few friends, during that short intermittent visit with the newspaper people, and they all said, “Oh, my gosh, that's so right.” And each one said, “Would you do one for me?” So that is what I am going to do, and I think it is connected to what has happened in the last couple of years as a young meditator. I do not know how. I am not going to “programize” it, but I am sure that something about it will reveal itself. No matter what I do, it will be some advantage that I did not have before. And that will then come back to the classes.

MOIRA ROTH: I have been wanting to ask you, when you switched from Cal Arts to the University of California in the mid-seventies—did that change things much for you or was that a question of a different job?

ALLAN KAPROW: No, as I mentioned before, I determined not to let myself become a “cause célèbre” or get fired with the duplicity I had before. And, in fact, that school did not fire me, and I never was any trouble there.

MOIRA ROTH: You mean Cal Arts.

ALLAN KAPROW: Cal Arts. Although it was, as you have probably heard, horrible for a lot of other people. But I was not communal, or maybe I just stood above it so long that I wouldn't believe in it. In spite of the people that I loved personally I didn;t believe in it as a myth, whereas an institution. So I remained a little bit above the shapes in the ground of that place, and when I used it up I just went for another job. Then the first sign of that

was that they couldn't afford to pay us cost of living expenses. And I thought, gosh, with all this money, Disneyland is rich, why shouldn't we be paid fairly? So I went to, with Paul Brach and Stephen Von Heine, associate dean at that time, John Baldessari and a few other senior members of the department, to see the then President. And I said, "What's with us? You know, we're really not getting enough recognition, not enough money. Tell us what the administration and backers think about the Art Department. He was very fair, I must say this, Bill Lund. He was temporary president while they were looking for somebody else, and he said, "You've done a great job." I said, "Past tense?" "Yes." I said, "Thanks."

MOIRA ROTH: And then you left.

ALLAN KAPROW: And then I left. The others didn't. Paul left sometime after that. But he got the message finally. He just could not believe it, my reading of it. He said, "No, you're wrong, it can't possibly be that," and finally he did.

MOIRA ROTH: How does it affect you as an artist living in Pasadena, but being here some of the week, or does it?

ALLAN KAPROW: I can't take it anymore. It is very difficult. I think I may have had more self-delusion in the past, having done it all my life. In one way or another I have commuted to work over long distances. It always wore me out. I never would admit it, because I could not see it any other way. Probably I also, in some neurotic fashion, did not want my various institutions' employment to think they had me, lock, stock and barrel. So for whatever the reasons of which that is only one symptom, I think, I did it, and I did it at—incredible personal expense. I'd be exhausted and lit on nervous energy. Then I'd be deracinated in terms of space. I couldn't really be that consistently with my family or consistently away from it, as the case might be.

MOIRA ROTH: Because it seems to me, from the way you describe your days now, that you get up early in the morning and you meditate and you exercise, and that you seem very intent on having a demi-pattern that should not be disrupted.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes, that was distractive, and it still is. And I think I am making very good steps now to simplify my life, so I look forward to, not being distracted in the future. I mean, it is hard enough for those of us who have to travel to do our profession, but to do this on a regular basis is insane.

MOIRA ROTH: That sounds as though it is very symbolic of what you would like to do with your life—[inaudible]—.

ALLAN KAPROW: Yes.—Do you know, I have talked to Newton Harrison about this?

MOIRA ROTH: What did he say?

ALLAN KAPROW: And do you know, at least in style, Newton was the great dreamer, and Helen [Harrison] is the "wait-a-minute, let's think" dreamer. Helen is much more the grounder of the team. And it is a wonderful operation because Newton goes out on a haywire and spins these incredible fishing lines that go way out in the ocean and stratosphere—if the aurora borealis is at the end, you know. Between them, they manage very often to tailor it down to still something very extraordinary, and yet reasonably projected into the future. So, in talking about a simple life, we spread it out in such a way that it sounds almost as though energy is going to get it. The idea of a fundamentally capitalist commune—I mean, no hanky-panky, you really invest a certain amount of money based upon the property. You do not want it—you would not imagine it to be too big. And that with the money that we could raise by our present—ownership, we could buy something and rent communal equipment. Like a laundry room with industrial laundry equipment and then heavy duty lines instead of each one having a washing machine, or buy food or rent cars on a larger way, rather than—and have our corporate pool, which would then be deducted from your taxes. All kinds of things like that; it is still in the talking phase.

MOIRA ROTH: This is you and Newton talking.

ALLAN KAPROW: Me and Newton and Helen and Coryl. The main thing is that we're actually thinking, and Paul McCarthy is now involved in the conversation, what we really want is to live somewhere, maybe teach half the time, and still have enough money to survive and do our work and just be.

MOIRA ROTH: And what, in that community, would your work be? Do you ever conceive of not making it?

ALLAN KAPROW: Well, I don't know whether what I do is art, so therefore I conceive what I do to be socially valuable. You understand that that indifferent, blurry line that this position of the mind treads, not because it is precarious, but because it is precarious, but because it is becoming increasingly unimportant. At one moment I can look at it as "Art." Another moment it is the lower-case art that I have learned a lot from the practice of—[phone rings]—for daily life. It depends upon which perspective I am going to take—

[Tape stops, restarts.]

It seems to me no contradiction at all if we now could begin to conceive an art work as having the same multiple access as any act in life or any person in one moment you are more, whether you are a taxpayer, you are an interviewer, you are an art scholar, you are a lover, you are any number of things, depending upon what is needed to be paid attention to at this time. And yet we have been taught that an art work is always an art work. There does not seem to be any reason now, in especially this kind of art work, performance, activity, or whatever you call it, to have the same flexibility.

That it is art, but it also sometimes can be therapy, and other times it can be social critique, and sometimes it can be just plain old practical work, in a performance that needs to dig some footings for a house. That may be the loveliest achievement for me of what I have done; it is in that way a mirror of life, it is life.

MOIRA ROTH: Does it sometimes help illuminate the work? That is always been one of the—

ALLAN KAPROW: Sure.

MOIRA ROTH: —aspects of art over the ages.

ALLAN KAPROW: But not more or less than. Yes, the answer is yes, no more or less than some other focused upon act in your life. You, you, I, anyone, certainly can reflect on those moments when we have met somebody and we have said something, or we went on an outing which was more focused, and we got some great insight about ourselves out of those occasions. In the same way, the art can or should be insightful, but it could be insightful if it was applied to a practical end right on day, or to a therapeutic end another day, or to a purely esthetic end another day. Those are different insights, or maybe they will even provide overlap in the similar ones, but flavored slightly differently.

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