

Definition

A Happening is an assemblage of events performed or perceived in more than one time and place. Its material environments may be constructed, taken over directly from what is available, or altered slightly; just as its activities may be invented or commonplace. A Happening, unlike a stage play, may occur at a supermarket, driving along a highway, under a pile of rags, and in a friend's kitchen, either at once or sequentially. If sequentially, time may extend to more than a year. The Happening is performed according to plan but without rehearsal, audience, or repetition. It is art but seems closer to life.

Birds

(For participants only. Commissioned by the University of Southern Illinois, Carbondale, performed February 16, 1964.)

Setting:

A patch of woods near a lake on the campus. A road leading to a small wooden bridge over a dry brook filled with rocks. On the bridge, a patio table loaded with packages of cheap white bread and strawberry jam, a bright beach umbrella opened over this. Women in trees are widely separated and some can only hear each other. Below each woman is a mass of old furniture hung on ropes.

Events:

1

Tree women swing hanging furniture,
and bang trees with sticks.

Wall men build wall of rocks on edge of bridge.

Bread man hawks bread and jam,
“Bread! Bread! Bread!” etc.,
blows toy pipe whistle.

2

Bread man silent.

Wall workers go to tree women, taunt them,
bang with sticks and rocks on trees.

Tree women drop furniture.

3

Wall workers carry furniture to pile
under edge of bridge.

Tree women blow police whistles.

Wall workers bomb furniture with rocks from wall.

Bread man resumes hawking.

4

Wall workers leave quietly one by one when finished.

Bread man continues hawking.

Tree women silent after first wall worker leaves.

5

Bread man slowly bombs rubble with bits of bread,
leaves when finished.

Tree women rhythmically yell in unison "Yah! Yah!
Yah!" like crows, as Bread man does this, and when he
leaves they are silent.

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