

JIM DINE

a statement

(Rewritten from a recorded interview.)

I CANNOT TALK ABOUT theatre because I have no background except acting out everything in everyday life. That is a complete, comprehensive background, because it happened every day of my life. The Happenings then became an extension of that, rather than an extension of my painting. The visual side of the Happenings was the extension of my painting, but there were other things involved, since I think on two levels. I think on the visual level, which has nothing to do with the way one talks. But these things had to get across with talking, too—as literary ideas seen in a visual way—so that there were two levels. And my only preparation for that was acting out everything through my life. I felt that it was the most natural thing to do—to do the Happenings. When I did *The Car Crash*, it related to my paintings only because I was doing a Happening then, and that is what I was painting about, and I thought it would be nice to tie them in. There was no other relationship.

Kaprow once said, "You're the one who does the funny Happenings." He likes classification—that there was someone who did



“funny Happenings.” But they were not funny. *The Car Crash* was not laughed at; the spectators tittered like they do at nudes in museums—kids get embarrassed and laugh.

The first “Happening” I did was called *The Smiling Workman*, at the Judson Church. I had a flat built. It was a three-panel flat with two sides and one flat. There was a table with three jars of paint and two brushes on it, and the canvas was painted white. I came around it with one light on me. I was all in red with a big, black mouth: all my face and head were red, and I had a red smock on, down to the floor. I painted “I love what I’m doing” in orange and blue. When I got to “what I’m doing,” it was going very fast, and I picked up one of the jars and drank the paint, and then I poured the other two jars of paint over my head, quickly, and dove, physically, through the canvas. The light went off. It was like a thirty-second moment of intensity. It was like a drawing. I did not have to think about it. Claes said, “We’re going to have these Happenings,” and I said, “OK. I’d like to do one.” And that is the one I was going to do. It was just a thought I

had. It was a thought. For me, it was the most pure that I did.

I did not think it was funny. What I was doing was not a humorous situation. I think it was funny to see it, but I do not think obsession is funny or that not being able to stop one's intensity is funny. If I had performed it for an hour with that sort of intensity, I do not think it would have been funny. It took the form of a blackout or a vaudeville act. The nature of the medium did that, not the intent.

The next one I did was called *The Vaudeville Show*, which was a crowd-pleaser and one that was quite pleasing to me to do. I had a stage built. It was like an old-time stage with two flats of canvas on each side, and over the top it said, "Jim Dine's Vaudeville" in Dayglow color. There was a tape recording made for that. It was all kinds of crazy things: organ music, me talking—it was a collage on tape. I came out with a red suit on and cotton all over me, my face painted yellow. To the music that was going on, I pulled the cotton off and just let it fall to the floor until there was no cotton on me. Then I walked out. As soon as I walked out, inanimate objects became actors. Two people behind the flats operated a dance of strung cabbages and carrots and lettuce and celery. That stopped quickly, and red paint was poured down the flats on each side and onto the floor. That was another "act." The final act was: I came out with my red suit on and a straw hat on this time. On each arm I had a nude girl made out of cardboard so that each of my arms became their inner arms. These were made like puppets—Javanese puppets. I did a dance. I do not even understand how I did that dance. I could never do it now. But I did this dance that people cheered. And they tore my clothes off. Encores! And I ripped off my tie and threw it to the audience. It was an incredible scene. In the sense of audience participation, I have never felt it stronger—with someone else or with me. People remember it as a fantastic night. It was the same night Whitman put on *E.G.*, which I was in. Mine was the finale.

The next one was *The Car Crash*, and the final Happening I did was called *The Shining Bed*. The music was important in that. It was a 33 record of a Palestrina chorale played on 78, and it sounded like The Chipmunks singing it. It played through the whole performance, very softly. The Happening opened with one light and the audience seated around a bed. The head of the bed was covered with foil and was strung with Christmas-tree lights

that were not yet turned on. There were long silver spikes made out of foil at the end of the bed. There was a big piece of paper over the bed. Then they lifted the paper off, and there I was as Santa Claus with a blue face and no beard, under the covers of the bed. I lay there for a few minutes as if I were waking up, while the music—The Chipmunks—was playing softly in the background. Then I quickly pulled a piece of polyethylene from the foot of the bed up over my face and made certain movements with a flashlight in my crotch very quickly. Throwing the plastic off, I sat up, went to the end of the bed on my knees, took batter out of a bowl, and put it all over the spikes. It was a repulsive situation. When that was over, I reached down with my head between my legs into a bowl of flour and pulled my face up quickly. It was white instead of blue. The lights went off, and the people were in darkness for a short time. From underneath my pillow, I pulled a gold baby doll and put it on the pillow. I disappeared. The Christmas-tree lights, which blinked, came on, and the Palestrina music on 78 got very loud. The baby was just sitting there. Then it was over. That was my best one—the one I liked the best. It was the most beautiful one.

I had to do it all myself, and I did it without rehearsals. We always had one rehearsal, in which my wife would see me go through it. I would not really do it. I wanted to save that performance, but she would see me go through it and say, "Well, this looks different. Maybe you could get closer toward the lights"—something like that. But that is all we ever did in rehearsal.

Now I feel that I would never want to appear in my own works again, but then it was important because I did not trust anyone else, and I did not feel that what I was doing was of a public-enough nature to even tell the people what to do. That is where I think the clue is to the fact that they were so personal and so much related to acting out one's life rather than art because I was not able to even transmit my ideas to anyone else to have them do it.

The name "Happening" was a great crowd-pleaser. People knew what they were going to see. If it said "Happening," they were going to see Whitman, Dine, Oldenburg, or Kaprow. People sometimes say about my painting, "That's a real Happening." It is ridiculous. It is Kaprow's word, and it does not refer to me. I do not

really know what it meant. But if it meant what he did, it was not what I was doing, so it was not true of me.

What I did was not understood for the most part. I do not feel that there was enough of a perspective between art and life in them. I felt they were too closely allied with me. That would be all right in paintings because people would have time to look at them, but these were too temporary. Everybody I ever talked to was completely misinterpreting them.

I stopped doing Happenings because I felt anyone could do anything and be liked. It was becoming so chic. The audiences were laughing at everything. And I also felt that it was taking too much from my painting, which I really wanted to do.

THE CAR CRASH / *the script*

NOTE: *Two separate scripts for The Car Crash, one for the action and one for the words spoken by the seated woman in white (Pat Oldenburg), are combined below.*

TRAFFIC SOUNDS BEGIN. Car comes out and does swirling motion light dance. After an interval two white people enter and try to hit each other with right-angle beams. They somehow keep hitting the car by accident. Each time the car is hit, he winces and makes noises. Soon they start hitting each other more regularly always using one light on the sex organs, the other on the face. They keep getting closer to each other, eventually ending up in the center where they focus on each other and turn slowly, subtly with bodies and lights held rigid for the count of 60 (possibly 120). Car sounds off. Lights on.

Two white people go to respective banging places and begin banging piece. Car is moving slowly around room honking. On cue (not yet determined) Pat begins speech while banging continues as accompaniment and honking becomes varied. Towards the end of her speech, car stops honking, takes balloon out of pocket and blows it up slowly. When it breaks, speech stops. Lights out.

THE CAR IN MY LIFE IS A CAR WITH A POLE IN THE HARM OF MY SOUL WHICH IS A PRETTY CLANK . . . (loud) MY CAR IS MY HERTZ SPOT OF LOVE TO ZOOM THROUGH THE WHOLE TRANSMISSION OF MY LOVELY TIRE HOLD TIME OF GOODSHORT GASSSSSSS, HOW SWEET IS SHORT SMELL OF EARTH NOISE WHEN THE SPARK

PLUG LIE OF WHOLE SHORT MAKE MY GARNU FLACK OUT OF
SHORT WEAVING MOTORS COME IN GAS HOLE OF TIRE RACK, TOOL
SMELL, AND CUZMY JERK ON OF OIL SLICK IN THE MIDDLE OF A
GOOD TIME OF DAY, WHEN ALL THE CARS OF MY MY MY MY HORN
HONKS ON THE HELP NOISE OF ALL OUR TIME TRUNK LOCK
CADILLAC MANIA FOR THE FORD IS THE CRUNCH OF THENORD
OFALL THE SHOOT FAST TIME NOISE OF OUR CAR

repeat

Traffic sounds (crash) for approx 2 min. Spot on wringer. Car cranks out help, Pat is saying help softly, one white person is banging softly, other is passing out help signs. Pat gets louder, keeps saying help in a drone until it is very strong. Spot goes out. Traffic off. White people and car put flashlights on Pat who begins second speech. When she starts stammering, fluorescent comes on, . . . spot on blackboard where car is.

OH MY OH MY GUM SHOT DAMN DAMN DAMN OH SHOT OH
CROTCHO OOOOOOH MY CAR IS THE WARM PART OF A SOUL BEAR-
ING THE GOOD OH MY GAAAA . . . WHERE IS MY MOTOR, SOUL,
HELL, HARD PART, COME ON GOOD TIME NIGHT TIRE REAL OF THE
GRAND TIME IN GHREE ON FOUR OF OUIOLD GRAAAAAGGH, OH OH
OH MY SHIP IS THE LONG TWELVE VOLT LOVE TOUCH OF YOUR
PIT AND TAKE IT DOWN THREE THOUS OUR LONG LIFE IN THE
SPRING OF SEATEARS MAKES MY CAR TALK WITH BIRD CREASE ALL
OVER MY WALLS PUT FORTH IN A SHARP TOOL GREASED AND
GREASED TO FIT A HEART WHO SAYS I'M ON OUR ROAD TOLL
MAKING MILES FOR THE VOLTS TO CHARGE THE GREASE SPOT OF
MY MY (stammer)

Car begins to stutter and draw cars and erase them. Two white people stand and cough, gag, stammer and stutter. Develops into chorale which builds up then gets quieter and more jerky. Car walks off slowly, while Pat and white people are still talking softly. Two people exit quietly . . . Pat still talking softly and irregularly. Traffic sounds on. Pat stops talking and sits there. Traffic sounds for 30 sec.

END

THE CAR CRASH / *the production*

IN EARLY NOVEMBER, 1960, the Reuben Gallery, which had just moved into a small store on East Third Street in New York, presented *The Car Crash* by Jim Dine. Entering the gallery, the visitor found himself in a small room, the walls of which were solidly lined with drawings and paintings by Dine. All of the works contained crosses—usually the blocky symbol of the Red Cross—and some had tirelike circles. The white, freshly painted display room was simple, neat and clean, but as the spectators passed the small table at which the proprietress of the gallery was accepting contributions for the production and stepped into the rear room, they were surrounded by an unusual and visually complex Environment.

Folding chairs filled most of the floor space. The wall to the left of the entrance was almost invisible behind shelves that overflowed with jumbled rolls of felt, linoleum, and cork, from which loose, curling strips escaped in streamers. On the temporary rear wall (made from heavy kraft paper and scrim) was a horizontal electrical conduit, a tire with a glove lying on top of it, and several limp, hanging bags from a vacuum cleaner. The right wall was also partially hidden by tall thin pieces of metal tubing and strips of wood which were propped against it. A satchel overflowing with stringy cotton waste was suspended at the end of a rope, and a few light bulbs with tangles of accompanying wires dangled down. Several large cardboard crosses hung from the ceiling throughout the room. The crosses were red, white, or silver. Everything else in the room was white. Paint had been splashed and splattered on the walls, and sections which were not solid white were covered by a fine white grid of vertical drips. Even the floor was white.

The main group of chairs faced the doorway through which

the spectators entered from the lobby. At least one row of chairs lined each of the other three walls, leaving a narrow U-shaped aisle with its base toward the front, connected with the main entrance. Thus the largest segment of the audience sat in a central group while others faced them from the front and sides. There were about forty or fifty chairs in all, and most of them were filled at each of the five performances.

As the first spectators took their seats, they noticed a motionless girl with a white face and long brown hair who appeared to be about eight feet tall. The ladder on which she was seated—just to the left of the doorway as the spectators faced it—was invisible under the white muslin sheeting that descended from her shoulders to the floor. In the corner at the opposite side of the entrance, a blackboard had been set up.

(Dine has explained how he was "a little anxious about sully-ing it [i.e., the entirely white Environment] with people." He had worked at the "setting" for several days, primarily utilizing materials that had been left in the store by the previous tenant. When the cast assembled for rehearsal, three days before the first performance, they found the white room virtually complete. Since they were told exactly what was expected of them at the first meeting, since the author himself had a central role, and since there were simple "cueing" and clear divisions between segments, only one hour of rehearsal was needed each of the three days. At the dress rehearsal the costumes fit well with the white room, but Dine briefly considered giving the spectators white caps and smocks to wear in an attempt to preserve the purity of the Environment.)

When everyone was seated, the lights went off abruptly. Honking horns and street noises were heard (a record was being played). Parallel rays of light flashed into the room through the front entrance, and a figure entered the dark room with two small lights on his head. As he moved slowly down the aisle, swinging the beams from side to side, the spectators could see that it was a solidly built man (Jim Dine) wearing a raincoat and a rubber shower cap that had been sprayed silver. His face was silver with dark lines circling his eyes and nostrils; his lips were bright red. Holes had been cut in the golf cap that he wore, and two flashlights jutted out just above the small brim.

In a moment, another pair of light beams entered the room from

the rear. A figure dressed in white, holding a flashlight on each hip, walked through an archway ripped in the white paper that made up part of the rear wall. It was a girl wearing men's clothing (white trousers, white shirt, and white tie), her long, black hair tied back in a ponytail and her face hidden behind a papier-mâché mask with oval eyeholes and a half-open mouth. The circles of light swept across the audience, momentarily illuminating the watching faces and flickering on the white walls. As the girl turned the corner of the aisle, the beams struck the man in the silver raincoat, and he moaned loudly as if in pain. Then the two figures moved past each other at the front of the room.

Another man entered through the rear arch. He wore a girl's white formal dress with a flaring skirt. His arms, shoulders and back were bare, and the dark hair of his chest could be seen over the low-cut bodice. The mouth of the white mask that he wore was rounded, and the lips protruded slightly. A flashlight was pressed under each arm, which made his movements somewhat stiff as he walked toward the front of the room. The three pairs of lights slid and darted about as the figures wove slowly back and forth in the narrow aisles. Car horns could still be heard. When the masked man or woman occasionally caught the silver man in the beams of their flashlights, he would grunt, moan, or cry out. He attempted to elude them, but the moving lights touched him several times.

Then the silver man disappeared out of the front entrance, leaving the playing space to the masked pair who slowly approached each other from opposite sides of the room. Their slow, sinuous movements were partially controlled by the position of their lights as they swung from side to side and began to slide the beams over the other person. Completely revolving once or twice, the masked white figures approached each other until they were only a foot or so apart. For a moment they wove from side to side, playing the beams of their flashlights over each other. Then both performers switched off their lights, and the sound of horns stopped.

Almost immediately the hanging bulbs went on, brightly lighting the room. The masked white figures had disappeared. As a loud, metallic clatter began from behind the rear wall (the two performers in white, who could see through the scrim wall without being seen, were banging pots and pans), the man in the silver coat, no longer wearing the flashlight headdress, entered again



The man dressed as a woman enters from behind central audience group. Girl dressed as a man is at right (Marc Ratliff, Judy Tersch).

from the front and walked back and forth making honking noises. The "eight-foot-tall" girl in white, who had remained motionless through the flashlight sequence, began to speak, raising her voice to be heard over the noise.

"The car in my life is a car with a pole in the harm of my soul which is a pretty clank . . . my car is my Hertz spot of love to zoom through the whole transmission of my lovely tire . . ."

Her tone was pleading, her face mobile and expressive at the top of the white column of cloth. When she finished the short speech—" . . . trunk lock Cadillac mania for the Ford is the crunch of thenord ofall the shoot fast time noise of our car"—she began again from the beginning. The silver "car" crossed to the blackboard, stopped honking, took a white balloon from his pocket, and began to blow it up. Just as the girl finished the second recitation, the man burst the balloon with a pin. The crash and clatter "off-stage" stopped abruptly, and again the room was plunged into darkness.

The sound of a car starting was heard (again on record), the brake was released, the clutch engaged, and the sound of the motor and tires changed as the driver shifted into second gear, then

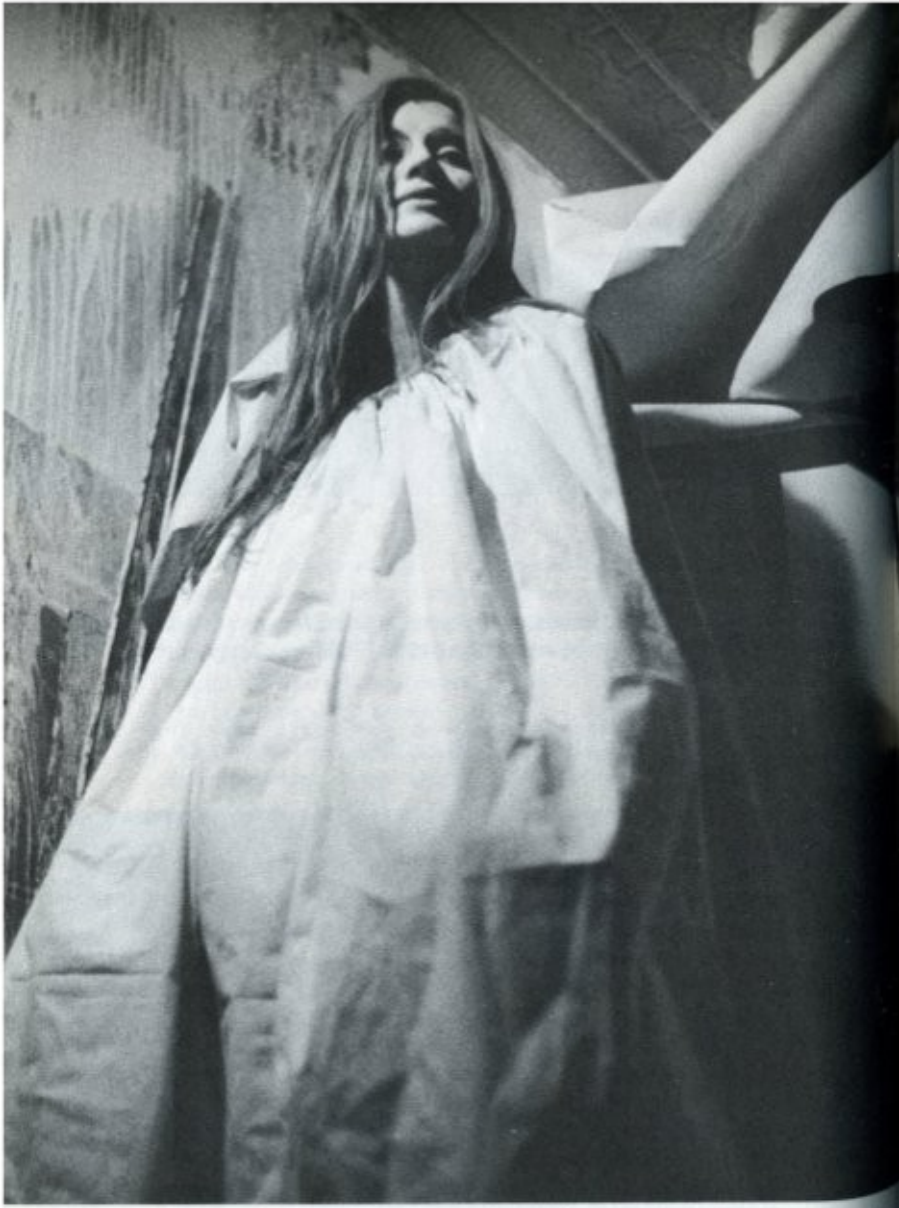
into third and picked up speed. The volume increased as the unseen car accelerated in the darkness. It suddenly was heard skidding out of control, the shriek of the tires amplified loudly. Abruptly there was silence. The lights came on again.

Mounted directly above the blackboard was the wringer from a washing machine, and the man in the silver raincoat and shower cap stepped up on a folding chair and, smiling slightly, began to turn the handle. Paper towels pushed out from between the rollers. As they hung down, it could be seen that the word "Help" was painted across them, repeated over and over in large, black, block letters. "Help," the seated girl began to say quietly. The girl dressed in men's clothing entered quickly from the rear archway and began to tear off the towels, handing them to members of the audience who were seated nearby. The voice of the seated girl became louder. When perhaps ten or fifteen towels had been ripped off and distributed, the lights went out again.

High above the floor, the face of the tall girl in white was illuminated. The two masked performers, standing at the rear wall—the man in the archway, the girl under the hanging white satchel at the end of the other aisle—were angling the beams of their flashlights at her over the seated spectators. "Oh my oh my gum

The audience during the first speech by the seated girl in white. The man-woman and woman-man can be seen in rear doorway. View is from entrance to lobby. The girl speaking is out of sight to the right.





The seated woman in white (Pat Oldenburg).



The man in silver at the "help" machine (Jim Dine).

The second speech of the seated girl in white, lit by flashlights (Pat Oldenburg).



shot damn damn damn . . ." Without any competitive noise, her sweetly suggestive but intense voice could be heard clearly. ". . . who says I'm on our road toll making miles for the volts to charge the grease spot of my my . . ." As she began to stammer, the flashlights flicked off, and, after a brief moment of darkness, the bright general lights came on.

The man in silver was standing by the blackboard, a large, thick piece of chalk in his hand. With a few quick moves, he drew the outlines of a large car in (perhaps) yellow, then added a window-eye and a huge smiling mouth. As he worked, the soft chalk crumbled and broke, falling on the floor. His heavily-made-up face contorted as if with the effort of his drawing, and he uttered a series of noises that sounded as if he were about to say something but could not quite begin a word. He erased the car and drew another in a different color. Again it had human connotations. The masked man and woman were standing in their places at the rear of the room, and they, too, began the strange stammering sounds. The stationary white woman joined in. With increasing excitement, the man at the blackboard drew, erased, and redrew cars in various colors. The sketches were becoming smaller and less specific; the volume of the grunts and semiverbal utterances by

The man in silver drawing on the blackboard (Jim Dine).



all four of the performers grew louder and louder. "Uh, bu, bu . . . woo, ech, heh . . . ayee, hee, doow, ugh . . ." From all corners of the room, the fugue of sounds became more intense. The man in silver rubbed out the cars and turned away from the board. The noises he was making gradually began to subside. In a moment they stopped completely, and he walked slowly and quietly out the front entrance. The others continued the vocal cacophony, but gradually their energy decreased. The masked performers stopped the sounds and disappeared. The girl at the front of the room was silent.

Although the spectators were not yet aware of it, *The Car Crash* was over. At every performance they sat quietly for several minutes. Finally some of them began to get up and move about, and the general exodus began. The presentation had lasted for fifteen or twenty minutes. Above the heads of the departing spectators, the woman in white remained in her place.