

# „Happenings are pure subjective experience“

## An Interview with Jean-Jacques Lebel

by Eric Morrill (Oakland)

Jean-Jacques Lebel, born in Paris in 1936, is an artist, activist and writer. His works have ranged from paintings, sculptures, installations videos and poems to translations and happenings. Trilingual and active both aesthetically and politically, he has had numerous exhibitions all over the world, working alone or in collaboration with artists including Erró, Allan Kaprow, Robert Filliou, Tetsumi Kudo, Claes Oldenburg, Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, and Wolf Vostell, and poets Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, William Burroughs and Michael McClure. For this interview, focused on documentation and the archive, we spoke primarily about his happenings, the first of which, *L'Enterrement de la Chose* (*The Burial of the Thing*, Venice, July 14, 1960) has been celebrated as the first such event on the European continent.

## April 23, 2015 – First Interview with Jean-Jacques Lebel

**Eric Morrill:** I'd like to talk about how images that circulated in the media have induced the perception of performances. Drifts in meaning like this are, as you know, inevitable, and result from newspaper editors preferring certain images over others, or photographers framing pictures certain ways, and this mediation leads to a transformation... Be it photos, videos, or texts, all documents that float around have a life beyond the performance that helps shape interpretation.

With that in mind, I'd like to talk about your and others' happenings in the 1960s. For those of us who weren't there, we have no access to the happenings themselves, but only to documents relating to them. And while these can be very inspirational, their relationship to the events they are associated with is not straightforward.

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** That's a terrific question. Concerning our happenings, the ones we did here in Europe, from '62 to '68. '68 of course is not a neutral date, because it's the year in which all over the world there was a general social, political and poetical upheaval, which we had been working towards. Our activities had –I would say– political vision. As a result, by contrast to my American colleague Kaprow, for example, we didn't put our happenings together in the same way. We would talk, a lot, sit around a table, mostly artists, but also people we didn't know. People who'd answered our ads in the press, or whom we met on the streets or in the metro. About 10 to 15 people came each time, men and women, of all kinds. It was very important for us to break down the barrier between artists and non-artists, professional and nonprofessionals. There were precedents: The Italian neorealist cinema in the postwar period was using a lot of nonprofessional actors, and before that were the surrealists, drawing *cadavre exquis*, to which they invited people who they met on the street. So in one *cadavre exquis* you would have fantastically famous artists

such as Miró or Dalí or Tanguy, and great poets like Péret or Breton or Eluard, and you would have their lovers of the day or people they just *dragued* at the café or in the street. That's wonderful. Because it brings in a certain wildness, a certain freshness, expressing other points of view which are not aesthetic, but this is a basic human impulse to express oneself in certain ways rather than others.

**Eric Morrill:** And how did you operate during the meetings? I know you've described them somewhat in your book *Happenings, ou l'insoumission radicale...*

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** We would sit around a table in a cafe, usually on the first floor of the *Café de la Mairie* on Place St Sulpice, for two or three hours, and each person would indicate what they wanted to do. We would do what we call in French a *tour de table*. Everybody would have an equal chance to say what they wanted, what they desired, and then we would have exchanges. My role was to write everything out in the notebook, to ask questions to everybody including those who were not artists.

**Eric Morrill:** And did you always manage to come up with a consensus?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Yes, because from the start the rule was free expression, meaning that nobody could stop anybody else from doing anything. Short of murder, but not to worry nobody wanted to murder anybody! The rule was we were there to try and find a combination where everybody could act out whatever they wanted to act out without anybody else interfering. The thing we were trying to do is articulate a combination of contents and forms which satisfied everybody. There was no ego-struggling, because we realized that being in a collective effort in fact made us more free not less. That's a phenomenon that we discovered while we were doing it.

The fact that we were in a collective and working as a collective not as individuals — that's the difference between performances and happenings. Performance is all "me, me, me!" Like in Show Biz. Certain performance artists seem to always be saying, "I'm the queen of the world, you must be here to admire me!" Many others, men, women, whatever, construct mausoleums to "Me." Our happenings were radically different.

That's not at all: we were trying to do something that was a bit more like a jazz thing. There is a wonderful record by my old and dear friend Ornette Coleman, it's called Free Jazz, with *White Light* by Jackson Pollock on the album cover. Free Jazz is about listening to what the other players are playing, and playing according to what the others are playing. In the liner notes, Ornette writes that they played with such freedom that most of the time they didn't know who was playing what. Wow! The group was the "author." That's exactly what we were trying to do. Ornette came to my happening *120 Minutes*, and we are still to this day close friends. Because we were trying to work in the same direction.[1]

One concrete example of a dream realized is the famous "Cynthia." In those days a transsexual was extremely rare. She worked as a strip teaser in the Folies Pigalle on the Place Pigalle and her boss thought she was a woman. But she had a penis, which she taped in, and she had breasts. Because she was not very well paid she also worked as a prostitute on weekends, with clients who came from the provinces. She said, in her Serbian accent, that her dream was to one day, on stage, show who she really was instead of pretending to be a woman with a vagina.

**Eric Morrill:** And how, exactly, did this aim of hers come out? Was this part of the regular meeting?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Yes, during discussions! And I was extremely moved by that; it's not just a very personal, intimate story, it's also a story that goes back very far in our cultural memory, and here I'm thinking, for example, of what Rimbaud called *le double sexe*. Or the ancient Greek myth of the Androgyn and the Roman sculpture of Hermaphrodite in the Louvre. And here she was, just wanting to live a dream, participating in an art event, an art action, collectively. And she did.

I would propose a sort of general sequence, a general organization that would be discussed and readapted. Everything would be discussed and changed, it took two or three months to structure a happening, because we did it calmly. The production process was, in itself, a sensuous experience. Of course, once the synopsis was mapped out, "mistakes" or "accidents" occurred and those unplanned mishaps were often the best of all.

### **There was no place in Paris**

**Eric Morrill:** In *Happenings*, you say that you would often meet around six or seven times. How much time elapsed between these rendez-vous? Who did which parts of the organizing?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** We met about once a week, something like that. Often people weren't available because we all had jobs, but it usually took about two months more or less. I would draw out a chart, people would change things around, and when we were satisfied, more or less, with the general structure, we set out to find out what techniques we were going to use.

I was the one who found the places for the venues. The place is probably the most important thing of all. If you look at the example of Dada, if it hadn't been for the Cabaret Voltaire, there wouldn't have been Dada. Because Cabaret Voltaire was a place where, when Tzara arrived from Romania, he already knew he would find people such as Hugo Ball and Hans Arp. Place allows people to search out like-minded colleagues.

There was no such place in Paris, in '61-'63. So I had to find one or invent one. Having lived in New York with my parents as a kid, they put me in the American community school when we returned in '46. That was in the American Center, 261, *boulevard Raspail*. It was a private structure, built in the 30s, a lovely old building with a garden around it, later destroyed by Jean Nouvel's horrible pseudo-modern building for the *Fondation Cartier*. But once upon a time there was a garden, a swimming pool in the basement, a cafeteria and a gym and rooms that were used as classrooms — and I went to school there. I have a photo, taken when I was 11 years old outside on the steps with the teacher and the whole class.

And then it stopped being the American community school, and it went back to being the American Center for Students and Artists, with language classes, painting classes and stuff like that. Yves Klein was a judo teacher there, and when I was 19 or 20 I wanted to do Judo — I'd never heard of Yves Klein — and I was his judo student for two years there. He introduced me to Iris Clert, and to all that group with Takis, Arman, etc. ... and I then showed work in the Iris Clert gallery on the Rue Des Beaux-Arts in 1957.

So when it was time to look for a space, I remembered the American Center from my childhood. I went to see the director, David Davis, and I said we were doing these things called “happenings,” and poetry readings and jazz concerts, and he said, “Well let’s try!” So we started out in ‘63 with a Happening, with Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the poet and publisher, and Harold Norse, who was an American poet living at the Beat Hotel. And after that I suggested other events. This was more like a poetry reading with gas masks. It was the beginning of a happening. I had done one in Venice, as you know, on the 14th of July, 1960, and in 1964 we started modestly and then we got to do a whole festival. First I called it the Workshop of Free Expression and then the *Festival de la Libre Expression*, and so we created a place where happening tribes from all over the world would congregate, once a year, for two, three or four weeks, doing happenings or concerts or readings or movie projections almost every night.

**Eric Morrill:** So you created this place, this point of congregation where people knew they could find colleagues. Of course, the physical structures that you used also shaped the possibilities... Can you recount how your time at the American Center ended in 1965, partly as a result of some terrible press reactions to a basement pool and the third festival?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Yes, the last year there was in ‘65... we didn’t know exactly what it was, but something was in the air. You could feel it, you could smell it: a mass desire to transform life. And take control of our lives. Rimbaud’s *changer la vie*. We felt this urge, this impulse, at the same time extremely individual and utterly collective. That urge went through our happenings completely. As you probably saw in the book, at the end of one of the evenings people wound up in the swimming pool downstairs and they took their clothes off. There were 50 to 60 people. That was the epoch of so-called “sexual revolution.” San Francisco panhandle stuff, a lot of people were smoking joints and just having a good time. And that created a really big problem for poor Davis, a nice, American, middle-of-the-road, bourgeois fellow. And he said, “No you can’t do this here, stop immediately,” and people pretended they didn’t understand, so he called the cops. The police came and confronted all these naked people in and outside the pool. It was wonderful slapstick. It was exactly the vision we had of what was about to happen on a broader scale but we didn’t know it yet. Boys and girls, men and women getting up and running, and the police were chasing them around it was crazy. It was just wild. But Davis got fired from his job. The next year we had to do it somewhere else, as the press went crazy and insulted us, even demanding that the police arrest us — which occurred often.

## **A totally unattainable objective**

**Eric Morrill:** To return to the question of which events were called “happenings” and which “performances,” I believe that it was only in 1966 that your 1960 *L’Enterrement de la Chose* was recast as the first European happening, in the volume by Kaprow that Abrams published. Do you feel that changed the way people remembered or spoke about it, to put it in that group of events?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Definitely! Imagine yourself in a happening. Either in the American Center, where there’s five or six hundred people in that large room, or whether it’s in a basement with Kaprow in New York, where there’s 20 or 30 people. What you are experiencing, what you are

perceiving with your eyes and ears and nose, is what's directly in front of you. And if you move your head to the right or to the left, you have a wider scope. So what you are perceiving or registering in your memory is what's directly in front of you. To get a real complete vision you would have to have many different eyes or cameras pointed in many different directions. So what remains, now, if you try to remember something, is a black and white photo, shot by a photographer, usually a man, sometimes a woman but usually the photographers were men, shooting something directly in front of them. Certain frogs can see in all directions with revolving eyes, but not human beings. That's to say we have an extremely fragmented, reduced vision. From that small piece of visual evidence we try to reconstruct the entire thing. It's a totally unattainable objective! We know that from the start. So that's why your question concerning images is absolutely central. It's like trying to reconstruct a whole suit from a button. It's about as ridiculous as that.

**Eric Morrill:** Which leads to some interesting ideas as to what the suit should look like.

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Maybe it doesn't even end up being a suit at all! But rather an ocean-bottom plant or a flying carpet from the *Arabian Nights*...

**Eric Morrill:** Exactly! I spent a year in the Getty archives a couple of years ago, and something that I found fascinating was to look at how in the United States, over the 60s, the term "happening" came to mean an 'anything goes,' chaotic improvised event –in popular vernacular– despite the fact that many of the first US happenings were highly scripted. This might seem contradictory, but actually it just shows the transformative power of media.

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** You're right, most of those US happenings weren't improvised at all. What was a "happening," in the first place? If you want to look at art history, look at the 1920 *Dada Messe* in Berlin, where Mehring and Grosz staged a race between a typewriter and a sewing machine, if that isn't a happening, what is it? It's a happening, but it wasn't called a happening. The term Happening was, as you said, first used by Kaprow.

But there are many different sorts of Happenings, and the same word applied to such different types of events is problematic.

In any case, we have these traces around which we try to rebuild a memory or a fiction of memory. You know, it's the old Proust thing with the *madeleines*... I know it's a cliché but it's ok as a cliché. From the smell of the *madeleine* Proust has his entire childhood come back to him in those wonderful pages of *La Recherche*. So you could say that about a simple black and white photo sometimes completely blurry and you have the entire experience that comes back to you of course it's not the actual experience, it's the remembrance, it's the reminiscence, therefore it's totally confused and distorted, imaginary even, but it has some inkling of a *rapport* with what was experienced in the first place. Or maybe not.

**Eric Morrill:** The problem is for those of us who haven't had the benefit of being there.

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Well, forget it! It's like the wonderful William Blake poem about the French Revolution. Blake being the great visionary artist, the poet, the magnificent mind, he sort of

reconstructed a dream of something he didn't experience personally. It's a fantastic "Disneyland," Blakeian vision of what he thought the French Revolution might have been. And it had nothing to do with what actually went down! But does it matter?

**Eric Morrill:** Well I think in the best case it's a creative misinterpretation that then produces something. In the worst case it's just a reduction that makes the event seem more like a black and white photo than an event. Were there any instances where you felt that pictures that had been taken during a happening were abused by the media?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Yes — in the sense that they were always sensationalist and mediocre and would take things out of context. There's the famous photo [from *120 Minutes* [2]] of the woman "*la République*" with cream all over her, and the mask of de Gaulle. That was considered completely scandalous according to the dominant cultural codes. But what's even worse than misuse of images is censorship. As you said, they would take an image and misinterpret completely or reinvent something that they thought was outrageous and scandalous from a photo. OK! But more often they would refuse to see or photograph things that were, for us, extremely important.

### **Their stupid media outlets**

**Eric Morrill:** In these planning meetings, did you talk about how the events were going to be documented? Or was that incidental?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Sometimes we had a couple of friends who were good photographers. Like Shunk and Kender or like Pablo Volta, who took the famous photo of Duchamp and Man Ray at one of our evenings — he was the only one who recognized him, the other 4, 5 hundred people in the room didn't even know who Duchamp and Man Ray were! Mostly the press people were just there because they were told there would be naked participants and they could sell that to their stupid media outlets. We had no illusions as far as that was concerned. I'll give you an example. A guy called Jean-Michel Humeau filmed several happenings and he made an extremely dishonest film. He mixed all the evenings and artists together — including pure theatre, Jodorowsky's *Théâtre Panique*. He mixed everything up and made a mess of it in order to try to sell it he put an absolutely abject commentary on it saying we were drugged crazies.

**Eric Morrill:** And did that then circulate? Did he manage to sell it?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Not really. Even with that horrible, antagonistic commentary it didn't get anywhere. So I suppose it didn't have much public impact, but at least we have the raw images. I refused to speak to that son of a bitch for 30 years until —finally— he acknowledged his mistake and gave me the rights to use some of the images.

In any case, it's a good example of the impossibility to film happenings in the classical reportage mode. The other example is the 1963 version of *Pour Conjurer l'Esprit de Catastrophe*. The first version was in a gallery at the end of '62 and then January or February of '63 it was in a cinema

studio where we reconstructed the space, and an Italian crew filmed it with several cameras. You can see them in the photos with their big 35 mm cameras. That was even more dishonest, because the commentary they used was insulting, and then they added sequences which had nothing to do with us. More nakedness. And they made a montage movie made of several sketches which was called *Malamondo*, a horrible malevolent commercial distortion that you can find on the internet. It added totally outrageously moronic sequences, like nudists skiing down slopes in Switzerland. They thought we were in the category of drunkards. It gave us a real idea what the cultural war between the artist and society is all about.

Because there was no way to be perceived as doing art work or expressing subconscious impulses in an artistic form. Immediately they would ridicule us. We experienced that, the everyday material consequence of being at war with the dominant culture. Artists were supposed to wear a beret and paint on a canvas for art dealers and collectors not change the rules and the very creative process itself.

**Eric Morrill:** But this was an idea that was ripe for questioning... Were there instances where you felt like there was reporting that supported your views, for example that managed to preserve some of the complexity of your happenings as fusions of politics and erotics?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** A little bit, but not much. One such example, we have to mention it, was an important 1966 reportage in *Life magazine* by Barry Farrell. He came and practically lived with us for a couple of months and followed one of the international festivals from the beginning to the end. He didn't quite understand what we were doing, because he had no background in this, but he was an extremely honest and well-meaning guy and his comments were extremely positive. He didn't quite grasp in what sense this was a new art form, that it all came from painting, as if the people in a Titian painting had walked out of the canvas and into the room and that was what a Happening was. He didn't understand that all this came from the necessity for art to *move*. But he liked it and he thought it was fun and that was a great progress compared to the other media brain-washing propaganda.

**Eric Morrill:** And did you have the feeling then that your audience included people who didn't attend the events, but only read about them? Something that I find fascinating about the way that images circulate is that they can then connect people who are far away to a place or to a person.

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Answering your question backwards, I'd never been to Japan, but I certainly saw images of the Osaka Gutaï group's work, and later became friends with some Gutaï artists that way. And all we had was a photo, yet we felt an extraordinary close kinship together, they were in Osaka and we were in Paris or Berlin or some other city, but we knew we were on the same wavelength.

In 1958 I was invited to Poland. I never went for that Stalinist-Communist-Leninist horror. I was much more in the anarchist vein, as you know, coming from Dada and Surrealism. I was part of a group called Phases, and I was invited to Poland by the Union of Polish artists that was for a few short months, less than six months, there was all of a sudden a cultural liberalization. So the arts were freer, the cinema, the Polish cinema was freer, new theater came out...

**Eric Morrill:** ...the Gomulka thaw in '56, that's also when Warsaw Autumn, an opening towards the West while showcasing the East, was being planned.

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Exactly. During that period I was invited with a group in Warsaw and Krakow, and went there and met a lot of Polish artists. One of them was doing abstract painting, which was prohibited. You were supposed to paint workers or soldiers, not painterly stuff. And I said, "This looks just like what they were painting in Paris or N.Y. twenty or thirty years ago," and he showed me contraband, small postcards, black and white postcards, that's all the information they had. And from there they reconstructed a totally dreamlike current of art, quite interesting because of that discrepancy. All they had were little fragments of images, and from there, like the button, they tried to reconstruct an entire suit. We were struggling for freedom, and then all of a sudden I realized that there were people who were much worse off than we were. For them, the circulation of images, either in black and white or in another form, was definitely part of the struggle. They lived under utter tyranny. Not us.

In '68, as you know, we were producing our own newspapers and newsreel films, because we didn't trust the mainstream media at all. I put out a newspaper in '68, called *Le Pavé*. The idea of *autogestion* (self government) was that we would self-manage our own lives. It's a terrible amount of work! But it's the only way we could be sure that things weren't distorted systematically and ideologically. What we had to do was to try and manage the circulation of the images of our actions. Which of course is impossible, but we tried! Who decides which images can circulate, and what are those images? If you analyze that you can get a pretty good idea of what the social and cultural context is.

## **Imagery management**

**Eric Morrill:** I tend to be rather pessimistic with regard to the circulation of the images on the internet. A random sampling of YouTube videos would probably yield more kittens batting at yarn or sports bloopers than news.

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** Because the perception system that most people use to apprehend images is also completely fucked up! I just did a show in ZKM in Karlsruhe and in Nantes, and I used something that I found on the Internet that everybody could see but doesn't actually see. It's some terrifying, troubling images that were shot in Berchtesgaden by Hitler, filming his girlfriend Eva Braun nude in a torrent, and then she would film him in his holiday retreat with his inner circle, his pet dog and with the Nazi generals and Eva's girlfriends out on Berchtesgaden's terrace in the Alps. And you see these women in the sun playing around and then all of a sudden you see Bormann, Himmler or Heydrich, you know, all the Nazi war criminals having fun together in the sun. Then a sad little girl who's three and a half looks into the camera, and I figured out who that person was: it was Romy Schneider, the future movie star. Her mother, Magda, was a close friend of Eva Braun. So she was this little girl at 3 and a half sitting on the knees of Hitler! A pure tragic figure. She later committed suicide.

These images are on the Internet for everyone to see, but they just don't realize what they're seeing. When you study the machinery of Nazism it's also a study in imagery management. There's

definitely a link between the very abundant commercial cinema industry and the Nazi machinery of dominance.

I tried to figure it out and I made an installation connecting those two elements, a five-minute montage I made of that, and the context of still photos of the commercial films. I'm passionately interested in the problem of the perceived imagery that you formulated earlier.

**Eric Morrill:** You've said you're against reenactments. How, outside of reenactments, can you preserve a performance, if photographs are just good at jogging the memory of those who witnessed them?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** You simply can't. Happenings are pure subjective experience, it's not supposed to last forever and be preserved. It's an ephemeral experience and all you have left is the imprint on your subconscious memory, and that's it! Happenings have philosophical, political and poetical contents, you live that experience burdened with your life's psychic luggage as a human being. And the happening changes the perception codes according to who is experiencing it. I think we just have to recognize the fact that when a happening has been experienced, the only thing left is a memory or traces of sensations. Or maybe a sensation of traces.

**Eric Morrill:** In terms of political impact, then, you must see the main value as lodged in the experience which people carried away from the happenings. But there's also an impact through the mediatization. Which happenings do you feel were the most effective, and what was it that made them so?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** It's an interesting question. You can create the conditions for events to occur, but it was by leaving some things unplanned that collaboration and 'success' in disruption came up most. That's why the Leninist concept of a revolution is completely counter-productive, it's totalitarian and bureaucratic and in fact just another form of Czarism. You cannot plan a social revolution from the top down, just like you can't plan to fall in love. It has to happen to you, you have to accept the fact that the decision is made for you by the social circumstances and events which happen to you but that you do not control.

## October 20, 2015 – Second Interview with Jean-Jacques Lebel

**Eric Morrill:** Last time we spoke about the impact of documents, and I'm hoping that this interview, we can talk about what, exactly, your archive is like. What sorts of documents did you preserve after a happening?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** I've got a lot of photos. Those published in my Hazan book give a modest idea of the kind of images I have kept. I also have leaflets, posters, manuscripts, dozens and dozens of diaries, notebooks, sketchbooks and much correspondence with my colleagues. I'm trying to figure out what to do with my archive now. I think it should go to a research library, there are

many of those which are interested, but I want one which will be active and lively, not a dormant one that puts it all away and leaves it in closed boxes to be forgotten.

My archive isn't just about happenings, it's also my writings and my life! Although I'm 80 years old this year, I haven't given up one inch of my political prerogative. I think that the world is in a much worse and dangerous mess than it was in 50 years ago, and it's horrifying. So I'm still doing everything I can, although I can't throw Molotov cocktails as far as I used to. But I still think of myself as an extremely active anarchist, and I keep myself very busy. So that's a double archive: art and life.

And then I have another, giant archive on the international poetry scene, because I set up the Polyphonix Festival, which I started in 1979, and before that in 1964, the Festival of Free Expression. So I have a lot of stuff concerning sound poetry, video, and all kinds of oral literatures which I call *poésie directe*. All this concerns the inner workings of the international counter culture movement

**Eric Morrill:** And then there's all of your art, and the works you've been given by friends, which overlap with your archive to some extent.

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** A rather enormous amount of stuff. I don't like the word "collector," because it's in my case is totally misleading. Collectors today are mostly speculators, they just buy to invest money. As you said, a great part of the things that I live with, the objects that I live with, are exchanges between my very close colleagues and me. All the artworks in this room [Lebel's studio's kitchen], for instance, were bartered with people that I love. I think of artworks as friends: subjective, affective, exchange of affect. Here there is no Damien Hirst or Jeff Koons — I wouldn't want to touch that poisonous stuff with a 100-foot pole. A lot of the works that I have exchanged with friends would mean nothing on the art market! They are not merchandise or merchandisable. It's not for collectors of mainstream industrialized products. But for me they're immensely important, as philosophical statements and artistic traces of a vibrant age-old counter culture.

**Eric Morrill:** You mentioned you've hired someone to sort your archive. How will it be organized, and how has it been organized in the past, if at all?

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** First thing we're doing is my *catalogue raisonnée*. And then she'll put a lot of things up on the website. I have an immense number of photographs, and my intention is to try and organize them, with captions, into a vast book of memories. I've met and befriended some extraordinary people in my life, a certain number of geniuses, such as Duchamp, Man Ray, Breton, Ginsberg, Corso, Deleuze, Guattari, Burroughs, Castoriadis, Axelos, Morin, Debord... I'm very sentimental about friendship. And I would like to publish one or two or three books of photos, a visual archive of an intense live experience. As somebody who was born in 1936, and I'm very eager to pass on this information and experiments to the next generations.

**Eric Morrill:** Many of Allan Kaprow's materials, which I worked with during my dissertation research, were spread out in different hands, and some of that was lost or destroyed. I talked to a few people who had been at happenings, documented them, and then gotten rid of the photos when they moved houses ten years later.

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** And now what's left sits in the Getty in boxes, and almost nobody but you has opened them all. Allan's formidable contribution to the re-dynamization of experimental art forms has not yet been recognized at its true value. He, as well as Artaud, or Péret or Burroughs need to be rediscovered and brought out of storage.

**Eric Morrill:** I saw some of your stuff in there.

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** You have? Stuff that Allan [Kaprow] forgot to give me back. You know, we were very close, I loved that guy very much. For his Abrams book I sent him a lot of texts and black and white photos, and none were ever returned, so they're in his archive at the Getty! Or in his book.

At any rate, our challenge in passing things on to future generations is to communicate contents, not only commercial capital gains, to bring the focus back on to what the artist or the philosopher or the writer or the musician wants to convey. Why they did what they did, how and to what end.

**Eric Morrill:** From the younger generation, I offer my heartfelt thanks.

**Jean-Jacques Lebel:** For me it's normal! It's almost banal. I think that the actual work of the intellectual, of the poet, of the artists, musician, whatever you want to call him or her, is not only to produce one's own thing that one signs with one's name. It's to inscribe this work in the context of a global rhizome, which encompasses many generations, languages, and techniques. It's a perfectly normal thing for me, who owes so much to Breton and Duchamp, and those who taught me all this, to attempt to be rigorous and to do a precise job. And I'm doing my best to pass this on. Nothing special really. It's just part of the life process.

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[1] Ornette Coleman passed away several months after this interview.

[2] *120 Minutes dédiées au Divin Marquis* was a Happening by Jean-Jacques Lebel, which took place at the *3<sup>rd</sup> Festival de la Libre Expression* in Paris, April 4, 1966 (a second, modified version was interrupted by the police on April 27). The happening, attended by roughly 400 people, was conceived and put on by Jean-Claude Bailly, Barbara Benamou, Bob Benamou, Billy Copley, Cynthia, Guillemain Géraud, Shirley Goldfarb, Frédéric Pardo, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Jocelyn de Noblet, Nicole, Gérard Rutten, Philippe Hiquily, and Denise de Casabianca. Named in honor of the Marquis de Sade, and featuring such activities as a woman peeing on the audience from above, sodomy with vegetables, a person revealed to be a transsexual, and the spanking of nude women and men to the rhythm of the Marseillaise, it provoked an immediate scandal. The second version, attended by police in plainclothes, was markedly different, although Lebel was nonetheless arrested, only to be released following a declaration signed by numerous well-known French intellectuals such as Breton, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Nadeau, Rivette, etc. ...