

# So What Happens After Happenings?

By ELENORE LESTER

**H**ATE Happenings. Love Intermedia Kinetic Environments." John Brockman speaking—partly kidding, but conveying the notion that Happenings are Out and Intermedia Kinetic Environments are In in the places where the action is. John Brockman, the New York Film Festival's 25-year-old coordinator of a special events program on independent cinema in the United States, plugging into the switched-on "expanded cinema" world in which a film is not just a movie, but an Experience, an Event, an Environment. This is a humming electronic world, in which multiple films, tapes, amplifiers, kinetic sculpture, lights and live dancers or actors are combined to Involve Audiences in a Total Theater Experience. Unlike Happenings, which often involve audiences in complicated relationships with plastics, bottles, sacks, ropes and other objects, Intermedia Kinetic Experiences permit audiences simply to sit, stand, walk or lie down and allow their senses to be Saturated by Media.

## No Way Out

"You can't escape from an Intermedia Kinetic Environment the way you can from a play or any art form that reaches you through language," says Brockman. "This is primary experience. It takes place in a 360-degree environment." Brockman, who fully accepts Marshall McLuhan's "the - medium-is-the-message" thesis, believes that full exposure to I.K.E. is positively "therapeutic."

When he was selected by New York Film Festival Director Amos Vogel to work with him on the special events program, Brockman imme-

diately thought in terms of helping to bring this farthest-out development in the film-art-dance-music world before a public "that really doesn't understand how our world has changed." When the festival starts at Lincoln Center on Sept. 12, four of 27 special events will be concerned with this area of film experimentation. The other programs cover a wide range of aspects of independent film-making from the cinema vérité work

of Ricky Leacock and Albert and David Maysels to poetic-impressionistic works and experiments involving the physical aspects of vision.

But how came Brockman, pink-cheeked, shiny-eyed, fresh out of business school, a traineeship at Bloomingdale's and involvement in a leasing corporation, to the world of artistic experimentation where in one year he has been largely responsible for bringing the underground cinema into the

light of day and promoting an unlikely marriage between mixed media and commercial discothèques—a marriage consummated when USCO (Us Company), a group of poets, artists and engineers, designed an "environment" for the World, a teen-age night club on Long Island. "All accident. I did what I wanted," says Brockman. "After that it was logical thinking. That I learned at business school."

Brockman was enmeshed in

finances and knew practically nothing of media outside of The Wall Street Journal when his friendship with Off-Off-Broadway actor Kevin O'Connor led him to an interest in theatrical activities at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bow-erie. He and O'Connor suggested to Ralph Cook, director of the church's art program, that a showing of the work of young independent film-makers might be interesting. The thing caught on. But no one was more caught by it than Brockman himself. In the work of the underground film-makers, the young businessman found a soul the computers lacked. "Money is just an abstraction. These people were doing something *important*. They are *artists*. They see through years of conditioned responses." The barriers of his own conditioned responses fell like the stock market. "Movies? I had loved them — Westerns, foreign films, all kinds of Hollywood films. But this was Something Else!"

## A New Wave

Dominating the far-out scene at this time (which will undoubtedly go down in film history as the first period of the new American cinema of the 60's) was the beat type of film-maker like Jack Smith, Ron Rice and Andy Warhol, whose work projected a wry, personal social criticism, using everything from pathos to put-on to point up modern man's alienation from his society, from his own body and soul. However, this programmatically naive, home-movie approach represented only one strain in the new cinema. Other film-makers were more concerned with extending the range of film-making through technical innovations such as



The New York Times (Tim Kantor)

John Brockman, champion of Intermedia Kinetic Environments

"It can't be told in words—you just have to experience it"

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the use of multiple screens and projectors, video tapes, and light and sound experiments. It was this aspect of the new work that most fascinated Brockman. Becoming connected with the Film-Makers' Cooperative, he promoted a week-long festival that brought widespread attention to the group.

Since then, intermedia presentations by Robert Whit-

man have been given at the Martinique Theater and at Circle-in-the-Square, and a Whitman work was shown before an invited audience at Easthampton, L. I., last weekend. Although Circle audiences have displayed amusement, bafflement and hostility, the art-oriented audience of Easthampton was enthusiastic about a "theater piece" based on a watery theme—penguins, a boat, a strange inflated

whale-like object, amplified watery sounds and people wrapped in plastic coverings that made them appear to have emerged from the depths of the sea. The work will be given as the final presentation of the special events program at Lincoln Center on Sept. 23.

Brockman feels sure that exposure to Intermedia Kinetic Environments like these will change people's perceptions. He finds it dif-

ficult to describe exactly from what to what ("You just have to *experience* it. The whole point is that it *can't* be told in words.") In any case, he is sure the change will be **for the better**—"After all, we're living in the second **half of the** 20th century, and for all most people know we may as well be in the 16th. Only the hippist, most aware artists are able to make a statement about our world today."