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Psychic Renewal:

Group 66 and the Politics of Participation

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Sammendrag/Abstract

Denne oppgaven tar for seg aspekter ved 1966 utstillingen, *Gruppe 66*, av den Bergenske kunstnergruppen Gruppe 66. Denne oppgaven ser på to av gruppens kunstverk, *Happening* og *Co-ritus*. Jeg argumenterer for at begge verkene fremmer Gruppe 66s idé om psykisk fornyelse, som involverer publikums bevissthetsskifte initiert av gruppens happening og co-ritus. Gjennom kunstneres forfatterskap og analyse av de to kunstneriske produksjonene, foreslår jeg at gruppen bruker kunstverkene sine til å fremme sin politisk ideologi gjennom strategier og teknikker hentet fra ulike kilder som teater, den amerikanske happening tradisjonen og Situasjonisme. Diskusjonen er basert på og ledet av kunstformenes internasjonale rammeverk og konseptuelle historier, ytterligere styrket av Gruppe 66s tilknytning til utenlandske kunstnernettverk. Dessuten ser jeg på gruppens mytologisering og marginalisering av norsk kunsthistorie og vurderer hvilken rolle tilstander i norsk kunstverden og kunsthistorie har hatt på gruppens mottakelse i fortid og nåtid. Derfor foreslår denne oppgaven et nytt rammeverk for å forstå den kunstneriske produksjonen til Gruppe 66, basert på internasjonale og nasjonale kunsthistoriske konsepter, med mål om å plassere gruppen i globalt kunsthistorisk rammeverk. Denne oppgaven tilbyr en detaljert diskusjon av Gruppe 66 og deres kunstverk, *Happening* og *Co-ritus*.

This thesis looks at aspects of the 1966 exhibition, *Gruppe 66*, by the Bergen-based artist collective Group 66. This thesis considers two of the group's artistic productions, *Happening* and *Co-ritus*. I argue that both artworks promote Group 66's idea of psychic renewal, which involves the audience's shift in consciousness instigated by the group's *Happening* and *Co-ritus*. Through artists' writings and analysis of the two artistic productions, I propose that the group used their artworks to promote their political ideology through strategies and techniques derived from diverse sources such as theatre, the American Happening, and situationism. The art forms' international frameworks and conceptual histories guide the discussion, further strengthened by Group 66's connections to foreign artist networks. Moreover, I look at the group's mythologization and marginalization by Norwegian art history and consider the role of the Norwegian art world and art history on the group's reception in the past and present. Thus, this thesis proposes a new framework for understanding the artistic production of Group 66, relying on international and national art historical concepts, to situate the group in a global art-historical landscape. This thesis offers a detailed discussion of Group 66 and their happening and co-ritus artworks.

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Introduction

“Ten or two years ago, it was almost impossible to imagine such a group in Bergen at all. What has happened in the meantime is unknown. Perhaps it will be the job of an art historian sometime in the future to find out.”¹

The Norwegian artistic landscape of the first half of the 20th century was intently engrossed in the role of art in nation-building. As a result, as Norwegian art historian Susanne Rajka observes, “the established art world resisted all Modernist advances for over 40 years.”² Norway’s art and its discourse subscribed to bourgeois values and clamored to styles like national romanticism to remedy the impression of the newly independent Norway as an a-historical and uncultured nation.

In 1966 an artistic earthquake, with its epicenter in Bergen, shattered the comfortable, petit-bourgeois art views of the narrow segment of the Norwegian population invested in the visual arts. The earthquake’s focus was a group of artists, going by the moniker Group 66, who held an exhibition in the Bergen Art Association from March 11 to April 3. The traditionally formatted day-time exhibition accompanied a weeklong series of evening events, which included happenings, events, mask games, and poetry. This thesis is an in-depth exploration of two of these evening events; co-ritus and happening. The Situationist-inspired group of artists known as Group 66 was responsible for some of the first happenings in Norway. They pioneered new art forms that shook up the Norwegian artistic landscape. Their revolutionary art forms and messaging ushered through a new wave of art that challenged the status quo.

Group 66’s inception was sparked by the respective arrival and return of artists Elsebet Rahlff and Olav Herman Hansen to Bergen after many years spent abroad in Denmark and France. They brought new artistic impulses and joined forces with artist Lars

¹ Per Hovdenakk, «Lasse Anno 66.» *Bergen Arbeiderblad*, February 26, 1966. Original text: “For ti eller to år siden var det bortimot umulige tenke seg en slik gruppe i Bergen i det hele tatt. hva som har skjedd i mellomtiden er ikke godt å vite. Muligens blir det jobb for en kunsthistoriker en gang i fremtiden og finne det ut.” Translation by the author.

² Susanne Rajka. «-Norway in the ‘60s Image of a Decade” in *The Nordic ‘60s : Upheaval and Confrontation 1960-1972* , eds. Birgitta Lönnell and Halldór Björn Runolfsson. (Helsinki: Nordic Arts Centre, 1990,)156.

Grundt and a group of younger artists, poets, and musicians based in Bergen.³ The series of evening events featured guests artists from the Copenhagen art milieu, including the Danish Situationist artist and filmmaker Jens Jørgen Thorsen. Group 66 saw themselves as a new generation of artists making a clear break from the confines of the conservative Bergen art scene. Any artistic or social limitations did not confine the group. They wanted to create a free and open artistic space where both artists and audiences could explore the relationship between art and society. A 1965 newspaper feature of the group states that “this is not about a cohesive artistic program, i.e., something that is attached to a specific view, a specific direction, one then takes many media to help to illuminate as many features as a new generation can express themselves in, and so are poetry, painting, and music involved in the group’s program. All with the intention of creating contact between the artists and the audience, and to engage art lovers as far as possible.”⁴ Group 66 aimed to open dialogue between the artists and the audience and encourage engagement and renewal through art and shared experiences.

³ Members of Group 66:

Olav Herman Hansen: graphic art, sculptor, painter, . Events/Happenings.

Egil Røed: graphic art.

Lars Grundt: graphic art, sculptor, painter, poet. Events/ Happenings.

Niels Bolstad: painter, graphic art, poet. Events/Happenings.

Elsebet Rahlff: textile artist, graphic art. Events/Happenings.

Bjørn Hegranses: graphic art, painter.

Ingvald Homefjord: painter.

Lars A. Sæverud: painter.

Oddvar Thorsheim: graphic art, painter, poet. Events/Happenings.

Ragnhild Gram-Knutsen: graphic art.

Per Kleiva: painter, graphic art. (Kleiva was never an official member, but participated in the Group 66 Exhibition.)

Terje Skulstad: poet, writer. Events.

Bjørn Kahrs Hansen: Photographer, writer.

Kjetil Hvoslef: composer, musician. Events.

Knut Bratland Kristiansen: composer, jazz musician, events.

Guest Artists:

Jens Jørgen Thorsen: situationist, painter, filmproducer, writer, art critic. Events/Happenings.

Walt Rosenberg: poet, performer/actor, theatre instructor. Events/Happenings.

Anne Hedegaard: textile artist, graphic art. Events/Happenings.

Stefan Rink: multimedia art. Events/Happenings.

⁴ «Gruppe 66 – et nytt innslag i bergensk kulturliv.» *Bergens Tidende*, November 26, 1965.

Original text: “Det er her ikke tale om noe kunstnerisk fellesprogram, dvs. noe som slutter seg tett omkring et bestemt syn, en bestemt retning, man tar så mange media til hjelp for å belyse så mange trekk som en ny generasjon kan uttrykke seg i og slik er diktekunst, malerkunst, poesi, musikk involvert i gruppens program. Alt i den hensikt å få kontakt mellom kunstnerne og publikum og engasjere kunstinteresserte så langt dette er mulig.” Translation by the author.

The group was engaged in both the practices of the historical European avant-garde and those of their American contemporaries. Their 1966 exhibition introduced Norwegian audiences to concepts such as happenings, co-ritus, expanded cinema, and *laterna magica*.⁵ The group and their art present as a part of global art networks, manifesting as a synthesis of local and global, personal, and political worlds. Despite their apparent contribution and role as agitators in ushering forth a shift in Norwegian art, the group has yet to receive their due art historically and has instead acquiesced to the realm of myth and folklore in Norwegian art history.

I was introduced to Group 66 at the beginning of my art history master's program at the University of Bergen after expressing an interest in happenings and performance art to my advisor. Having been previously educated abroad, I had little familiarity with Norwegian avant-garde artistic production in the 1960s. I became enthralled with discovering the little-known group of artists known as Group 66, working with a plethora of mediums such as happenings, events, and expanded cinema.

I had previously researched and written about well-established American and European artists working in the same mediums, and as I was accustomed to, I expected to find rich archives and a plethora of theoretical discourse on Group 66. Instead, I faced a rude awakening as I discovered barely any mention of the group in Norwegian art history. The discovery of the meager materials I was left to work with left me with a mix of shock and excitement. I was left unsure of how to approach the material, nevertheless, I relished the opportunity to delve into a previously under-documented chapter in Norwegian art history.

⁵ The Evening program:

Monday March 21, 8 PM: "Film Aften" (Film Evening)-Jens Jørgen Thorsen

Tuesday March 22, 8 PM: "Kunst og Kritik" (Art and Criticism) - Jens Jørgen Thorsen

Wednesday March 23, 8 PM: "Jazzkonsert I" (Jazz concert I) - Knut Kristiansen's Grupper

Thursday March 24, 8 PM: "Ny Musikk og Lyrikk" (New Music and Lyrics) - Per Ingolf Foss (guitar) performing pieces by Ketil Sæverud, Nils Bolstad, Lars Grundt, Walt Rosenberg, and Terje Skulstad (poetry).

"Co-Ritus" directed by Group 66- Situationist Jens Jørgen Thorsen and Olav Herman Hansen. Stefan Rink (conductor). Group 66 (musicians).

Friday March 27, 8 PM: "Poesi" (Poetry) - Walt Rosenberg.

Monday March 28, 8 PM: "happening, maske-spill, *laterna magica*, film, jazz-lyrikk" (happening, mask play, *laterna magica*, film, jazz-lyrics)- Nils Bolstad, Olav Herman-Hansen, Jørn Kahrs Hansen, Knut Kristiansen, Elsebet Rahlff, Terje Skulstad.

Wednesday March 30 8 PM: "Jazzkonsert II" (Jazz concert II) - Knut Kristiansen's Grupper.

Thursday March 31 8 PM: "Rundebords konferanse- kunstens kår i Bergen" (Roundtable conference-artistic premises in Bergen).

In their manifesto Group 66, ask, “Why should Bergen teeter behind like tepid tea water as the whole world now psychically renews from the stable, academic norms.”⁶ With this thesis, I wish to pose the same question to Norwegian art history.

At the first encounter with the research material, I expected to approach the group and their art through the lens of seeing them in relation to their international contemporaries. I saw Group 66’s artistic production as a revolutionary project that I naively thought I would historicize in their local, contemporary landscape, only to discover that there was no well-researched contemporary art historical landscape to work with.

What ultimately emerged through acknowledging the peripheral station of post-war Norwegian art and the conservative style of Norwegian art history was that a new approach was needed. I was left asking myself how one approaches Group 66 and their exhibition when there is no theoretical framework to support a discussion?

I assert that when there is no local or national theoretical discourse to engage in, it is not enough to acknowledge this as a result of provincialism and instead approach said artistic productions as if they exist in a vacuum. Instead, I suggest approaching the material through appropriate and relevant international equivalents that offer richer and more established histories and theoretical discourses. This approach is not meant to undermine so-called provincial art nor affirm the sovereignty of the center’s art, but rather to see this approach as a first step towards creating a productive, inclusive, and diverse history.

If art historians only point out the flaws in the center-periphery model and refuse to engage in its discourse, we reach a moot point when there is no national, local equivalent to engage in. I acknowledge that viewing the group and their art through the dynamic of periphery-center yet attempting to write their history through the framework of the dominant text may seem contradictory. However, it is my belief, and I hope to show through the approach of this thesis, that as far as niche, little-known art like that of Group 66 is concerned, in order to participate art historically beyond the borders of Norway, one must partake. At times, authoring this dissertation, I had to question myself and my approach as I felt uneasy and unethical trying to merge national and international histories. However, the underlying motivation remains to contribute to intellectual and artistic inclusion and diversity.

⁶ Lars Grundt. «Group 66 Manifesto,» *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. February 26, 1966. Translation by the author.

Nevertheless, even writing about art created in a world on the brink of globalism, the art created by Group 66 in the mid-1960s is a synthesis of personal, local, national, and international worlds. Group 66 has not yet been considered within an international context. They have been confined to the national, sometimes Scandinavian, backdrop, and it is high time this be remedied and that their art is considered in a larger context.

Halfway through the second semester of this master's degree, the covid-19 pandemic hit, and it is pertinent to address the pandemic's effects on this thesis briefly. The pandemic delayed the completion of this thesis due to the unavailability of particular sources, including archives and seeing artworks by the group in person. Furthermore, the pandemic inadvertently affected the texts chosen for the theoretical discussions. Due to the formal restriction of a master's thesis and the unavailability of material, the choice was made to center this thesis around Group 66's happening and co-ritus.

The choice not to include any photographic documentation of the works of art discussed in this thesis is a conscious decision. Despite the existence of photographs, it is my wish that this thesis conveys the intangibility of writing about ephemeral performance-based art practices. As such, this is an art history master's thesis without any visual pictures. This represents a metaphorical device used to illustrate the difficulty that writing about such artworks presents and referring to a photograph would not adequately portray this difficulty.

Significance and Methodology

The central thread of the thesis is an approach to the material based on art-historical idea constructs. In the vein of Foucault's *L'Archéologie du savoir*, a goal and method are to draw lines between different contemporary schools and constructs to integrate the happening and co-ritus practices of Group 66 into the greater art historical discourse. This approach, which is the thesis' methodology and its overall intention, is, in part, inspired by Norwegian art historian Marit Paasche's approach. In Paasche's dissertation, and later critically acclaimed book on Norwegian artist Hannah Ryggen, Paasche states that her goal is to uncover the artworks' *tilblivelseshistorie* (*creation history*), meaning how the artwork is related to contemporary society and its ideas and trends.⁷ This thesis grounds itself in an art-historiographic conceptual review of a selection of Group 66 practices.

⁷ Marit Paasche. "Forhandlinger Med Historien: Hvordan En Arkivstudie over Hannah Ryggens Kunstnerskap Ga Grunnlag for Kritik Av Det Normative I Kunsthistorien." (PhD Diss., NTNU, 2018) 11.

However, the main assertion of this thesis is that in the selected practices of Group 66 discussed, the artists are translating concepts into their local contexts. Acting in part as cultural and artistic transfer agents, a term offered from the field of intellectual history.⁸ The central tension discussed is that between the local and the global, or rather periphery and center. Furthermore, this thesis proposes that the local represents the personal and the global the political. While the tension between center and periphery is ever-present in this thesis, its main objective remains to offer a different approach to peripheral art that is not solely rooted in the aforementioned tension. Instead, this thesis looks to the artworks' conceptual histories and their theoretical frameworks to contextualize the artworks outside of the tensions of local and national historical contexts. This thesis wishes to thoroughly examine the broad international networks and influences behind Group 66's artistic production, which is crucial to place them within both the western and Norwegian art historical canons and not simply within national cultural history.

Central to this thesis is an examination of the relationship between the happening and co-ritus artworks and the participants by examining the communicative aspects of the artworks through the mechanics of their formal elements. Central to this thesis, and evidenced by its title, is the concept of *psychic renewal*, a term used by Group 66, meaning a shift in consciousness. Through the group's happening and co-ritus, this thesis explores how the idea of psychic renewal operates on individual and collective levels. The effects of psychic renewal on the individual are explored through the audience's interactions with the discussed artworks. Psychic renewal on a collective level is further explored by examining the ethos of Group 66 as it is presented through these artworks and in their writings and interviews.

Embedded within the artistic production of Group 66 is socio-political messaging, representing a generational shift and symptomatic of new values and new ways of looking at the world and the role of art in society. From the micro perspective of Bergen, Group 66 represents a crossroads in the artistic and cultural life of the city: they embody change and represent a new artistic direction. This is evident through the multitude of contemporary reactions and accounts, which document precisely how shocking and revolutionary Group 66 was in the then provincial Bergensian art scene and Norwegian society.

⁸ Stefan Nygård and Johan Strang. "Conceptual Universalization and the Role of the Peripheries." *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 12, no. 1 (2017): 55-75.

With this in mind, it is curious that Group 66 has largely been left out of the Norwegian art historical canon. Group 66 has yet to receive adequate art historical research and attention, and as such, the time is ripe for more research into the group and their artistic production.

Scope and Structure

The following chapter examines the existing research and literature on Group 66. The chapter explores how past literature's treatment of Group 66 have formed how the group is viewed. It emerges from this overview that some of the previous efforts to contextualize and historicize the group have played a part in Norwegian art history's mythologization of the group. This section examines firsthand recollections by Group 66 members and looks to both popular and scholarly literature on the group. One of the observations that continuously appear in the literature is the art's international character and the strong ties to international artists by Group 66. This helps establish the course for the proceeding chapters which looks to closely related international artists and artforms to contextualize Group 66 and the parts of their artistic production that this thesis delves into.

The third chapter explores Group 66's happening through a conceptual historical lens of their American counterparts. One of the questions that emerge with happenings, in general, is how the audience or the art historian should approach the event. With this in mind, this dissertation looks at the happening through several viewpoints, most frequently through theatre. The main objective of this chapter is to show how when the local art historical discourse (in this case, the very niche area of Norwegian happenings in Bergen in the 1960s) offers no corresponding vocabulary, let alone a rich discourse, an effective method is to explore subjects such as Group 66's Happening by interjecting it into the dominant text. The intent is for this context to serve as temporary molds to allow the art historian to examine Group 66's happening in a way unavailable to them through only national conceptual histories. That being said, it is pertinent to underline that these concepts borrowed from the dominant text are not meant to act as cookie cutters. The main objective remains to explore the subject through already established routes as a starting point for original, national discourse. However, it is also valid to highlight that although we typically view Norwegian artists such as Group 66 as inherently local and peripheral, their practices are clearly, in part, informed by other western traditions. They do share the western art historical canon with their European and American counterparts. In this chapter theories from theatre and contemporary happening discourse allow for critical examination of the oft-cited 1960s art

narrative of a union of art and life with the objective of a shift in consciousness, as it presents itself in Group 66's happening.

Chapter four explores Group 66's co-ritus, an artistic tactic grounded in an emphasis on the artistic process over the artistic product, usually known as the artwork. The practice is based around a shared or communal ritual in which audience members are turned into participants and collaborate with artists in the ritual. Co-ritus asks its participants to question their preconceived notions around art's objecthood and the relationship between artists and spectators. These same prompts serve as the starting point for this chapter's exploration of the practice. Co-ritus was adopted by Group 66 through its close ties to the Scandinavian Situationists, with one of the co-ritus' originators, Danish artist Jens Jørgen Thorsen collaborating with the group on their co-ritus. The co-ritus is sold to the audience as a ritual for everyday life. The role of traditional museum culture within this dynamic is also explored. Rather than focusing exclusively on the problematics of these dynamics, this chapter explores how Group 66 uses its co-ritus to protest the socio-political and art historical forces that undermine them. Instead, the chapter's exploration leads to the question of how the everyday as artistic content shows up in the co-ritus and asks what its implications are? This line of inquiry is followed as one of the central queries in the next chapter.

Chapter five brings together the two previous chapters by examining how both the happening and co-ritus practices try to induce psychic renewal on an individual level with their audiences. This chapter looks further into the idea of audience participation in these two practices, and challenges the role of the everyday in these two. Leaning on Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the strategies and tricks employed by the artists and the audience in the happening and co-ritus are examined. The discussion then includes and elaborates on the theatrical dimensions of both practices, introduced in previous chapters. This chapter looks at how the everyday and theories from theatre are involved in Group 66's attempt to achieve a state of psychic renewal in their audiences.

The sixth and concluding chapter critically examines Group 66 and the idea of collective psychic renewal in the context of Norway in the 1960s. This chapter explores how Group 66 negotiates the terms of their art practice within the context of the tension between periphery and center. This concluding chapter continues the thread of the idea of psychic renewal from the preceding chapter. However, it shifts the focus from the idea of psychic renewal on an individual level to a collective level. The subtext of the discussion of the three preceding chapters highlighted in the concluding discussion are the many critiques,

observations and peculiarities of Norwegian art history scholarship that run through the entirety of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: Mythologization: An Overview of Existing Research

This chapter presents an overview of the research and literature on Group 66 and their inaugural exhibition thus far. This chapter also looks at how Norwegian art history and history have preserved the group. When, as the case, unfortunately, is with Group 66, documentation and discourse are scarce much reliance is put upon recollections. The literature that does exist on Group 66 is divided between scholarly and popular discourse. Due to the scarcity of literature on the group, the literature that does exist is a mix of scholarly and popular and there is no clear division between the two. When this is the case, mythologization can easily occur. A secondary concern with the existing literature is that most rely on accounts by Group 66 artists written or recalled many years after the fact. While these accounts are valuable contributions, they cannot help but be colored by subjectivity and the passing of time. While this is unproblematic, what is concerning is that a portion of the art historical discourse mentioning Group 66 shows varied narratives. Many also fail to support these narratives with any documentation. As such, it requires that all the existing research is combed through with a fine toothed-comb. While this, although an annoyance, is fine for the art historian equipped to evaluate sources, it speaks to a much more concerning set of problems in Norwegian art and cultural history. When writing and research activity fails in this manner, it relegates artists like Group 66 to national folklore. One can only speculate that the exclusion of Group 66 was at the hands of reactionary forces of the same ilk that the group adamantly challenged with their 1966 exhibition in Bergen.

As such, this thesis sees one of its most crucial contributions in its attempt to validate sources and document this vital chapter in Norwegian art history appropriately.

Existing Research and Theoretical Approach

The existing literature and research on Group 66 are minimal in comparison with comparable international artists. As is unfortunately often the case with post-war Norwegian art, the existing research is confined to a handful of mentions in the literature, a few concise articles, and master's theses. Most of the books and catalogs included in this section are not Group 66 centric, and most offer only a bare mention of the group. However, they are included in this section because they offer an interesting overview of where and with whom they are cast in the Norwegian art historical canon. Most productively, these sources, which vary in the themes and the mediums of 1960s Nordic arts, offer distinctly different lenses

through which to view Group 66. While the exhaustive inclusion of existing research may include sources potentially deemed irrelevant, they have consciously been included to display the reality of the existing research landscape. Beyond introducing the reader to the existing research and this thesis' theoretical approach, this section wants to show the state of the current research landscape. This effort shows how current research often consists of either one-sentence mentions or longer pieces consisting of the same information and sources, which at its best attempts to historicize Group 66. It must be said that there are exemptions in the literature discussed, and the critiques are not against specific texts but a critique of the marginalization of Group 66 by Norwegian art history at-large. Among these exemptions are two recent master's theses that attempt to contribute to the discourse on Group 66. This recent development is perhaps symptomatic of a trend in which interest and research are dedicated to previously overlooked artists in Norwegian art history. As such, this thesis wishes to continue this work following these two recent master's theses.

Firsthand Accounts

Two of Group 66's artists, Olav Herman Hansen and Elsbet Rahlff, have in later years written about their time with Group 66. Their retrospective accounts provide insight and give context to both the art and the broader motivations of Group 66.

Rahlff's recollections, "Min Tid med Gruppe 66, Konkret Analyse og Samliv», are published in the anthology *Norsk Avantgarde* edited by Per Bäckström and Bodil Børset.⁹ The text provides a broader context to Group 66's artistic endeavours. These recollections serve as what can be called the official history of Group 66.

Rahlff's text follows a chronological order, and she begins the text by introducing the reader to the background for the formation of Group 66. Rahlff had met Olav Herman Hansen in 1962 in Paris at S.W. Hayter's workshop Atelier 17.¹⁰ Three years later in 1965 she joined Herman Hansen in Bergen, having been invited to participate in Group 66's exhibition, which took place between March 11 and April 3, 1966 in Bergen Kunstforening (The Bergen Art Association). With her she brought pornographic magazines, which were at the time illegal in Norway. The magazines provided her entry ticket into the group.¹¹ Rahlff writes that several of the group's members had been educated abroad and influenced by what they had been

⁹ Elsbet Rahlff "Min tid med Gruppe 66, Konkret Analyse og Samliv." In *Norsk Avantgarde*. Edited by Per Backstrom and Bodil Børset. (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2011.) 281-304.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 281.

¹¹ *Ibid*

exposed to in avant-garde centers like Paris and Copenhagen they wanted to change Bergen's artistic life, which she describes as a bourgeois art scene that was at a standstill.¹² Rahlff provides descriptions of the exhibition and the opening. The opening was marked with a Dada-inspired dinner that took place in *Kafé Paletten* and ended with the serving of a pink "cake" made of painted plaster and decorated with shaving cream in the place of frosting.¹³ Rahlff documents several of the group's evening events, including "Filmaften", which consisted of the screening of Jens Jørgen Thorsen's experimental films, and ended with the screening of his pornographic film, which led to Thorsen being reported to the police.¹⁴ In retrospect it remains unclear which of Thorsen's films were shown. However, a review of the evening published in *Bergens Arbeiderblad*, mentions that the five films shown included one about Bud Powell the jazz musician. Two films made fun of "advertising-hysterics and mass-mentality", which they achieved by intercutting together a montage of advertising and reporting clips.¹⁵ The article calls the highlight of the evening, Thorsen's film depicting the artist Poul Gadegaard decorating a shirt fabric on Jylland with his abstract paintings, described as a beautiful poem of colors and forms, the beauty of which is highlighted by the accompaniment of jazz improvisations.¹⁶ The article also describes the aforementioned pornographic film, which consisted of naturalistic scenes of live film intercut with still photos from advertising and fashion magazines.¹⁷ Invaluable to this thesis are Rahlff's descriptions of the co-ritus and happening that took place as a part of the group's evening program.¹⁸ Rahlff writes that although the original Group 66 never collaborated again a handful of the group's original members stayed in touch, and later collaborated on the exhibitions *Konkret Analyse* (1970) and *Samliv* (1977-78).¹⁹ Rahlff also writes about these two later exhibitions in her text. Furthermore, Rahlff provides a list of the participating artists in Group 66's exhibition and the program for the accompanying evening events is reproduced.²⁰ Rahlff's recollections serve as a central source for this thesis. However, it is important to keep in mind that these recollection were written fifty years after the fact. The claims in the text have been

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Ibid*, 284.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 285.

¹⁵ Per Hovdenakk, «Suksess-start for Gruppe 66's «aften serie», *Bergens Arbeiderblad*. March 22, 1966.

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ Rahlff, 285-287.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 288.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 298-299.

vetted by looking at newspaper articles and other archival materials to corroborate these claims.

Olav Herman Hansen's brief text, "Group 66," summarizes the group's inaugural self-titled exhibition. He introduces the societal background as the backdrop and impetus for the group's formation.

"The year was 1966, the world around us was changing, new thoughts were in the ether. The young people wanted to find their identity, tired of parents' attitudes and current concepts of morality. Economic exploitation and repression, the Vietnam War, and conflicts in South America. Nuclear armaments and pollution, the liberation of women. This was part of the reason for the enthusiasm that galvanized large groups of young people to gather in the belief in a better and more just world. The artists were often at the forefront of this renewal."²¹

His brief article summarizes and reminisces on the 1966 exhibition. Herman Hansen's article presents some of the same issues as Rahlff's recollections, in that memory is fickle and subjective, and the contents of the article should be treated as such. Again importance is put on corroborating the claims and recollections made by Herman Hansen, yet the article helps support Rahlff's recollections and widens the story of Group 66.

Another publication offers perspectives from representatives of the Bergen Art Association, who were instrumental in the execution of the exhibition. On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Bergen Art Association, a book *Kunst i Tiden: Bergens Kunstforening 150 år*, chronicling the art associations storied past was published.²² One chapter, "Et Jordskjelv" (An Earthquake), chronicles the Group 66 exhibition.²³ In the chapter, Reidar Storaas, describes how the group's rebellion was fueled by a general irritation at the city's bourgeois cultural establishments.²⁴ According to Storaas, the ivory tower's era was coming to an end, and it was now artists' turn to look to everyday life and engage with its people.²⁵ To make their mark Group 66 had to shout to make their presence heard and use the language of the day.²⁶ Storaas chronicles the exhibition and documents the debate that unfolded in the press concerning Group 66. Storaas writes, that the group tapped into, and

²¹ Olav Herman Hansen, "Gruppe 66", *Kunst Plus 1 (2011)*:6-7. Translation by the author.

²² *Kunst i tiden: Bergens Kunstforening 150 år*. Ed. Reidar Storaas, (Bergen: Bergen Kunstforening, 1988)

²³ Reidar Storaas, «Et Jordskjelv» in *Kunst i tiden: Bergens Kunstforening 150 år*. Ed. Reidar Storaas, (Bergen: Bergen Kunstforening, 1988) 50-53.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 50.

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ *Ibid*

released, something that was in the zeitgeist, and that following Group 66's exhibition Bergen's art scene was never the same again.²⁷

Per Hovdenakk's contribution to the book, «Synspunkter på 60-årene» (Viewpoints on the 1960s) summarizes the many changes in the Norwegian and Bergensian art world in the decade.²⁸ In the context of Group 66 Hovdenakk himself is an interesting figure as he actively and enthusiastically covered the group and their exhibition while working as a journalist for *Bergen Arbeiderblad* in the 1960s. Hovdenakk writes that the greatest impetus for change in the Bergen art world was, in the 1960s, the clashing of the older generation with the younger.²⁹ At the center of this clash between the generations was abstract art. While abstract art was at the center of the Norwegian cultural debate, abroad artists had moved on to new expressions like pop art. Hovdenakk writes, «the pop impulses crept unnoticed in the shadow of the abstract debate, and when they blossomed in full bloom with Group 66, the bourgeoisie were laid bed stricken with shock injuries, - long since overdue in most other places.»³⁰ Furthermore, Hovdenakk calls Group 66 the event which formulated and encompassed the many oppositions of the Bergen art scene in the 1960s.³¹

Hovdenakk concludes that retrospectively what was Group 66's most important feature was their need for rebellion. This rebellion manifested itself through the variety of artistic mediums and expressions in their exhibition, which helped break down the barriers between art forms.³²

Group 66 Through a political lens

In her book *Med Kunst som Våpen*, Gerd Hennem paints a group portrait of Norwegian artists, including Group 66, between 1960 and 1975.³³ Hennem portrays a generation of artists breaking cultural and artistic molds against the socio-political backdrop of the 1960s-70s. Concerning Group 66, she stresses their artistic production within the context of youth uprisings and provides a surface account of the unfolding of their happenings. Hennem repurposes previous accounts by Group 66 artists to give an overview

²⁷ *Ibid*, 53.

²⁸ Per Hovdenakk, «Synspunkter på 60-årene» in *Kunst i tiden: Bergens Kunstforening 150 år*. Ed. Reidar Storaas, (Bergen: Bergen Kunstforening, 1988) 172-174.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 172.

³⁰ *Ibid*. Translation by the author.

³¹ *Ibid*, 173.

³² *Ibid*

³³ Gerd Hennem, *Med Kunst Som Våpen : Unge Kunstnere I Opprør 1960-1975*. (Oslo: Schibsted, 2007.)

of the unfolding events. The most noteworthy feature of Hennem's description is the mention of a different part to Group 66's happening that is not mentioned in any other existing literature, except for a brief mention in an article documenting the evening.³⁴ Hennem describes that four members of Group 66 painted four human models dressed in white. The painting of the models soon turned to groping of the models, which frightened the models, and they quickly exited the scene.³⁵ This facet to the happening is absent from the recollections of Elsebet Rahlff, whose account of the happening this thesis relies on.³⁶ It can be surmised that the part of the happening Hennem refers to is what, in a 1966 newspaper article, is briefly mentioned as a fashion or mannequin show. Journalist Per Hovdenakk describes in this article, that during the mannequin show, in the spur of the moment four of the group's members each created a dress-pattern on four provided mannequins.³⁷ Why this part of the happening is not mentioned by other sources like Rahlff remains unclear. The two accounts that describe this part of the happening also differ. Hennem describes four live models, however the mannequins mentioned in Hovdenakk's article are not explicitly described as human and no groping of said models is mentioned. The mannequins described by Hovdenakk could be dressmaker's lay figures. As Hennem does not reference this information, and this part of the happening is not supported by other sources it has not been included in this thesis' third chapter which looks at Group 66's happening.

One of Hennem's most astute contributions lies in her connecting Group 66's happening to John Cage and the American development of the happening, rather than focusing on its European antecedents such as Dada. Hennem further integrates Group 66's happening with the American tradition by making mention of arguably Norway's very first happening; Nam June Paik's 1961 Oslo performance. Hennem saliently highlights the lack of communication channel between Bergen-based artists such as Group 66 and the Oslo art world and emphasizes the group's connection to foreign art milieus. This is an interesting example of Group 66's regional and local focus in conjunction with their international connections.

³⁴ Per Hovdenakk. "Moro med Gruppe 66". *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. March 29, 1966.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 118.

³⁶ Rahlff, «Min Tid», 281-304.

³⁷ Per Hovdenakk. "Moro med Gruppe 66". *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. March 29, 1966. The account also mentions the presence of a TV crew filming the evening. Original text: Særlig interesse viet TV-folkene "mannequin-oppvisningen», hvor fire av gruppens medlemmer på stående fot kreerte hver sin kjole-modell på et ditto antall tilveiebrakte mannequiner.»

Hennum does, however, connect Group 66 to other contemporaneous and later developments in the Norwegian art world. Hennem situates Group 66 within the Norwegian art scene of the 1960s and provides a Norwegian context to the artistic production of Group 66. Despite being meant for a general audience, Hennem's book provides a solid general overview of Norwegian political artistic production between 1960 and 1975, which includes and contextualizes Group 66.

The Shadow of War: Political Art in Norway 1914-2014, edited by Kari J. Brandtzæg, was published in conjunction with the Kunstnernes Hus exhibition of the same name in 2015.³⁸ Brandtzæg explains in the book's preface that the intent of the exhibition, and book, is to explore the influence of "war and rebellion" on the development of "politically conscious art" in Norway, and the artist's role in this schema.³⁹ "The exhibition and book illustrate how collective and individual utopias arise in the wake of devastating events."⁴⁰ Brandtzæg situates Group 66's, together with the GRAS group, practices as their generation's artists' reaction to events like the Vietnam war and the 1968 uprisings.⁴¹ Included in the exhibition are pieces from Group 66's *Samliv* (*Common Life*) exhibition. The group is discussed with a focus on their later exhibitions, *Samliv* and *Konkret Analyse*, and in the context of the artistic production of Elsebet Rahlff. However, the catalogue from the exhibition *Group 66* is included.⁴² *The Shadow of War* weaves Group 66 into the tradition of the historical avant-garde in Norway. However, Group 66's inclusion holds the group to support the project's assertion that Norwegian political art of the period, 1914-2014, was in direct response to war.

Knut Ove Arntzen has looked at Group 66 from the perspective of theatre. In his article "Gruppe 66, Co-ritus og kunsten som samhandling" he calls Group 66 "a living legend in Norwegian art history."⁴³ Arntzen acknowledges that research and interest in the group have been sporadic, but claims that in later years this has changed as the interest for the type of art practiced by the group has increased.⁴⁴ He underlines that Group 66 must be looked at from its historical context, the Bergen art milieu of the 1960s, which at the time was at a

³⁸ Kari J. Brandtzæg (ed.) *Krigens Skygge : Politisk Kunst I Norge 1914-2014 = The Shadow of War : Political Art in Norway 1914-2014*. (Oslo: Teknisk Industri, Kunstnernes Hus, 2015.)

³⁹ *Ibid*, 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² *Ibid*, 186. The list of exhibited works inaccurately dates the *Group 66* catalog to 1977.

⁴³ Knut Ove Arntzen. "Gruppe 66, Co-ritus og kunsten som samhandling." *Kunst Pluss*, no. 1. (2011): 8-10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 8.

standstill and seen as provincial.⁴⁵ In his 2011 article, he explores the act of co-ritus and the idea of art as a shared or communal action. He outlines and explores the happening from the notion of participation and shared action between artists, artwork, and participants.⁴⁶ The aforementioned anthology, *Norsk Avantgarde*, includes an essay by Arntzen, titled “Et avantgardistisk blikk på performancekunst og teater.”⁴⁷ Arntzen’s text places Group 66 in the development of performance art in Norway and connects their practice to the American happening concept and the situationist tradition, dubbing their practice a “situationist happening.”⁴⁸ Like Hennem he acknowledges the link between American performance art, but emphasizes Group 66’s Situationist connections, and as such reads their artistic productions in the light of a Situationist framework.

Susanne Rajka touches on Group 66 in her work within the context of the Norwegian cultural and artistic scene of the 1960s. She situates them along with their contemporaries in the Norwegian art scene of the 1960s, including Marius Heyerdahl, Irma Salo Jæger, Willi Storn and Group 66 collaborator Per Kleiva. She also provides an international, Scandinavian, and Norwegian context for the development of Group 66, both historically and contemporary for the development of the Group’s impulses.⁴⁹ Rajka also contributed to the catalogue *The Nordic ‘60s*, which was published in conjunction with the 1990 pan-Scandinavian exhibition of the same name.⁵⁰ As its title suggests the catalogue and exhibition looks at artistic production in the Nordic countries in the 1960s. Rajka’s essay discusses how the Norwegian art of the sixties not only reflected but, in many cases, spearheaded the many societal changes Norway underwent in the period. She situates Group 66 in the category of political art and weaves them into the narrative of artists ushering forth change, ahead of or in tandem with social change.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*

⁴⁶ Knut Ove Arntzen. "Gruppe 66, Co-ritus og kunsten som samhandling." *Kunst Pluss*, no. 1. (2011): 8-10.

⁴⁷ Knut Ove Arntzen. “Et avantgardistisk blikk på performancekunst og teater.” In *Norsk Avantgarde*. Eds. Per Bäckström and Bodil Børset, (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2011,) 331-340.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 334-335.

⁴⁹ Susanne Rajka, "Eksperimentelle tendenser i norsk 1960-talls kunst", in *Til og fra Norden: Tyve artikler om nordisk billedkunst og arkitektur*, eds. Marianne Marcussen and Gertrud With, (Copenhagen: Institutt for Kunsthistorie, 1999,) 59-67.

Susanne Rajka. *Eksperimentelle Tendenser I Norsk Billedkunst I 1960-årene: Marius Heyerdahl, Per Kleiva, Irma Salo Jæger, Willi Storn*. Vol. 2006 Nr 1. HiO-rapport (trykt Utg.).(Oslo: Høgskolen I Oslo, Avdeling for Estetiske Fag, 2006.)

⁵⁰ Susanne Rajka, "Norway in the '60s: Image of a Decade", in *The Nordic 60s: Upheaval and Confrontation*, (Helsinki: Nordic Arts Centre, 1991,) 156-161.

A catalog accompanied the 1996 exhibition, *1960-årene I Norsk Maleri (The 1960s in Norwegian Painting)* held at Lillehammer Kunstmuseum⁵¹ The exhibition which as its title suggests was concerned with the medium of painting includes mention of Group 66 and a variety of their artistic practices outside of painting. The catalog's texts make many salient points concerning Norwegian artistic production in the decade. One of the most poignant observations is made by the museum's director, Svein Olav Hoff in his introduction, writing that "the 1960s was the decade in which Norway lost its innocence."⁵² He astutely claims that the attitudes and mores usually assumed to the 1960s were not actually firmly rooted nor visible in Norwegian society until the 1970s. As such, Hoff writes that, «The 1960s cultural and political consistency is therefore in Norway a strange mixture of the enthusiastic innocence of the 1950s and the idealistic protests of the 1970s.»⁵³ The information concerning Group 66 gleaned from the catalogue, stresses and sketches out the importance of the group for later generations of artists and developments in the Bergen art milieu. The catalogue touches on happenings and performances but rely on later better-known happenings like Willibald Storn's 1969 happening *Coca-Donald Samfunn, ikke ta meg (Coca-Donald Society, don't take me)* rather than looking to Group 66's earlier 1966 happening. The catalog's highlight (for the purposes of this thesis) is an interview with artist and Group 66 collaborator Per Kleiva. Interviewed by Art historian Ingrid Blekastad, Kleiva reflects on his artistic productions in the 1960s. In the interview Kleiva states that he was not a member of Group 66, but that he knew most of the group's artists and was invited to contribute to the exhibition. Interestingly Kleiva shares that there was little contact between Oslo and Bergen artists, and that the Bergen artists were much closer to certain artist milieus elsewhere in Europe.⁵⁴ Kleiva's statements support Hennums emphasis on the local/international character of Group 66, as distinct from a national focus.

The 2015 catalog *Pop Etc.: Norsk Popkunst 1964-1974*, edited by Lars Mørch Finborud and Thomas Flor and the exhibition of the same name charts the influence of pop

⁵¹ Ingrid Blekastad (ed.). *1960-årene I Norsk Maleri : 30. Mai - 1. September 1996*. (Lillehammer: Lillehammer Kunstmuseum, 1996.)

⁵² *Ibid*,3. Original text: «1960-årene var det tiåret da Norge mistet sin uskyld.» Translation by the author.

⁵³ *Ibid*. Original text: "1960-årenes kulturelle og politiske konsistens er derfor i Norge en merkelig sammenblanding av 1950-årenes begeistrede uskyld og 1970-årenes idealistiske protester.» Translation by the Author.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 18.

art on Norwegian artists in the period its title indicates.⁵⁵ Included in the exhibition, and reproduced in the catalog, was Group 66's poster for their 1966 exhibition.⁵⁶ The two-sided poster, whose six parts can be folded together features a photo of each of the group's artists together with a short bio for each, and a list of each artist's exhibited works in the exhibition. Surrounding each page are various photos, depicting scenes ranging from a nuclear explosion to children playing in a sandbox, assembled collage-style. The cover page features a print by Oddvar Torsheim. In *Pop Etc.*'s context Group 66 is primarily contextualized through the artist Per Kleiva. In one of the catalog's essays, "Uvirkelig virkelighet," penned by one of the exhibition's curators Thomas Flor, an early event exposing two Group 66 artists to pop art is described. In the spring of 1964, Stockholm's Moderna Musset put on an exhibition featuring American pop art. The exhibition traveled to Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark, and it was here that Per Kleiva together with Oddvar Torsheim was first exposed to pop art.⁵⁷ Flor's text briefly mentions Kleiva's involvement with Group 66. Highlighted from the Group 66 exhibition are Olav Herman Hansen's 'pornographic' collages, Egil Røed's décollages and the works by self-proclaimed pop-artist Bjørn Kahrs Hansen who showed experimental 16mm films, solarized nude photographs and text mixed with sculpture.⁵⁸ For the purposes of this thesis of most importance is that Flor, through the figure of Kleiva, demonstrates the influence of contemporary American art on Norwegian artists in the 1960s.⁵⁹ The catalog addresses Group 66 more directly in a text written by co-curator of the exhibition, Lars Mørch Finborud, titled "Blow Out Bergen!". Mørch Finborud writes that for the Norwegian public it was not from Oslo but from Bergen that they would experience the first great "blowout" by tomorrow's art, underlining the historical importance of Group 66's exhibition.⁶⁰

Another 1996 exhibition, shown in Bergen, titled *Brudd (Break)* touches on Group 66 in a comparable manner, although this time the focus is sculpture by artists from Norway's west coast.⁶¹ The catalog underlines how Group 66, among others such as Gruppe Lyn, lay

⁵⁵ Lars Mørch Finborud, Thomas Flor, Øystein Thorvaldsen, and Henie Onstad Kunstsenter. *Pop Etc.: Norsk Popkunst 1964-1974*. (Oslo: Orfeus Publ. Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 2015.)

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 27

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶¹ Norsk Billedhoggerforening, Bergens Kunstforening, and Galleri Otto Plonk. *Brudd : Tredimensionale Utsagn Med Utspring Fra Vestlandet*. (Bergen: Galleri Otto Plonk Bergens Kunstforening, 1996.)

the initial groundwork for future artists and were the first to initiate this break with older styles in sculpture. The reason these catalogs are included in the literature review is primarily because they both demonstrate how Norwegian art historians have previously acknowledged the group's importance in Norwegian art history. Yet, as the examples show the research and documentation of the group is limited.

Displaying Archives

Two exhibitions, *Whatever Happened to Sex in Scandinavia* (2009, OCA) and *An Army of Liars: Situasjonistene I Skandinavia / This World We Must Leave – An Idea of Revolution* (2016-2017, Kunsthall Oslo), tackle Group 66 in a more direct and dynamic manner than the aforementioned exhibitions. Oslo Kunsthall's dual exhibition is centered on Scandinavian Situationism from 1957 to 1972. The exhibition shows how Situationist ideas and practices emigrated to Norwegian art through, among others, Group 66 members Laurie Grundt, Olav Herman-Hansen, and Elsebeth Rahlff. The exhibition included a look at the exchange between Group 66 and Scandinavian Situationists like Jørgen Nash and Jens Jørgen Thorsen through their respective Co-Ritus projects. The second part of the exhibition, *This World We Must Leave*, presents the titular project by Danish art historian Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Danish artist Jakob Jakobsen. Their project is described as a revolutionary archive, consisting of artworks and archival materials from the Second Situationist International which are presented as a total art installation. Central to the exhibitions' understanding and formulation of Scandinavian Situationism are two volumes edited by Bolt Rasmussen and Jacobsen; *Expect Anything Fear Nothing: The Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere* (2011) and *Cosmonauts of the Future: Texts from the Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere* (2015). In lieu of an exhibition catalogue, the exhibition makes texts, archives, and media related to the exhibition openly available online, which has served as an invaluable resource to this thesis.⁶²

The exhibition, *Whatever Happened to Sex in Scandinavia*, includes Group 66 in its menagerie of artists and artworks. The exhibition, and its catalog, addresses the representation of Scandinavia as a sexual utopia in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶³

⁶² "An Army of Liars – Situasjonistene I Skandinavia – bilder og dokumenter.» Kunsthall Oslo. Accessed November 12, 2021. <http://kunsthall oslo.no/?p=4367>

⁶³ Pablo Lafuente, Marta Kuzma, and Tonja Kristiane Boos. *Whatever Happened to Sex in Scandinavia? Vol. No. 12. Verksted* (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art, 2011.)

The exhibition includes Group 66 in its “zone f”, titled “Ready, Set, Fire! Direct Forms of Resistance.”⁶⁴ Group 66 is grouped together with Poul Gernes, Thomas Bayrle, Öyvind Fahlström, Marie-Louise Ekman, Willibald Storn and Asger Jorn, among others. The exhibition includes material from the *Gruppe 66* and *Konkret Analyse* exhibitions. The 1966 exhibition is represented through a showing of the 1966 Epoke episode, featuring an interview with the group and a booklet featuring documentation of the exhibition compiled by Group 66 member Elsebet Rahlff.⁶⁵ Also included is Olav Herman Hansen’s collage *Sjøppeldyngje* (1966) that was shown in the original 1966 exhibition.⁶⁶ The brochure provides an overview of the group that is based on Gerd Hennem’s text, and Elsebet Rahlff’s recollections. The catalog includes an article by theatre scholar Knut Ove Arntzen, titled, “Art is Pop. Co-ritus is Art: Artistic Strategy in Scandinavian Action Art in the 1960s and 70s- with some Aspects of Postmodern Recycling.”⁶⁷ Which like the other texts by Arntzen, mentioned in this chapter looks at performance practices like Group 66’s co-ritus from the perspective of theatre studies.

An art history master’s thesis by Kristine Hjørnevik Dalland, titled, “Oddvar Torsheim: En vestnorsk multikunstner” delves into the artistic production of Group 66 member Oddvar Torsheim.⁶⁸ Of particular interest is one of the thesis’ chapters which looks at representations of Torsheim in the art museum. In this context an exhibition titled “Bergensavantgarden 1966-1985” is described and discussed. At one point the exhibition was a part of larger permanent exhibition in Bergen’s KODE museum, titled “20th Century Artistic Movements.” No catalog or much other documentation of the exhibition exists, so Hjørnevik Dalland’s first-hand account of the exhibition proves an invaluable resource.⁶⁹ Hjørnevik Dalland, describes the exhibition as possessing a meta characteristic, as the exhibition itself primarily displays archival material and documentation of the original 1966

⁶⁴ Office for Contemporary Art Norway. *Whatever Happened to Sex in Scandinavia ?* (Oslo:OCA, 2011) 44-45. Exhibition Booklet.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*,52-53.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

⁶⁷ Knut Ove Arntzen, “Art is Pop. Co-ritus is Art: Artistic Strategy in Scandinavian Action Art in the 1960s and 70s- with some Aspects of Postmodern Recycling.” In Pablo Lafuente, Marta Kuzma, and Tonja Kristiane Boos. *Whatever Happened to Sex in Scandinavia? Vol. No. 12. Verksted* (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art, 2011.) 376-380.

⁶⁸Kristine Hjørnevik Dalland. «Oddvar Torsheim - En Vestnorsk Multikunstner.» MA Thesis. (University of Bergen, 2019.)

⁶⁹ Dates the exhibition from May 2012 to December 2020. The end date is incorrect, and the actual end date is unknown. Despite an exhaustive search I have been unable to locate a visitor brochure, or more information on the exhibit. The museum’s website does not mention the exhibit in their overview of past exhibitions.

exhibition.⁷⁰ The Group 66 objects displayed in the exhibition include photographs depicting Group 66's co-ritus. Also included is a TV playing the 1966 episode of the cultural program *Epoke*, featuring an interview with Group 66.⁷¹ Dalland mentions that the exhibition includes a number of the artworks displayed in the original 1966 exhibition but does not name specific pieces. However, Dalland includes a photo and describes a display in the exhibit which includes promotional posters, programs, and brochures from the Group 66 exhibition.⁷² Next to this display are photographs depicting the co-ritus, which are accompanied by an explanatory text.⁷³ From Dalland's account, the rest of the Group 66 section of the exhibition displays artworks and archival materials from the group's two later exhibitions *Konkret Analyse* (1970) and *Samliv* (1977). Noteworthy, is that the exhibition includes books for each of the Group 66 exhibitions that consist of newspaper clippings documenting each exhibition's reviews and discourse.⁷⁴

Another 2019 art history master's thesis, titled "Kunst og folkeopplysning: Gruppe 66s utstilling *Samliv* (1977) og den aktivistiske kunsten," by Olea Marie Steinkjer, delves into Group 66's 1977 exhibition *Samliv* (Common Life).⁷⁵ While the thesis' focus is the 1977 exhibition, it also explores the group's earlier exhibits. The thesis looks at several of Group 66's evening events, including co-ritus, as a basis for the investigation of activist art in the Norwegian context.⁷⁶ Steinkjer places Group 66 in the tradition of activist art, and looks at how the group used activist strategies derived from feminist activism and Scandinavian Situationism to convey socio-political themes in their art. Steinkjer's thesis contributes immeasurably to the discourse and research on Group 66's *Samliv* exhibition, and as such I have chosen to focus exclusively on elements Group 66's 1966 exhibition, and hope to contribute to the research on this exhibition in the same manner as Steinkjer does to the *Samliv* exhibition.

⁷⁰ Dalland, «Oddvar Torsheim,»79.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 80.

⁷² *Ibid*, 81.

⁷³ *Ibid*

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 83.

Due to the pandemic I have been unable to receive first hand access to these materials. However, a digital copy of much of the contents of this "book" from the exhibition was kindly granted to me by KODE curator Frode Sandvik.

⁷⁵ Olea Marie Steinkjer. "Kunst Og Folkeopplysning: Gruppe 66s Utstilling *Samliv* (1977) Og Den Aktivistiske Kunsten." MA Thesis. (University of Oslo, 2019.)

⁷⁶ *Ibid*,21-23.

Worth mentioning is Holger Koefoed's *Modernismen i Kunsthistorien* (Modernism in Art History) published in 1998. Although the book is intended as a textbook for secondary school students and only makes a brief reference to Group 66, the group's inclusion in this volume is noteworthy. The book follows a scheme which involves discussing a school or "ism" of art first from the general western art historical perspective, and then looking at the Norwegian equivalents. In the case of Group 66 they are included in a section titled, "Fra popkunst til politisk kunst i Norge," which follows a section titled simply, "Popkunst."⁷⁷ Despite the obvious issues with the way the book presents art history, the mention of Group 66 in a 1998 textbook, when they are not mentioned in for example Danbolt's *Norsk Kunsthistorie* is an almost comical representation of one of the oddities of Norwegian art history.⁷⁸ Oddities like this one, will be further discussed in this thesis' concluding chapter, which reflects on Norwegian art history's treatment of Group 66.

Conclusion

To further highlight the depth of this dig into the existing literature on Group 66, this section concludes with a mention of the group in a book featuring photos from Bergen in the 1960s from the archives of *Bergens Tidende*.⁷⁹

A photo of Group 66 artists, Olav Herman Hansen, Elsebeth Rahlf, Ingvald Holmefjord, Egil Røed, Lars Sæverud, Knut Bratland Kristiansen, and Bjørn Kahrs-Hansen, shows them posing around Lars Grundt's sculpture "Liggende Kvinne", inside their exhibition. A brief paragraph is featured next to the photo and concludes by saying Group 66 became a famous experiment.⁸⁰ Perhaps infamous is a better descriptor for the group and their 1966 exhibition. As this overview of the current literature has tried to show, art history's treatment, or lack thereof, of the group has bestowed upon them a mythical status, rather than attempting to contextualize the group through their art.

⁷⁷ Holger Koefoed. *Modernismen i Kunsthistorien: fra 1870 til 1990-årene*.(Norway: PDC-Tangen, 1998,) 142-143.

⁷⁸ Note that *Norsk Kunsthistorie* includes mentions of several Group 66 artists and discusses practices like happening, yet Group 66 are not mentioned. See Danbolt, Flottorp, Brudevoll, Homlong, Thorbjørnsen, Flottorp, Vigdis, Brudevoll, Kari, Homlong, Beate, and Thorbjørnsen, Kari. *Norsk Kunsthistorie : Bilde Og Skulptur Frå Vikingtida Til i Dag*. 3. Utg. Kari Thorbjørnsen. ed. (Oslo: Samlaget, 2009.)

See pages 348, 355, 362, 364, 441, 455, 477, 484, 494, 477.

⁷⁹ Synnøve, Truls, Frode Bjerkestrand, Knut Strand, and Bergens Tidende. *Da Verden Kom Til Bergen : 1960-årene. Tidbilder Fra Bergen*.(Bergen: Bergens Tidende, 2008.)

⁸⁰ *Ibid*,190.

As such, this thesis attempts to provide an in-depth look into two of the group's artistic endeavours, their happening and co-ritus. Group 66's inclusion in the literature discussed in this chapter underlines their importance and place in Norwegian art history. This thesis hopes to contribute to Group 66 scholarship by presenting an investigation into the group's happening and co-ritus.

The sources discussed in this chapter all provide puzzle pieces, of varying sizes, to the puzzle that is Group 66. Based on this existing research, the following chapters use their findings as a starting point for its discussions of the group. Many of the texts discussed, such as Hennem's, underlines and connects Group 66 and contemporaneous international artistic movements. This thesis follows this thread and looks to Group 66's international connections as its starting point in its investigation. These connections help contextualize Group 66 in a global artistic landscape, and provide a roadmap of how to approach and read the group's art. This contextualization is based on a selection of the group's activities, looking at their 1966 happening and co-ritus practices and connecting these to the Group's idea of psychic renewal. This thesis wishes to show how these two artistic practices contained mechanisms and used strategies that promoted the group's political ambitions, and that the concept of psychic renewal aided in the implementation of these ambitions on an individual and collective level.

CHAPTER 3: It's All Happening

“Stage=place where I paint.”⁸¹

“It should have been made clear that Happenings came about when painters and sculptors crossed into Theatre taking with them their way of looking and doing things.”⁸²

Introduction

Group 66's evening program for Monday, March 28th, commencing at 8 pm, reads happening, mask-play, laterna magica, film, jazz-lyric poetry, with the participation of Group 66 artists Nils Bolstad, Olav Herman-Hansen, Bjørn Kahrs Hansen, Knut Kristiansen, Elsebet Rahlff, and Terje Skulstad.⁸³ No film exists that documents the evening, but the following narrative can be sketched based on different textual sources.

Clad in a dark conductor's suit, guest artist Stefan Rink stepped onto the conductor's podium, facing the audience sitting in makeshift rows of chairs in the great hall of the Bergen Art Association.⁸⁴ Members of Group 66 had implanted themselves with the audience. Olav Herman-Hansen had written a script for the opening of what the group presented as a concert. The audience was each given a page from stacks of newspapers and, a pre-planned “mumbling choir” commenced as Group 66 members began reading aloud from each of their newspaper pages. The audience joined in, and Rink conducted the audience from his podium. However, some audience members objected to the choir of mumbles. In an attempt to boycott the choir, they started ripping and curling up the newspapers, proceeding to stuff them down each other's clothes. A ruckus and loud noises ensued in a cascade of paper as the Bergen Arts Association's intendant, Per Remfeldt, ran into the room yelling, “STOPP, STOPP, it's a total fire hazard!”⁸⁵ However, a new action had already commenced. Kismul, an older artist in attendance, came up behind the conductor's podium where Rink stood, picked up a bucket containing colored water left behind from a previous act, and was gearing up to release the

⁸¹ Claes Oldenburg quoted in Claes Oldenburg and Emmet Williams. *Store Days: Documents from The Store, 1961, and Ray Gun Theater, 1962*. (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), 138.

⁸² Quote attributed to Claes Oldenburg by Ken Dewey. See Ken Dewey. "X-ings." *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (1965): 216-223.

⁸³ Elsebet Rahlff, “Min tid med Gruppe 66, Konkret Analyse og Samliv”, in *Norsk Avantgarde*, eds. Per Backstrom and Bodil Børset, (Oslo: Novus, 2011), 299.

⁸⁴ Multimedia artist Stefan Rink participated in Group 66's exhibition and series of evening events in the capacity of a guest artist.

⁸⁵ Rahlff, “Min Tid,” 287. Original text: “STOPP, STOPP, det er jo brannfarlig til tusen!”. Translation by the author.

bucket's contents onto Rink.⁸⁶ Everyone in attendance held their breath and watched the bucket. Unaware of Kismul, Rink continued directing the audience but was warned of what was about to happen from an audience member. In an impressive feat, without turning around, Rink grabbed the bucket mid-air and emptied the colored water onto Kismul's head. The audience shrieked with joy, and Kismul was left standing soaking wet in his stylish grey suit and buttoned vest. The parquet floor was awash with water and crumpled up newspapers. Per Remfeldt was distressed, but the boycotters' attempt to stop the "concert" instead successfully ignited Bergen's first-ever happening.⁸⁷

Numerous challenges present themselves for the art historian left to grapple with these fleeting artworks' archeological remnants. Firstly, and most obviously, no existing physical object, usually known as the artwork, is to experience in person. The art historian must use whatever evidence remains, in photographs, object remnants, and contemporary accounts, and attempt to resuscitate the happening. This quest raises the question of, if one can in fact resuscitate happenings? Quite obviously the nature of happenings makes this an impossibility, and as such this provides an unsolvable challenge within the field of art history. In this scenario the art historian cannot rely on their usual "tools", like formal analysis, and a different approach is needed. Another challenge that presents itself is the fact that such a "niche" artform as happenings is not accompanied by the richness in discourse and research as more "common" artforms. As a result, the existing scholarship on happenings reveals that it is necessary to look to the conceptual and theoretical histories of closely related art forms to provide the happening art form with a jumping-off point or foundation to support further discussion and exploration of the artform. Not only are facts and documentation of happenings limited, but the art form's ephemeral nature lends itself to mythmaking. "There is a prevalent mythology about Happenings. It has been said, for example, that they are theatrical performances in which there is no script and "things just happen.""⁸⁸ This was stated in theatre historian Michael Kirby's anthology *Happenings*, as early as 1965, and over fifty years later, confusion around the art form known as happenings is just as prevalent. Even in the minds of those who have a precursory familiarity with happenings, the term

⁸⁶ Rahlff infers in her recollection of the happening that the bucket of colored water was a remnant from the Co-Ritus that had taken place five nights earlier on March 24.

⁸⁷ As recalled by Elsebet Rahlff, in "Min tid med Gruppe 66, Konkret Analyse og Samliv", in *Norsk Avantgarde*, eds. Per Bäckström and Bodil Børset, (Oslo: Novus, 2011), 281-303.

See also Olav Herman Hansen, "Gruppe 66", *Kunst Plus 1 (2011)*:7.

⁸⁸ Michael Kirby, *Happenings*. (New York: Dutton, 1965), 9.

conjures up nostalgic and glamorized images of artistic production in the early 1960s. As Kirby notes, “myths naturally arise where facts are scarce.”⁸⁹

Moreover, the intangibility of happenings is increased by the fact that very few people have attended one. Of those lucky few attendees, many could easily be left with merely a surface impression emphasizing the event’s peculiar or scandalous elements. Most people learn about happenings through popular media or theoretical discourse. Typically, the media will favor highlighting a work’s more shocking content, whether nudity or violence, rather than promoting theoretical discourse. This tendency often leaves out more challenging, obscure works of the genre. The secondary information disseminated to the general public about happenings feeds into the mythic image of spontaneous, free-for-all, fun pop-up gallery experiments. This general impression may represent one layer of happenings. However, behind this initial impression, most happenings are grounded in deep involvement with formal elements, and many communicate broad socio-political issues.

Happenings are closely related to two other art forms; their parentage is painting and theatre. The dive into the theatrical dimensions of happenings in this chapter reveals theoretical antecedents and how these show up in a happening’s execution. This line of inquiry also presents political programs implicit to the theoretical formulations to which happenings often align. The effects of this discovery are two-fold. On the one hand, this offers a succinct explanation of the art-life equation; however, as this chapter will explore, this tidy conclusion delimitates the discussion and excludes several art historical concerns. For these reasons, questions regarding happenings’ political charge will be critically met and discussed but will not serve to provide a clear-cut conclusion to the discussion.

As previously mentioned, Knut Ove Arntzen has described Group 66’s happening as a “Situationist happening”.⁹⁰ The group’s close ties to the Danish situationist Jens Jørgen Thorsen and the Drakabygget collective supports Arntzen’s observation. However, this thesis maintains that the use of the term happening by Group 66 reflects an inherent connection to the happening tradition, which, as we shall see, was an American invention. To begin unpacking the dynamics at play in Group 66’s Happening, it is pertinent to briefly establish the historical precedents to the group’s happening as a basis for further discussion.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*

⁹⁰ Knut Ove Arntzen “Et avantgardistisk blikk på performancekunst og teater,» in *Norsk Avantgarde*, eds. Per Bäckström and Bodil Børset, (Oslo: Novus, 2011), 335. Arntzen’s statement is also reflective of his view that Group 66’s exhibition and series of evening events can be seen as one happening. See Knut Ove Arntzen. "Gruppe 66, Co-ritus og kunsten som samhandling." *Kunst Pluss*, no. 1. (2011): 8-10.

Origins

Pollock, as I see him, left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday lives, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be the vastness of Forty-second Street. Not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch. Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, a thousand other things that will be discovered by the present generation of artists. *Not only will these bold creators show us, as if for the first time, the world we have always had about us but ignored, but they will disclose entirely unheard-of happenings and events, (...)*⁹¹

While Group 66's happening may have been Bergen's first, the happening format was, in 1966, no longer a novelty in the US and other parts of Europe. Group 66's event followed a rich lineage of artistic productions known as happenings since their inception in New York in the late 1950s. How did Group 66 understand themselves per these international movements? Aside from an endnote to Group 66 member Elsebet Rahlff's text, "Min Tid med Gruppe 66," how Group 66 understood the term happening has proved difficult to establish.⁹² Said endnote reads; "'Happening,' an action with a set script for an incipient course of action. It is contingent upon an audience interjecting into this course of action, and thus that the action takes on completely new and unexpected directions."⁹³ While Rahlff's definition is correct, it is important to underline that the description only speaks to a narrow type and definition of happenings. As such, it is helpful to widen the lens through which to approach Group 66's happening, and to extend that lens to include broader international contexts and narratives.

This chapter will explore Group 66's happening by approaching it through the conceptual history of their international happening artist contemporaries. This approach will allow a look at the group's happening through a broader lens, hopefully enriching its discourse. However, as this chapter will show, Group 66's definition of a happening describes *their* happening, which constitutes a happening, but does not reflect happenings at large.

⁹¹ Allan Kaprow. "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock." In *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Allan Kaprow and Ed. Jeff Kelley. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1993), 8-9. Italics by the author.

⁹² Rahlff, «Min Tid,» 287. Reference to Endnote 4. See, "Notes," 711, in *Norsk Avantgarde*. Eds. Bäckström & Børset.

⁹³ *Ibid*

The term Happening was first coined in the late 1950s by the artist Allan Kaprow. Kaprow chose the term for its vagueness to discourage associations with other art forms and events.⁹⁴ In his 1956 essay, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” published in 1958, Kaprow asks what the late artist has bequeathed to his artistic heirs in his testament. Kaprow offers an answer in the form of action, using all senses and materials to reunite art and life.⁹⁵ During the two preceding decades, “the end of painting” had been orchestrated by The New York School. As a result, next-generation artists like Kaprow searched for a new medium to offer a way out of this predicament. Kaprow postulates that by turning his attention outwards, away from the center to his environment, the artist could move forward and realize a completely new artistic expression in the form of happenings.⁹⁶ The term’s near-mythic origins stem back to a 1957 collage performance by Kaprow at sculptor George Segal’s farm in New Brunswick, N.J. The term first appeared in print the following year in Rutgers University’s undergraduate literary journal *Anthologist’s* winter issue. Kaprow, who was teaching at the university, and a handful of his students published a script for a happening, “The Demiurge,” which they captioned, “something to take place: a happening.”⁹⁷

Along with fellow artists like Al Hansen, George Brecht, Dick Higgins, and the Poet Jackson MacLow, Kaprow attended a class, “Experimental Composition” at the New School taught by John Cage in 1958.⁹⁸ Many art historians credit Cage with the first happening, citing his 1952 evening event at Black Mountain College.⁹⁹ Although Kaprow would later

⁹⁴ “The name ‘Happening’ is unfortunate. It was not intended to stand for an art form, originally. It was merely a neutral word that was part of a title of one of my project ideas in 1958-59. It was a word which I thought would get me out of the trouble of calling it a ‘theatre piece’, a ‘performance’, a ‘game’, a ‘total art’, or whatever that would evoke associations with known sports, and so on.” Allan Kaprow. “A Statement.” In *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*. Ed. Michael Kirby. (New York: Dutton, 1965), 47.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*

⁹⁶ *Ibid*

⁹⁷ Dick Higgins. “The Origin of Happening.” *American Speech* 51, no. 3/4 (1976): 268

⁹⁸ See, Rebecca Kim. “The Formalization of Indeterminacy in 1958: John Cage and Experimental Composition at the New School.” In *John Cage (October Files 12)*, ed. Julia Robinson. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011.) 141-70.

⁹⁹ This evening included an audience seated in four triangular inward-facing blocks, and the performance took place mostly in the aisles, rather than on stage. Cage standing on top of a ladder began the event with a lecture. Charles Olsen and M.C. Richards read poems from another ladder, David Tudor played the piano, while Robert Rauschenberg played a wind-up gramophone. Merce Cunningham and other dancers moved through the aisles, and some of Robert Rauschenberg’s white-on-white paintings were suspended overhead as a ceiling. See John Cage, Michael Kirby, and Richard Schechner. “An Interview with John Cage.” *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (1965): 50-72; Another Cageian trope happenings would draw inspiration from was the use of chance play, which Cage first seriously explored in his infamous piece, *4’ 3”*. Like Fluxus, Cage increasingly concerned himself

claim that the emphasis placed on Cage in the theoretical discourse on the origins of the happening was an oversimplification, Cage's role as a contributor and influence on the genre's development should not be negated.¹⁰⁰

Kaprow sees happenings as a "...pan-artistic phenomena, in which energies originally developing within the separate fields of painting, dance, music, poetry, etc., began to cross each other's paths at various and unexpected places."¹⁰¹ In 1959, Kaprow put on the first happening to catapult the term into the popular consciousness, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* at the Reuben Gallery in New York.¹⁰² The effect of the happening's title was two-fold, in that it revealed the piece's compartmented structure and the use of the term happening in the piece's title. In a loft, Kaprow had divided the space into three rooms, separated by laths covered with polythene sheeting. The environment included walls covered with painted or collage materials, painted words, plastic fruit objects, and during intervals, slides and film were projected onto the walls. Accompanied by various sound sources, two audience members painted on opposing sides of a canvas, one side with circles the other with stripes, in two singular colors. Before the happening, audiences were given instructions to follow, including where and when to sit and which rooms to move through. Some of the actions carried out by the performers included quotidian ones like a girl squeezing oranges, others less so, like an orchestra playing solely with toy instruments.¹⁰³

Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Robert Whitman, and Red Grooms are the artists that have come to be most strongly associated with the early American happening. Despite an apparent lack of cohesiveness in the form and style of their respective happenings, these artists are often discussed as a group. Oldenburg's happenings present as physical extensions of his sculptures, and his happenings were concerned with everyday domestic

with the inclusion of chance play and frequently utilized the I-Ching. Although most later happenings proper were pre-planned and followed a script most allowed for an element of chance play, which we can only speculate was induced by Cage's prolific use of chance operations in his work. See Branden W. Joseph, "Chance, Indeterminacy, Multiplicity." In *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art*, edited by Julia Robinson, (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2009,)210-38; Knut Ove Arntzen writes that happenings and events emerged from Cage and the Black Mountain College Milieu. He further calls happenings and events the immediate historical basis for performance art at large. See Knut Ove Arntzen. "Et avantgardisk blick på performancekunst og teater,» in Per Bäckström and Bodil Børset eds. *Norsk Avantgarde*. (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2011) 331.

¹⁰⁰ Allan Kaprow and Mimsy Lee. "On Happenings." *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 4 (1966): 281-83.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 281.

¹⁰² Formerly the Hansa Gallery, co-founded by Allan Kaprow in 1952, and named after the artist Hans Hoffman.

¹⁰³ Adrian Henri. *Total Art: Environments, Happenings, and Performance*. (New York: Praeger, 1974,)91-92.

objects and situations presented in a formal and artificial context. Dine's happenings appear highly personal, even humorous. His happening *Car Crash* is a psychologically loaded dramatic happening, inspired by the artist's car crash. On the other hand, Whitman's Happenings have a distinctly different quality, appearing much more abstract as a form of visual poetry with a distinct lyrical quality. Whitman avidly used the filmic medium, and his happenings soon moved over to the roam of expanded cinema.¹⁰⁴

The term, happening, encompasses such a breadth of artistic practices proving it challenging to arrive at a definitive definition. A definition is made even more difficult by the varying definitions provided by the artists and theoreticians to whom the term is usually attributed. Here the aforementioned near-mythic aura surrounding the concept of happenings ensures that a clear distinction is difficult, and that misuse and confusion reign.

In his 1975 article, "The Origin of the Happening," Fluxus artist Dick Higgins offers a retrospective definition of the term happening, as understood by the happening artists of the early 1960s:

"A form of theatrical compositions begun in the late 1950s, rejecting all narrative logic and all forms of stages in favor of maximum exploitation of the performance environment, lyrical performing elements within a matrixed structure, and an overall synthesis of music, literature and the visual arts."¹⁰⁵

In his essay, Higgins acknowledges the confusion surrounding the term even by 'happeners' themselves but singles out Michael Kirby's definition as the one that has stood the test of time. "A purposefully composed form of theatre in which diverse alogical elements, including nonmatrixed performing, are organized in a compartmented structure."¹⁰⁶

The Happening medium became more firmly established with the publication of Michael Kirby's anthology *Happenings* in 1965.¹⁰⁷ The anthology includes scripts and productions by artists Jim Dine, Red Grooms, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Whitman. Kirby's introduction to the volume presents the genealogy of the Happening, introducing what has since become the accepted pre-history of Happenings in most art historical discourse. Like later art historians, Kirby commends the development of the American

¹⁰⁴ For Dine's *Car Crash* see Judith Fredenka Rodenbeck. «Crash: Happenings (as) the Black Box of Experience, 1958-1966.» (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2003.)

For Whitman see Branden W. Joseph. "Plastic Empathy: The Ghost of Robert Whitman." *Grey Room*, no. 25 (2006): 64-91. For Oldenburg see, Nadja Rottner. "A Theater of Vision: Claes Oldenburg and the Emergence of the Happening." (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2009.)

¹⁰⁵ Dick Higgins. "The Origin of Happening." *American Speech* 51, no. 3/4 (1976):271.

¹⁰⁶ Kirby, *Happenings*,21.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*

Happenings to the legacies of European art movements of the first half of the 20th century, beginning with cubism and highlighting the influence of futurism, surrealism, and dada, among others.¹⁰⁸ Kirby asks if Happenings could be called a visual form of theatre. “Certainly, they are not exclusively visual. Happenings contain auditory material, and some have even used odor.”¹⁰⁹ Kirby details that a distinct quality shared among the early Happenings is their rough, crude, and borderline primitive visual style. Kirby notes that this stylistic choice is partly due to happenings’ closeness to junk sculpture and action painting but primarily due to limited finances.

In his introduction, Kirby underlines several characteristics of happenings. Among them is the use of a *compartmented structure*, which contrasts with the information structure employed in traditional theatre. A *compartmented structure* “is based on the arrangement and contiguity of theatrical units that are completely self-contained and hermetic.”¹¹⁰ These compartments may be used sequentially or simultaneously. Kaprow’s *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959) is an example of both sequential and simultaneous structure. With this in mind, a possible reading of Group 66’s weeklong series of living exhibitions is that they are compartments within one happening. Their titular happening follows a sequential structure. With the context of the evening, Group 66 includes its happening in, the happening is one structure, alongside other structures like mask-play and *laterna magica*.¹¹¹ These self-contained units constitute that evening’s program of events or one compartment in the week-long happening. This way of looking at Group 66’s happening has already been proposed by Knut Ove Arntzen. He identifies Group 66’s living exhibition as having “a dramaturgical structure consisting of actions inspired by happenings, events, mask play, and *co-ritus*. These actions followed one another in shorter or longer timespans, and schematically placed action

¹⁰⁸ For an alternative history for the development of the American happening, namely the American influences behind the development of process art see Pamela Lehnert. “An American Happening: Allan Kaprow and a Theory of Process Art.” (PhD. Diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1989.)

¹⁰⁹ Kirby, *Happenings*, 11-12.

¹¹⁰ Kirby, *Happenings*, 13.

¹¹¹ It is unclear whether the other evening events followed a sequential or simultaneous structure, however, it appears that the evening program as a whole followed a sequential structure, with each event functioning as a self-contained unit or compartment.

descriptions formulated as scripts or mind maps.”¹¹² Arntzen sees Group 66’s “artwork” as the entire series of events.¹¹³

However, examining Group 66’s series of events as one happening requires a language to adequately speak to the many differences between happenings’ design, even within Group 66’s titular happening. While Arntzen offers a structure for understanding Group 66 entire series of events, he does not offer a language for understanding the the structures within individual events. To gain a deeper understanding of the happening by Group 66, extracting said happening from its connected series of events and looking at the structures within the happening is necessitated. An available model for this type of investigation is offered by Richard Kostelanetz and his concept of the theatre of mixed means.

A Theatre of Mixed Means

Another important figure in the happening theoretical discourse is artist, author, and critic Richard Kostelanetz. In his *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, Kostelanetz writes that an integration of the arts is not a new phenomenon and that “the separation of these arts probably followed in the development of human consciousness from the recognition of Art as distinct from life”.¹¹⁴ Kostelanetz views happenings as an inappropriate name for this new movement, as it creates an image of an art in which there is little planning or control, and instead prefers the term ‘theater of mixed means,’ “because that phrase isolates the major characteristics and yet isolates the entire movement.”¹¹⁵ Kostelanetz christens what he calls recent developments in American theatre, including Happenings, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*.¹¹⁶ Kostelanetz places the Theatre of Mixed Means in direct opposition to traditional theatre, thus identifying the happening, under his umbrella term, as theatre.

¹¹² Knut Ove Arntzen. "Gruppe 66, Co-ritus og kunsten som samhandling." *Kunst Pluss*, no. 1. (2011): 8-10. Translation by the author. ; See also , Knut Ove Arntzen, “Et avantgardistisk blikk på performancekunst” in Per Bäckström and Bodil Børset, eds. *Norsk Avantgarde* (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 2011) 331-340.

¹¹³ *Ibid*

This is the same way as this thesis’ author views group 66’s artwork. However due to the formal restrictions of a master’s thesis only certain compartments are looked at in detail.

¹¹⁴ Richard Kostelanetz. *The Theatre of Mixed Means: An Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments, and other Mixed-Means Performances*. (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 3.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹¹⁶ For Kostelanetz, the theatre of mixed means encompasses a wide range of arts including, happenings, new theatre, events, activities, painter’s theatre, kinetic theatre, and action theatre. Kostelanetz, *Theatre of Mixed-Means*, xi.

There are four distinct genres within the *Theater of Mixed Means*: pure happenings, kinetic environments, staged happenings, and stage performances. The three genres are distinguished by three variables: space, time, and action.

GENRE	SPACE	TIME	ACTION
Pure Happening	Open	Variable	Variable
Staged Happening	Closed	Variable	Variable
Staged performance	Closed	Fixed	Fixed
Kinetic Environment	Closed	Variable	Fixed ¹¹⁷

Several genres can simultaneously take place, as we see with Group 66, whose happening starts as a staged happening before shifting into a pure happening. Using Kostelanetz's model, we can divide Group 66's happening into two compartments, the first one a staged happening and the second a pure happening. The first part of Group 66's happening, consisting of the audience performing in a mumbling choir, directed by a conductor, relies on a loose script and takes place within a somewhat controlled closed environment. The time and action are presumably left as variables, as the artists do not seem to exercise control over the time or the proceeding actions of the audiences. However, it is unclear to what extent the artists had pre-planned the time and action elements of the happening. If there were shifts in either one, the happening classifies either as a staged performance or a kinetic environment according to Kostelanetz's model. The second part of the happening is undoubtedly a pure happening, taking place in an open space with variable time and action. The mechanism by which the second part of the happening turns into a pure happening is the audience's intervention in the happening's direction. Time and action become variables because they are decided by the audience members/participants, who effectively hijack the happening and override the artists' control over the happening's unfolding. This similarly affects space, which is opened, as restrictions are lifted through the audience/participants' actions. As understood by Group 66, the definition of a happening is "an action with a set script for an incipient course of action. It is contingent upon an audience interjecting into this course of action, and thus that the action takes on completely new and unexpected directions."¹¹⁸ In the context of Kostelanetz's categories, Group 66 sees the interjection of the audience as a defining feature of what

¹¹⁷ Chart by Kostelanetz. Kostelanetz, *Theatre of Mixed-Means*, 7. Note that there exist four additional unnamed variations.

¹¹⁸ Bäckström & Børset, *Norsk avantgarde*, 711.

Kostelanetz calls a pure happening. As a pure happening, the action and time are variable because they consist of both a script and the unexpected direction of the audience.

Kostelanetz, much like Kirby, gives happenings a pre-history of what he deems the four great preceding European avant-garde movements, Futurism, Dada, the Bauhaus, and Surrealism. Kostelanetz highlights the importance of another significant tendency in modern painting; the moving away from a fixed perspective to allowing for simultaneous points of view, starting with Cezanne in the late nineteenth century. This break with the renaissance perspective is more forcefully explored with cubism, the antecedent of later collage practices that re-unites the object with art-making's physical ritual. Kostelanetz's assertions are echoed by artist Adrian Henri who asks, "The isolated, individual artist, the unique, irreplaceable object, have been a part of the human consciousness for about two thousand years: for how much longer has art as magic, as ritual, as disposable object, as body-adornment, been part of our heritage?"¹¹⁹

Assemblage brings the collage principle into space and various media. A happening is, according to Kostelanetz, assemblage created into an environment taken one step further by including structure and content. By re-uniting art and life with regard to the happening's contents and using its structure to create a total art (a sensorially all-encompassing art/ritual), art and life are once again reconciled after a nearly two thousand yearlong separation. The question then becomes, how do artists ensure that their artistic productions, like happenings, keep art and life together. An answer to this conundrum can be found by returning to the works of Allan Kaprow.

In 1966 Kaprow published *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings*, in which he lays out a guideline for such productions. Firstly, Kaprow emphasizes that "The line between art and life should be kept as fluid and perhaps indistinct, as possible."¹²⁰ Kaprow refers to this as the foundation upon which all happenings should be built. He underlines that the happening's contents can be derived from any place or period, with the exceptions of "the arts, their derivatives and their milieu."¹²¹ These exceptions are put in place to deter artists from inadvertently sully the new artistic language of happenings with art history's baggage. However, Kaprow underlines that these guidelines serve as training wheels and can be discarded once the nascent art form has gained footing. Furthermore, happenings should take place in widely spaced, changing locales in variable and discontinuous times. This is to

¹¹⁹ Henri, *Total Art*, 7.

¹²⁰ Allan Kaprow. *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*. (New York: Abrams, 1966),260.

¹²¹ *Ibid*

release the artist from the confines and inhibitions placed on them by a traditional time-space continuum, further deterring the creation of a new language. Happenings should only be performed once, and audiences should be eliminated entirely. “The composition of a Happening proceeds exactly as in Assemblages and Environments, that is, it is evolved as a collage of events in certain spans of time and in certain spaces.”¹²²

If we look at Group 66’s happening through the lens of Kaprow’s guidelines, we see that the group mostly follows Kaprow’s criteria.¹²³ Firstly, the line between art and life is kept fluid, for example, through the mumbling choir’s reading of current newspaper pages, which, although a little bit too on the nose, directly integrates daily life and current events with the artistic expression. As to the happening’s contents Group 66 somewhat complies with Kaprow, and apart from Stefan Rink’s role as conductor, do not use objects especially linked to the arts or their derivatives.¹²⁴ Group 66’s happening is performed only once. If not eliminated, the artists have changed the role of the audience into participants in the happening. Group 66’s happening is “a collage of events in certain spans of time and in spaces.”¹²⁵ However, in the context of Kaprow’s outline, the big elephant in the room is the fact that Group 66’s happening is taking place in the locales of the Bergen Arts Association, which immediately, according to Kaprow, sullies the happening with the baggage of art history and the art world. An alternative read on Group 66’s choice of such locales for their happening is that they are attempting to reconcile art and life from inside a representative of the forces responsible for said separation; the art world. This assertion will be further explored in this thesis’ concluding chapter, building on this chapter’s exploration of the happening concept.

As previously established happenings are a hybrid artform, derived from painting and theatre, and as such further exploration necessitates an interdisciplinary framework. This chapter has thus far looked at Group 66’s happening through the lens and concept of the American happening. Equally important to grasping the group’s happening is to examine it from the lens of theatre. In this context the contributions by Knut Ove Arntzen are central.

¹²² *Ibid*, 266.

¹²³ I can only speculate as to Group 66’s knowledge and familiarity with Kaprow. However, due to the international education and nature of the group such knowledge appears highly likely. Regardless, the similarities between Kaprow’s guidelines and Group 66’s execution speak to both acting on or capturing a contemporary artistic/ cultural zeitgeist.

¹²⁴ The bucket of colored water left behind from the co-ritus not having been placed there intentionally to be part of the happening and not used by the artists in the happening.

¹²⁵ Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*, 266.

Following Arntzen's trail, this chapter will now shift its focus and look to theatre studies for further insight into Group 66's happening.

Theatre by Painters

"...happenings, like musicals and plays, are a form of theatre."¹²⁶

Academic, writer, and critic Darko Suvin asks, "are happenings theatre or not?"¹²⁷ According to Suvin, the answer to this question is simply an exercise in semantics. Performance of an action organized in a plot they are not. However, if we employ a broader Cageian definition of theatre as a performance that engages the ear and the eye simultaneously, then Suvin concludes that happenings are, in fact, theatre. Suvin prefers to talk about happenings within the broader aesthetic category of spectacles characterized by a human performer's live actions. Suvin concedes that although not theatre proper, happenings share characteristics descended from theatrical traditions.¹²⁸

Curator Henry Geldzahler expressed a similar sentiment when he declared that "Happenings are theater by artists."¹²⁹ However, the mainstream view held by scholars in the fields of art history and theatre history has been that happenings are not theatre proper but maintain theatrical qualities.¹³⁰ Instead, art historians have taken their cues from Kirby and focused on happenings' rich lineage from European avant-garde traditions. In contrast, theatre historians have concluded that due to their lack of distinction between performer and audience, happenings are not theatre proper.¹³¹ Although it is safe to say that happenings are not traditional theatre and that the genre has managed to create a self-supporting theoretical structure, it would be amiss to ignore the theatrical roots from which the Happening sprung out. The Tulane Drama Review's (TDR) editor Richard Schechner calls the new theatre a "genealogical hybrid" whose parentage is theatre, painting, sculpture, dance, and music. According to Schechner, "this new theatre offers us an aesthetic experience for which we have no corresponding vocabulary."¹³²

¹²⁶ Kirby, *Happenings*, 11.

¹²⁷ Darko Suvin. "Reflections on Happenings." *The Drama Review: TDR* 14, no. 3 (1970): 131.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*

¹²⁹ Henry Geldzahler. "Happenings: Theater by Painters." *The Hudson Review* 18, no. 4 (1965): 581-86.

¹³⁰ Judith Rodenbeck. "Madness and Method: Before Theatricality." *Grey Room* (2003): 54-79.

See pp. 55-56

¹³¹ *Ibid*

¹³² Richard Schechner. *Public Domain: Essays on the Theater*. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), 155.

Because the new theatre is so different from the “parent arts,” the criteria and locutions of the parent arts are not adequate to encompass the new theatre. Happenings artist Al Hansen writes, “the happening is about man’s displacement from order.”¹³³ As an artist, Hansen sees his role as a mediator in the realms of communication and education. For Hansen, Happenings are a mode of education. “...that these performances engulf the spectator; the environment is a work of art that the observer goes into and walks in and in some cases actually participates in.”¹³⁴ “Theater collage” is Hansen’s preferred description, similar to assemblage but underlines the theatrical elements and structures within the happening.

One quality shared by both theatre and happenings is their ephemerality. Like a play, one cannot buy a happening. However, unlike traditional theatrical productions, even if the happening is repeated, it is not meant to enter a repertoire like most plays are. Also, the preoccupation with materials aligns happenings more closely to painting. The artwork, or its materials, is central, unlike in a traditional play where backdrops and props and their materiality are secondary to the performance. However, the use of people, whether they be performers or audiences, as objects provide the Happening with a theatrical dimension in the vein of Brecht or Artaud, which painting rarely achieves.

Brecht and Artaud

By aligning happenings with traditional theatre, a spotlight is cast upon the audiences’ (sometimes participants) roles in happenings. This emphasis on audiences raises several questions as to their function, but more importantly, the mechanics of their participation as it relates to communication. Through this lens, happenings ask us to consider a changing conception of the audience and interrogate spectatorship. Kirby considers happenings to be one of “...the best examples of Artaud’s Theater of Cruelty that have yet been produced.”¹³⁵ He elaborates by noting that «the profoundest political implications of Happenings are their rejection of packaging, not by parody, which is the Absurdist technique, but by forcing on the receiver the job of doing the work usually done by the artist/educator/propagandist. »¹³⁶

Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud’s influence has been highlighted by many writers who support the happening-theatre viewpoint. Unlike the traditional theatre, which relies on

¹³³ Al Hansen. *A Primer of Happenings & Time/Space Art*. (Ultramarine Publishing Company, 1965), 1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 6.

¹³⁵ Kirby, *Happenings*. 35.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*

the Aristotelian model of catharsis achieved by audiences through empathetic responses fueled by identifying with the characters, the new theatre aligns with Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* and Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*. Artaud's model involves waking the audience up from their anesthetized state using whatever means necessary, even if that means invoking fear and terror in the audience by trapping them in a state where impressions override their senses and personal agency is temporarily limited. On the other hand, Brecht's alienation model prevents the audience from identifying with the characters to maintain their critical thinking skills and grips on reality.

In the "Theater of Cruelty (Second Manifesto)," Artaud writes, "Admittedly or not, conscious or unconscious, the poetic state, a transcendent experience of life is what the public is fundamentally seeking through love, crime, drugs, war, or insurrection."¹³⁷ Within this poetic state each audience member/participant, from their personal encounter with the artwork, is awakened to a higher consciousness level. Perhaps what Group 66 called a state of psychic renewal can be understood in the same terms as Artaud's poetic state.¹³⁸ The objective of this spiritual quest is to question artistic authorship and the objecthood of the artwork. Susan Sontag has prominently noted the Artaudian abuse the audience of a happening is subjected. Sontag writes that a happening «is designed to stir the modern audience from its cozy emotional anesthesia."¹³⁹ She calls the happening's treatment of the audience its most striking feature, in that "the event seems designed to tease and abuse the audience."¹⁴⁰ Calling the audience treatment, the happening's dramatic spine, she points to the devices employed to achieve this, ranging from terror to the confusing and mundane.¹⁴¹ The terror, or violence, Sontag refers to is that inflicted upon the happening's performers or audiences. In a happening, people often function as objects, and the part of what constitutes the terror Sontag refers to is the control or manipulation exercised on people in happenings.

In the amalgam of modern art, Sontag equates the functioning of certain happening practices and tactics to nightmares. "If the meaning of modern art is its discovery beneath the

¹³⁷ Antonin Artaud. *The Theatre and Its Double: Essays*. Vol. CB423. A Calderbook. (London: Calder, 1977), 123.

¹³⁸ Psychic renewal (psykisk fornyelse) was a term used by Lars Grundt in the Group 66 interview featured in an episode of *Epoke*. Broadcast February 24, 1966. NRK.

¹³⁹ Susan Sontag. *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays*. (London: Deutsch, 1987), 275.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 265

¹⁴¹ *Ibid* "This abusive involvement of the audience seems to provide, in default of anything else, the dramatic spine of the Happening. When the Happening is more purely spectacle, as in Allan Kaprow's *The Courtyard*, presented in November 1962, at the Renaissance House, the event is considerably less dense and compelling."

logic of everyday life of the alogic of dreams, then we may expect the art which has the freedom of dreaming, also to have its emotional range. There are witty dreams, solemn dreams, and there are nightmares.”¹⁴² According to Sontag, through the prescription offered by Artaud in *The Theatre and its Double*, we can clearly understand what happenings are.¹⁴³ Artaud wanted “...a theatre that wakes us up: nerves and heart.”¹⁴⁴ In this scenario, according to Sontag, the audience ends up being the scapegoat, in the truest meaning of the word; the object of a ritualistic sacrifice, meant to cleanse humanity of their sins, or in the case of happenings; re-educate their minds.

Playtime

Suppose we accept the purported Artaudian abuse and Brechtian alienation inflicted upon happening audiences. Examining how this plays out in the relationship between artists, artwork, and audiences is necessary. Using Kostelanetz's previously discussed model, we can divide Group 66's happening into two compartments, the first one a staged happening and the second a pure happening. The second half of the happening centers around the bucket filled with colored water, the conductor Rink, and the audience member/ artist Kismul. Kismul's intent is presumably to douse the conductor in water, thus putting a stop to, or at the very least objecting to, his conduction of the audience. On the surface, the act itself looks like a childish prank. A child throwing a bucket of water over someone to entice laughter from onlookers may embarrass the victim, receive attention, and establish their dominance. Kismul, a grown man, perhaps wants to disrupt the conductor's direction of the audience; strip the conductor of his creative power. Alternatively, entice the audience by creating suspense. At its very essence, this act is akin to children playing games. Perhaps this can be understood considering Richard Schechner idea of the ritual's relation to play, games and sports, theatre, ritual.¹⁴⁵ "The essential revitalization," Schechner wrote, "is one which awakens in many individuals their capacity to make metaphors—to see relationships that were either hidden or not there before."¹⁴⁶ Kismul's act and what followed it is the happening's most notable feature. An

¹⁴² Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 271.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 272.

¹⁴⁴ Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 84.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Schechner, *Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969) 85.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 165.

audience member takes over the director's helm and completely changes the course of the happening. Group 66's audience members are not the passive and entrapped scapegoats described by Sontag; they are active participants in the artistic expression. They are actively objecting to their assigned roles. To unpack this dynamic, we need to look at the original design of Group 66's happening. Firstly, Stefan Rink commands the audience, dressed in formal attire; he demands respect and presents as a formal authority figure. The audience's mumbles, "reading" aloud from the newspapers they had been given, under Rink's direction, presents several layers to dissect.

Most apparent is Rink's exercising of his power over the audience by directing their mumbles. However, the use of newspapers as props in the happening is one of its most exciting and revealing features. The audience is communicating current news, the type of news that they are inundated with daily. One can only speculate as to the contents of these newspapers. However, major news stories from 1966 include the escalation of the Vietnam war, the USSR successfully landing a vehicle on the moon, and China's cultural revolution began in May. In Norway, some headlines in major national newspapers read, "We're getting TV commercials," "The Drug Problem," and "Norwegian Adventurer in Moscow was Pressured."¹⁴⁷ Presumably, these were the types of topics that filled the newspapers the audience was reading. Imagine a medium-sized audience mumbling together with occasional audible words like USA, drugs, TV. This scene can be interpreted in two ways. One sees the audience as a mumbling herd of sheep repeating the words and stories the mass media feeds them. To an onlooker, they might have looked like they were either engaging in meditative chanting or a trance-like state, depending on the onlooker's perspective. The mumble choir can be looked at through a nefarious lens in that, the audience while engaging in the practice, might feel shame or embarrassment when alerted to their lack of critical thinking when consuming news. This dynamic again constitutes a form of Artaudian cruelty, and the aim of Group 66 is perhaps to expose its audience to this cruelty to wake them up from their anesthetized state. Alternatively, a Brechtian alienation effect can also be achieved by the unusual way the audience consumes information to allow for critical distance to its contents. Philosopher and media theoretician Marshall McLuhan wrote, "To the alerted eye, the front page of a newspaper is a superficial chaos which can lead the mind to attend to cosmic

¹⁴⁷ The examples of headlines are the following: «Vi får reklame-tv», *Verdens Gang (VG)*. February 26, 1966. «Narkotika Problemet», *VG*, March 3, 1966. «Nordmann på Eventyr i Moskva Ble Presset», *VG*. February 12, 1966.

harmonies of a very high order."¹⁴⁸ Perhaps, this is the ultimate realization that Group 66 wishes their audiences to achieve.

Another palpitating facet of the happening is the mode in which the audience is communicating, through mumbling. By breaking away from the intellectual subjugation of language, more primal desires should, in theory, emerge.¹⁴⁹ Both Group 66's original plan and the happening's ensuing course of events are grounded in ritual. Whether through a communal mumbling choir, chanting together in a trance-like state, or through childlike rituals of rebellion such as crumbling up the newspapers or attempting to douse someone with a bucket of water. As pointed out by Schechner, returning to these primitive, intuitive actions reveals existing relationships and their power dynamics.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

What emerges from this chapter's discussion is that through their happening, Group 66 was dedicated to renewing people's everyday lives and creating real change on both a personal and societal level in the city of Bergen. Their vision is utopian and typical of 1960s art production. This chapter has presented an interpretation of Group 66's happening by looking to concepts present in the international context the group undoubtedly were a part of. This interpretation has shown a possible mode for viewing parts of Group 66's artistic practice, based on languages offered in this larger international context. Furthermore, this chapter has begun to uncover and establish the Group's insistence on and the importance they placed on the concept of psychic renewal. This has been seen through the emphasis placed on the role of the audience in the happening. The concept of psychic renewal and the role of the audience will be returned to in later chapters, and discussed in more detail. The next chapter looks at Group 66's co-ritus event. The look at the group's co-ritus will reveal more facets to the themes of psychic renewal and audience participation. The fifth chapter will then, based on these readings of happening and co-ritus look closer at the audience and psychic renewal and the individual. The sixth, and final, chapter will feature a discussion of the idea of a collective psychic renewal and will consider this with the backdrop of Norwegian art history and the tension between art's centers and peripheries.

¹⁴⁸ Marshall McLuhan. *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*. No. 265. (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951), 4.

¹⁴⁹ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, 91.

¹⁵⁰ See Schechner, *Public Domain*, 155-166

CHAPTER 4 :Come Together: CO-RITUS by Group 66

«I mistrust audience participation»¹⁵¹

Introduction

A highlight in Group 66's weeklong evening program was an event titled "CO-RITUS directed by Group 66, Situationist Jens Jørgen Thorsen and Olav Herman Hansen, Director: Stefan Rink, Musicians: Group 66."¹⁵² Art Historian and Journalist Per Hovdenakk noted the momentous nature of the event writing in his review that "for the first time in Norway, a co-ritus, a collective music-painting, was performed."¹⁵³ The event invited its audience to participate in the artmaking process and asked that the audience consider art's objecthood and examine and interrogate the relationship between artwork, artists, and spectators. A co-ritus is, according to theatre historian Knut Ove Arntzen, "a form of action based art, developed by using social rituals in interaction with the audience."¹⁵⁴

This chapter explores Group 66's co-ritus. However, such an exploration first needs to ask the question, what exactly was co-ritus? Providing this question with a definitive answer proves extremely difficult, leading to questioning how to approach such an elusive form of art. This realization that niche and ephemeral artforms like co-ritus do not easily lend themselves to typical art historical analysis encourages a reflection on how art history is written. As such, this chapter tackles said artwork by undertaking an investigation based on the co-ritus' artistic and theoretical origins through an intellectual history framework. The inventors of co-ritus Jens Jørgen Thorsen and Jørgen Nash claimed that "through for instance the CO-RITUS experiments they tried to include the audience in the creative process and to erect alternatives to the American domination of art life in the sixties through semi-official

¹⁵¹ Willoughby Sharp, "Interview with Bruce Nauman, 1970," in *Please Pay Attention Please: Bruce Nauman's Words; Writings and Interviews*, ed. Janet Kraynak (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2003), 113.

¹⁵² Elsebet Rahlff, "Min tid med Gruppe 66, Konkret Analyse og Samliv", in *Norsk Avantgarde*, eds. Per Backstrom and Bodil Børset, (Oslo: Novus, 2011), 299.

¹⁵³ Per Hovdenakk, "Norgeshistorisk kunst-begivenhet med co-ritus i Gruppe 66-regi i går", *Bergen Arbeiderblad*, March 25, 1966. Original text "For første gang i Norge ble det fremført et co-ritus, et kollektivt musikk-maleri.» Translation by the author.

¹⁵⁴ Knut Ove Arntzen. "Gruppe 66, Co-ritus og kunsten som samhandling." *Kunst Pluss*, no. 1. (2011): 8-10. Translation by the author.

events like happenings, pop art, etc.»¹⁵⁵ On the surface, co-ritus and happenings appear to be quite different mediums or structures. However, through Group 66's adoption and use of the two, similarities emerge, addressed in later chapters. Continuing the thread from the previous chapter's exploration of Group 66's happening, this chapter builds on discourse introduced in the previous chapter yet addresses different aspects concerning the artwork than the previous chapter. Thorsen and Nash claimed that co-ritus was an alternative to the American domination of art life in the sixties. Building on the conceptual history of happenings in the previous chapter, this chapter looks at co-ritus, in part, as a response to this background.

This chapter approaches Group 66's co-ritus through contextualization and exploration of what kind of experience was engendered by the co-ritus and how this experience aligns with the socio-political ambitions of its orchestrators. This line of inquiry forms the foundation for exploring the dynamics between artworks, individuals, and the collective in the two preceding chapters. As established in the introductory chapter, Group 66's co-ritus did not exist in isolation but was engendered through a geographically and historically diverse network of artists. Central to a reading of Group 66's co-ritus is to note that two of the co-ritus' three headline orchestrators, Thorsen and Rink, were not members of Group 66 and that the co-ritus concept was not conceived by Group 66. Group 66's co-ritus displays and explores the effects of adopting a foreign artistic model and interjecting it into a local context and how this changes the co-ritus' content and meaning. The co-ritus' situationist inventors saw the art form as an alternative to practices like happenings.¹⁵⁶ However, this chapter challenges these claims by exploring how Group 66's co-ritus iteration emerges as an amalgam of happening and situationist frameworks, and how the co-ritus, is forced to continuously navigate through a dynamic based on its existential conditions.

Co-Ritus by Group 66

“What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Patrick O'Brien and Ambrosius Fjord. “Europe's First Avant-Garde”, in *Situationister 1957-70* (Copenhagen: Bauhaus Situationniste, 1971). Re-printed in Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen eds., *Cosmonauts*, 289-293. Note that Patrick O'Brien and Ambrosius Fjord are Thorsen and Nash's pseudonyms.

¹⁵⁶ See Jens Jørgen Thorsen “The Communicative Phase in Art: An Essay On The Death Of Anti-Art”, Jens Jørgen Thorsen, Hardy Strid & Jørgen Nash (eds): *Situationister i Konsten* (Örkelljunga: Edition Bauhaus Situationniste, 1966). Reprinted in Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen, *Cosmonauts*, 256-261.

¹⁵⁷ Harold Rosenberg. “The American Action Painters,” in *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique*, ed. Ellen G. Landau, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.) 190.

Thursday, March 24th, 1966, a co-ritus commenced at Bergen Kunstforening (The Bergen Art Association). A 4.5 x 2.4-meter wooden plate was placed diagonally in the great hall of the art association's locales, with paint and brushes placed in a *mise-en-scène* ready for the co-ritus to begin. The ritual was accompanied by both recorded sound and live music. An old Tandberg tape recorder, belonging to Olav Herman Hansen, played "a type of prepared sound, timbre, and rhythm."¹⁵⁸ The live music was provided by members of Group 66 and volunteers, using a variety of musical instruments together with any items at hand that could produce sound.¹⁵⁹ The idea was that the music would guide the two artists, Danish situationist Jens Jørgen Thorsen and Group 66 member Olav Herman Hansen, executing the painting and acting as vessels through which the music and collective output of the participants could express themselves.

Stefan Rink, wearing a dark corduroy suit, directed the music while the audience sat in a half-moon circle around the stage. Jens Jørgen Thorsen, clad in a polka dot sundress, and Olav Herman Hansen, wearing his old painting clothes, performed/painted the painting. Stefan Rink turned the old tape recorder on and signaled to the musicians to start playing, and the co-ritus began. Jens Jørgen Thorsen and Olav Herman Hansen threw paint from paint buckets onto the wooden plate; the paint was thrown, splashed, brushed, and painted onto the canvas. Thorsen and Hansen ran, slid, and threw themselves towards and onto the canvas. The rhythm and sounds produced by the musical accompaniment were transferred onto the canvas mediated by Thorsen and Hansen as vessels for the expression. The audience's engagement was high; they cheered and shouted out ideas and commentaries on the process, partially guiding the artwork's direction. The whole process lasted for 22 minutes and ended with jubilation from the audience. Bergen Art Association's vice-chairman, Wilhelm Håland, bought the painting remaining from the co-ritus for 400 NOK.¹⁶⁰

Before the co-ritus' commencement, Danish Situationist artist Jens Jørgen Thorsen, who appeared in the capacity of a guest-starring role, informed the audience of the idea behind the practice. Thorsen explained that, in essence, a co-ritus consists of several people collaborating on creating an artwork, with the audience participating in the creation process. Through participation, the audience's experience of the artwork is bound to the production

¹⁵⁸ Rahlff, "Min tid", 285-286.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*; From the accounts of Rahlff and others, it remains unclear which types of musical instruments/objects were used.

¹⁶⁰ As recalled by Elsbett Rahlff, see Rahlff, «Min tid» 281-303; See also Olav Herman Hansen, "Gruppe 66", *Kunst Plus 1* (2011): 7.

process rather than the finished product or artwork they are accustomed to interacting with in a traditional museum space. As the ritus in co-ritus implies, the experience should be seen as a ritual.¹⁶¹ The idea of a collective ritual is the feature that most ostensibly distinguishes co-ritus from similar artistic styles and practices. It is worth noting that unlike a happening which typically includes a script directing the actions of participants to various degrees, a co-ritus intends for its participants to collaborate on the ritual freely.

Co-ritus' use of action painting in front of an audience was not a novel concept. Similar artistic processes centered around performing or painting live in front of an audience had already been explored by the Japanese Gutai group and French artist Georges Mathieu. However, in these artists' practices, the onlookers act as traditional audiences and are not actively involved in the process. Group 66 and co-ritus seemingly extricate themselves from this narrative by grounding their practice in the idea of audience participation and making the very existence of the artwork, the co-ritus, dependent upon participants. It appears that co-ritus offers its participants a collective synesthetic experience that is ritualistic and primitive and attempts to overthrow the subjugation of the individual's relationship to art. In a co-ritus, the product of the art-making process is not material evidence of the mystical inner life of the individual genius artist. However, it occurs to this writer that another possible reading of the group's co-ritus is that it is on one level meant to act as pure comedy. It does not seem far-fetched to imagine the artists staging the co-ritus as a parody, aiming at artists like Jackson Pollock, Yves Klein, Mathieu, or the Gutai. Group 66's particular co-ritus can be viewed as a commentary on the perceived absurdity of the performative artist persona perpetuated in the art world.

Since grappling with a potential definition of co-ritus through looking only at the unfolding of Group 66's iteration seems to be a futile exercise, it is necessary to look further into the co-ritus' historical background, beginning with the artform's situationist roots.

The Situationist Roots of Co-Ritus

Artist Jens Jørgen Thorsen brought the co-ritus concept into Group 66's artistic repertoire. Thorsen developed the concept with his fellow Danish situationist Jørgen Nash in 1962. Nash was a member of the International Situationists from 1959 to 1962, alongside

¹⁶¹ Per Hovdenakk, "Norgeshistorisk kunst-begivenhet med co-ritus i Gruppe 66 regi i går." *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. March 25, 1966.

his, more well-known, brother the artist Asger Jorn. However, in the early 1960s, a conflict rooted in different views on art's role within the greater situationist project began to disintegrate the group. On this issue, the group split into two camps. One camp led by head-situationist-in-charge Guy Debord no longer saw art's place within the revolution.¹⁶² At the same time, another faction spearheaded by Jørgen Nash maintained that art was a powerful means to revolution. Danish Art Historian Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen describes that "this faction saw the artistic method of experimentation as a means to the expansion of human existence and as a revolutionary process without specific political ends."¹⁶³ The tug-of-war between the two camps came to a head at the Situationist conference in Gothenburg in 1961. Following the conference, Situationist collaborators, the German Gruppe Spur, was dismissed from the SI in 1962, with Nash and artists Jaqueline de Jong and Ansgar Elde following suit, leading to the formation of the artists' collective Drakabygget. The Drakabygget artists collective was formed by the discharged Scandinavian situationists. The SI still had a Scandinavian presence led by the Danish artist J.V. Martin, which meant that the Drakabygget artists still felt the SI's opposition. The newly formed group based at Drakabygget became known as "Nash-ists." It included new members like the English painter and poet Gordon Fazarkely and the Danish art critic and filmmaker Jens Jørgen Thorsen.¹⁶⁴ From their base Drakabygget, a farm in Skåne in the south of Sweden with proximity to Copenhagen, the group produced several spectacular artworks such as the *Seven Rebels* Exhibition (1962), which included the artists carrying a large cross made of trash and empty picture frames through the streets of Odense, *Co-Ritus* (1962), and most infamously Nash's self-alleged decapitation of *The Little Mermaid* in 1964.¹⁶⁵ At the top of the group's agenda was achieving a "cultural insurrection."¹⁶⁶ Bolt Rasmussen notes that "the group focused primarily on activities and less on theory in their use of a wild mixture of social democratic and anarchist ideas to advance their notion of art as a ritualistic experiment aimed at liberating people."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen describe this faction's position as fueled by "...Debord's hardliner rhetoric as art as 'non-Situationist' and the demand to abandon individual art work no matter how experimental it was." Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, «Introduction» in *Cosmonauts of the Future: Texts from the Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*, eds. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen (Copenhagen: Nebula, 2015), 8-10.

¹⁶³ Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen, «Introduction» in *Cosmonauts of the Future: Texts from the Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*, eds. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen (Copenhagen: Nebula, 2015), 8.

¹⁶⁴ The group are interchangeably referred to as Nashists, the Drakabygget Collective, The Scandinavian Situationists and the Second Situationist International.

¹⁶⁵ Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen. *Cosmonauts*, 12-15.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 14.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*

One such ritualistic experiment was co-ritus first put on in Copenhagen in 1962, with later iterations in Gothenburg, Malmö, Lund, Uppsala, Aarhus, and eventually Bergen.¹⁶⁸ The goal of co-ritus was to abolish a passive audience by turning the audience into active co-creators in the artistic creation process.⁶ The first Co-ritus by the Second Situationist International was held in 1962 at Galerie Jensen in Copenhagen. The small commercial gallery's exhibition space was empty but decked out with materials and tools, ready for the audience to activate and participate in the ritual. The Co-ritus participants used paint, pieces of wood, paper, and thrash to turn the gallery into one giant collage that the audience/participants added to throughout the night. Danish artist Jakob Jakobsen identifies the use of thrash, or "old junk," as material as a continuation of earlier Dada and Nouveaux Réalistes practices that the Drakabygget artists were familiar with.¹⁶⁹ The use of Dada practices is interesting to note as remaining images documenting the co-ritus shows, on the surface, an aesthetic eerily similar to early American happenings, who were also influenced by Dadaist practices. A few nights after the opening, Nash, Thorsen, and other artists from Drakabygget continued the Co-ritus outside the gallery's confines by painting a 300-meter long fence. The artists were promptly arrested, only to return to the scene of their "crime" and finish the job hours after their release.¹⁷⁰ On the occasion of the first Co-ritus, Jens Jørgen Thorsen, Jørgen Nash, and Hardy Strid published a "Co-Ritus Manifesto." In the manifesto, they write that:

"In the European cultural tradition there is an insurmountable barrier between performer and audience. The barrier is blocking cultural evolution and threatens to

¹⁶⁸ Jens Jørgen Thorsen, "The Communicative Phase in Art: An Essay on the Death of Anti-Art," in *Cosmonauts of the Future: Texts from the Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*, eds. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen (Copenhagen: Nebula, 2015), 261.

¹⁶⁹ Jakob Jakobsen, "The Artistic Revolution: On the Situationists, Gangsters, and Falsifiers from Drakabygget," in *Expect Anything, Fear Nothing: The Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*. eds. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jakob Jakobsen (Copenhagen: Nebula, 2011), 260-262.

¹⁷⁰ Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "Raping the Whole World in a Warm Embrace of Fascination – Drakabygget's Anti-Authoritarian Artistic Endeavours." In *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950–1975*, Vol. 32. Avant-Garde Critical Studies. eds. Tania Ørum, and Jesper Olsson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 599 ;Also see: Hagund, Elisabeth and Kristina Garmer. "Situationists 1957-71 Drakabygget." Exhibition Catalogue for "Situationists 1957-71", Skånska Art Museum, Lund, Sweden, 1971.

make all of us into twaddling fools in the supermarket of the culture industry and victims of an anonymous repression on an unheard-of scale.”¹⁷¹

Thorsen, Nash, and Strid assert that the individualism of the European cultural tradition is at the root of the threat they describe above. Their solution to healing the divide between the individual and the group is to create new rituals, specifically co-ritus rituals. In their manifesto, they write, “We want to create new rituals. Rituals are human thinking shaped in social patterns. Every cultural pattern is a ritual.”¹⁷² Through participation in this ritual, the audience is liberated from their role as passive consumers of art. By unleashing their latent creative energy in the Co-ritus, the lines drawn between art and life blur, and they can start to move towards complete integration of art and life. The name Co-ritus, combining the abbreviation of collective with the Latin ritus (rite), divulges the practice’s intent, which Danish artist Jakob Jakobsen describes as “a new function for art as a collective and cult-like activity.”¹⁷³ Alternatively, Bolt Rasmussen claims that Thorsen coined the term by combining ‘coitus’ with ‘ritus.’¹⁷⁴ Both etymologies work for the purposes of Thorsen and Nash’s project.

In an interview with Nash and Thorsen, titled the “Co-Ritus Interview” from 1963, the interviewer asks, “What is the situationists’ relationship to society?” To which Thorsen replies that “any potential change of society is conditioned by the cultural possibilities” and “The essential in situationism is the relationship of human beings to the forces of creativity; it is the intention to realize these forces through moments of creativity. The situationist idea is based on the use of art and the forces of creativity directly in the social environment.»¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, Thorsen explains that unlike the first Situationist International, whom he refers to as the Parisian Situationists, who believed that people were the product of their environment, the Nashists “... believe that the source of life is the continuous realization of new possibilities of inter-human activity.»¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ “CO-RITUS Manifest”, leaflet written for the co-ritus show at Galerie Jensen, 1962. Translated by Jakob Jakobsen, published in Bolt Rasmussen, Mikkel., and Jakob Jakobsen. *Cosmonauts of the Future : Texts from the Situationist Movement in Scandinavia and Elsewhere*. Copenhagen: Nebula ; in Association with Autonomedia, 2015. pp.124-127.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 124.

¹⁷³ Jakobsen, “The Artistic Revolution,” in *Expect Anything*, 260.

¹⁷⁴ Bolt Rasmussen, “Raping,” in *A Cultural History*, 599.

¹⁷⁵ “CO-RITUS interview. Kunst er pop – CO-RITUS er kunst – Uenighed gør stærk”, *Aspekt*, no. 3, 1963. Translated by Jakob Jakobsen. Published in Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen, *Cosmonauts*, 206-209

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 207.

The Situationists wanted to liberate man from alienation caused by a capitalist society through their particular brand of anarchy mixed with Marxist socialism. Before the group denounced art in 1962, the Situationists viewed art as a means to ignite change and advance their political program. *The Situationist Manifesto*, penned by the group's leading figure Guy Debord, states that "Against the spectacle, the realized Situationist culture introduces total participation. Against preserved art, it is the organization of the directly lived moment. Against unilateral art, situationist culture will be an art of dialogue, an art of interaction (...) at a higher stage, everyone will become an artist."¹⁷⁷ The art of the realized Situationist culture, as outlined above, more or less, comes to fruition in the Co-ritus. It is an art of total participation, existing only during its performance. It is a means to liberate the audience from the spectacle or the trappings of capitalist culture. "So what really is the situation? It's the realization of a better game, which more exactly is provoked by human presence."¹⁷⁸ The SI saw art not only as a means to achieve a total revolution but wanted to dismember the bodies of capitalism controlling art's production space. "Today artists – with all culture visible – have been completely separated from society, just as they are separated from each other by competition. But faced with this impasse of capitalism, art has remained essentially unilateral in response. This enclosed era of primitivism must be suspended by complete communication."¹⁷⁹ Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen write, «The Situationists were in a certain sense continuing the iconoclastic project of the inter-war-avant-gardes, which envisioned art as an intervention into the communication systems of capitalist society."¹⁸⁰ Years before Barthes announced the death of the author, the Situationists suggested "killing" the artist, or less dramatically changing their job description. If everyone could be an artist, it would not only enrich people's lives but effectively kill a switch in the "communication system of capitalist society."¹⁸¹

The situationists were would-be revolutionaries with avant-garde artists among their ranks. Art was a part of the situationist project, one of many means to achieve total revolutionary activity. For the situationists, art was never a goal in itself, only insofar as art could act as a dimension of everyday life. They saw the potential to hijack and reclaim art by breaking the invisible line between spectator, artist, and artwork, thus breaking the contract of

¹⁷⁷ Guy Debord, "Situationist Manifesto" (1960) in *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*. Ed. Alex Danchev, (London: Penguin Classics, 2011),349-350.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁰ Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen, "Introduction" in *Cosmonauts*, 9.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*

the division of labor.¹⁸²As noted by Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen, "...art was the means to an aesthetic emancipation from capitalist society. (...)The situationist wanted to realize art."¹⁸³

Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen further explain that "art was to be realized beyond the confines of the art institution where art was safely locked away from everyday life."¹⁸⁴For the SI, art was a transgressive activity, a means to achieve their overarching goal. One tactic for achieving this goal was to replace "contemplative viewing of art" with "the construction of situations," which, according to Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen, meant "the construction of a new life beyond the constraints of capitalism."¹⁸⁵ These ideas regarding the potential of art informed Nash and Thorsen's ideas around co-ritus. However, it appears that for Nash and Thorsen, art was not only a tool to ignite change, but the two artists were on a rescue mission that included rescuing both art and people from the clutches of capitalism. A result of their situationist education and personal vision for a revolution was Nash and Thorsen's invention of an art form that directly highlighted the existing power relations of society, as mirrored in the art world and seen through the spectator artist relationship.

How then did these radical ideas manifest themselves through Group 66's co-ritus in the city of Bergen, "where artistic life is otherwise of the more sedate kind."¹⁸⁶

Group 66's Revolution

«Art will get new power with CO-RITUS» – The Örestad Experimental Laboratory:
Thorsen, Nash, Strid & O'Brien¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "The Situationist International(s):The Realisation of Art." Lecture, Art as Force-Situasjonisme og Folkekunst from The University of Bergen and KODE, Bergen, October 26, 2018. Lecture available as podcast, Karoline Skusest, host, Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and André Eiermann, lecturers, "Art as Force-Part 1: International Situationism" Bit Pod (podcast), October 26, 2018, accessed September 1, 2021, <http://bit-teatergarasjen.no/program/arrangementer/art-as-force-situasjonisme-og-folkekunst/>.

¹⁸³ Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen, "Introduction" in *Cosmanauts*, 8.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁶ Per Hovdenakk. «Lasse Anno 66» *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. February 26, 1966. Translation by the author. Full original text: «Men selve gruppens eksistens er ikke desto mindre et så oppsiktsvekkende faktum at det grenser til det sensasjonelle. Ikke minst i Bergen, hvor kunstlivet eller er av det mer sedate slaget.» Translation by the author.

¹⁸⁷ "Ytringsfriheden ikke til salg", leaflet from the street festival and occupation of Strøget, Copenhagen 1965. Translated by Jakob Jakobsen. Pub. In Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen, «Cosmonauts,» 251.

As established, Group 66 did not create the concept of Co-Ritus. They seemingly saw Co-ritus as a potentially effective model to host their revolutionary project. In the context of the grand revolutionary project of their Danish colleagues, Group 66 presents as an outlier. Although the group heralded the idea of a psychic renewal engendered by art to help people suffering under the conditions of modern life, the group also had tangible, practical goals that they wanted to achieve through their artistic project. As outlined in their manifesto, these included better working conditions for artists and essentially an overhaul of cultural life in Bergen.

“There is so little happening in Bergen, so now we want to present artistic expressions-/ actions that we have experienced abroad. (...) We want to pave the way for new generations of artists in this city, so they won’t have to face a wall of conventional art views and attitudes. (...) Bergen needs a free experimental scene, permanent galleries, a house for all art disciplines, and an art academy with plenty of room for experimentation.»¹⁸⁸

Group 66 used practices like co-ritus to convey that the medium is the message. Paramount to achieving their makeover of the Bergen art scene was to display as many new possibilities in art-making as they could muster. Group 66 wanted to show the city’s art decision-makers that a whole other world of artistic possibilities existed beyond traditional artistic expressions such as painting and sculpture. A 1965 newspaper profile of the group, subtitled “ A collaboration of the arts and an activation of the audience”, describes the group’s eschewing of a unified artistic theme and mediums in favor of experimenting with and showing as many different artistic mediums as possible to show what their generation stands for.¹⁸⁹

These goals may seem modest in comparison to the situationists. However, Group 66 knew the transgressive potential of art and used it to create real, measurable change in the working conditions for Bergensian artists. This is not to say that Group 66 did not have a vision for more meaningful change on a socio-personal level. In an interview in Bergen Arbeiderblad in 1966, Group 66 member Lars Grundt presents this vision as the following:

¹⁸⁸ From *Epoke* (NRK) sent 24.02.1966. quoted in Elsebet Rahlff, “Min tid med Gruppe 66, Konkret Analyse og Samliv”, in *Norsk Avantgarde*, eds. Per Backstrom and Bodil Børset, (Oslo: Novus, 2011,) 283. Translation by the author.

¹⁸⁹ «Gruppe 66-et nytt innslag i bergensk kulturliv: et kunstartenes samarbeid og en aktivisering av publikum.» *Bergens Tidende*. November 26, 1965.

“To me, it seems clear that there must be a balance between the material and the mental. By that, I mean that it is not enough for a normally equipped person to just deal with material things, be it being a bus driver, a bank director, or a housewife. All people need to experience, engage and respond to their big or small mental complexities (...) And outside of work, we live under an ever-increasing pressure of material factors, finances, social prestige, career pressures, etc. Art is intended to create a counterbalance to this pressure. In art, people should be able to find opportunities to experience something different, to respond to their rage and humility. The art should dissolve the knots and relieve the pressures and give people back the appetite for life. Personally, I’m naive enough to think that art can be a kind of therapeutic aid, a treatment method for people with complexes and knots on the soul.”

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From Grundt’s statement, it appears that the group saw their mission to change Bergen’s artistic institutions and landscape as a prerequisite for young artists to create art that would serve people in their everyday lives. Group 66 wanted art to have a tangible impact on and shape people’s everyday lives. They saw art as a therapeutic or instructive vehicle for regular people. They wanted these peoples’ interaction with art to extend beyond merely viewing a painting hanging on a museum wall for a few minutes wholly removed from their day-to-day lives. Beyond the previously mentioned proposed functional changes in Bergen’s cultural life and institutions, Group 66 saw art forms like Co-ritus as a potential therapy for the malaise of the realities of modern everyday life. With this as the artform’s goal, the ritualistic aspect of co-ritus acts as behavioral therapy seemingly priming the participant’s minds towards expansion and structural changes. Group 66 envisions their co-ritus as a “therapeutic aid”¹⁹¹. However, whatever personal transformative potential co-ritus holds remains a subjective experience.

Nonetheless, with co-ritus, Group 66 acts as interlopers and interrupters in the traditional relationship between artwork and spectator. The experience the co-ritus engendered, a communal ritual with potentially transformative powers, is the opposite of the experience produced by typical art encounters in museum or gallery spaces. Given that the focal point of the group’s co-ritus is an abstract expressionist painting, they, perhaps

¹⁹⁰ Per Hovdenakk. “Lasse Anno 66.” *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. February 26, 1966. translation by the author.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*

unknowingly, align their co-ritus to their happening. Their happening, as previously discussed, derives its concept from the American happening tradition which as established in the previous chapter was a response to the ‘end of painting’ orchestrated by the New York school.

Group 66 seems to have recognized that the traditional art exhibition space contributes to the societal alienation they propose their art can cure. Through co-ritus, Group 66 prompted their audience, and art consumers in general, to confront their experience as spectators in traditional museum or gallery spaces, and recognize the limitations imposed on them by such spaces typically exemplified by the white cube gallery. A contextualization of co-ritus and traditional museum culture is found through art critic Brian O’Doherty’s discussion of the white cube gallery.

Out of the Cube, Into the Everyday

The goal of Group 66’s co-ritus was to lift art out of this context and bring it closer to life.¹⁹² The idea behind the co-ritus practice was not to eliminate awareness of the outside world but to bring life and art closer together by merging the awareness of daily life with the artifice and pseudo-spirituality of the traditional art consumption experience. Group 66 believed that their co-ritus was not a dead artwork hanging inside the white cube gallery space but a ritualistic experience happening before the spectators. In his seminal text, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1976), Brian O’Doherty writes that “presence before a work of art means that we absent ourselves in favour of the Eye and the Spectator. (...) For the Spectator and the Eye are conventions which stabilise our missing sense of self. (...) We objectify and consume art, then, to nourish our nonexistent selves or to maintain some aesthetic starveling called “formalist man”.”¹⁹³ O’Doherty asserts that the modernist spectator is alienated from himself by the artwork on the assumption of his presumed incompetency. For O’Doherty, the white gallery walls artworks typically occupy have divorced art from life. O’Doherty’s assertions align with one of Group 66’s overarching goals, which is to have art serve as a therapeutic aid, undoing the alienation caused by modern society.

¹⁹² The following section, “Out of the Cube, Into the Everyday” is an adaption of a previously submitted text for a course in art history, KUN321 Spring 2020, by agreement with the supervisor and the department of Linguistic, Literary, and Aesthetic Studies.

¹⁹³ Brian O’Doherty. *Inside The White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space.* (Santa Monica/ San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1976) 55.

In O’Doherty’s words, the traditional artwork displayed in a sterile space is life-erasing; Group 66 wanted their co-ritus to be life-affirming. By revealing the artistic process to the audience, a veil between artist and spectator is lifted. The spectator is not merely interacting with the artwork mentally but is invited to engage with the artwork through active participation. Through the act of participation, the co-ritus relinquishes the idea of the artwork as a magical object the spectator “prays” to in the non-communal traditional sense. Instead, the practice gives the spectator-participant the tools to unleash their inner creative forces and incorporate them into their own lives. Furthermore, the timelessness and eternal qualities that traditionally adhere to an artwork are attempted to be entirely removed in a Co-ritus. The process itself is the artwork. The artwork does not live beyond the process. According to O’Dougherty, “Process, then, gives us opportunities to eliminate the Eye and the Spectator as well as to institutionalise them.”¹⁹⁴ Through participation, or even merely witnessing the artistic process, viewers can liberate themselves from the eye and the spectator. However, the ritual intended to overthrow the eye and the spectator takes place inside a verified white cube gallery.

Distinct differences between Group 66’s co-ritus and the 1962 premiere co-ritus at Galerie Jensen in Copenhagen become apparent within O’Doherty’s context. The conception of the first iteration of the co-ritus involved the participants transforming the gallery space, erasing the gallery’s white walls. The first co-ritus is more reminiscent of happenings, focusing on the total collaborative transformation of an environment rather than the formality and restrictiveness of Group 66’s co-ritus. Group 66’s disruptive revolution of the Bergen art scene is coming from inside and is sponsored by the Bergen Art Association. Group 66’s co-ritus leaves the locales of Bergen art association untouched; the paint remains firmly within the canvas’ boundaries. Group 66’s co-ritus displays the entirety of the creation process of a painting its audiences would otherwise encounter as a finished product on a museum wall removed from its environment of creation and its production process. Even disregarding the audience participation component for a moment, the live performance of a painting’s creation contrasts with the viewing of an artwork as a spectator within the traditionally sterile museum space. O’Doherty points out that happenings in transformed gallery spaces are examples of tableaux actualized into 3-d spaces. “With the tableau, the gallery “impersonates” other spaces.”¹⁹⁵ In effect, Group 66’s Co-ritus impersonates the artist’s

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 64.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 49.

studio space. O'Doherty asserts that this practice also alienates the spectator by making him take on the role of a trespasser, replacing the effects of the eye and the spectator.¹⁹⁶ However, through the design of their co-ritus, Group 66 still manage to highlight the tension produced by the white cube gallery. Group 66 emphasize this tension through tropes like audience participation. Most extensively, it lets the artwork's (co-ritus') production process constitute its life-span, rather than letting an artwork removed from its production process enjoy a long life hanging on a gallery wall. Paradoxically the painting remaining from the co-ritus was bought by the Bergen Art Association's vice-chairman, who intended to hang the painting on a wall in his chalet.¹⁹⁷ Group 66 claimed that the ritual of co-ritus constitutes the art. As such, it is somewhat perplexing that they sold what in theory should hold no more value than one of the buckets of paint that were also left over from the co-ritus. Perhaps the group's sale of the painting to the vice-chairman is the group playing a trick on him and can be understood as the group further highlighting the general fetishization of objects that runs rampant in the art world. Returning to the general audience's experience, when the material after-life of artistic production is removed, it leads to the question of how art, such as co-ritus, is meant to interact with and affect an audience or group of participants and through what mechanisms?

The Communicative Phase in Art

In a 1966 essay, "The Communicative phase in art: an essay on the death of anti-art," Jens Jørgen Thorsen pinpoints the desired effect of co-ritus: reaching art's communicative phase.¹⁹⁸ "The communicative phase in art consists in establishing communicative fields. CO-RITUS is such an establishment of a field of communication.»¹⁹⁹ Achieving this is dependent upon replacing the spectator with the participant. Perhaps the role of a participant in the art process can be extended to the role of a participant in a revolution. Through this lens, we can perhaps view Thorsen's call for turning spectators into participants as equivalent to a grooming and recruitment process for participants-turned-soldiers in a Situationist revolution. A communicative art is an art that exists in a communal space created by and accessible to participants, which constitutes "the social space."²⁰⁰ When art exists in the social space, it is no longer an extension of "...the aesthetic, of the philosophical, of the

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁹⁷ Rahlff, "Min Tid," 287.

¹⁹⁸ Jens Jørgen Thorsen "The Communicative Phase in Art: An Essay On The Death Of Anti-Art", Jens Jørgen Thorsen, Hardy Strid & Jørgen Nash (eds): *Situationister i Konsten* (Örkelljunga: Edition Bauhaus Situationniste, 1966). Reprinted in Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen, *Cosmonauts*, 256-261.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 256.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*

chronological or of mental space.”²⁰¹ Furthermore, communicative art facilitates an abolishment of art’s historical hierarchy of assigned roles. “The death of the spectator is mutually the death of the classic artist.”²⁰² Group 66’s co-ritus is an example of attempting to achieve this. In their co-ritus, the idea is that audiences should stand on equal footing with the artists and have an equal say in the execution of the ritual. As such, this should, in theory, remove the artistic sovereignty of the artists and the hierarchy of assigned roles. Thorsen asserts that the aftermath of this, that is, the reconfiguration of art’s relationships, is dealt with in communicative art, with co-ritus re-assembling art’s relationships.

Thorsen further claims that “the communicative phase of art is not death of art, but its expansion.”²⁰³ This expansion consists of several points:

- a) Through turning the spectator into a participator
- b) Through turning the artist into an urbanisor
- c) Through turning the possibilities of art into the possibilities of the social space
- d) Through turning the functional urbanism into a communicative one
- e) Through turning the fixed picture into an un-composed one
- f) Through turning communism into communicativism
- g) Through turning passing (derive) into CO-RITUS, etc.”²⁰⁴

The expansion of art is necessary because, according to Thorsen, “individualism is utopian.”²⁰⁵ It is individualism that, since the renaissance, has dominated European culture and created a divide between the individual and the group. “It,” individualism, “produced the spectator, the consumer.”²⁰⁶ The Drakabygget artists further claim that the same forces are responsible for communism, cubism, liberalism, and fascism, and state that the time for utopias is over. Through co-ritus, they are tackling one face of individualism’s effects by erecting an alternative to so-called anti-art.

Thorsen identifies Anti-art as the antithesis of co-ritus. In his essay, Thorsen calls Brecht and the epic theatre a response to societal alienation formulated in dramatic theatre.²⁰⁷

Thorsen writes that “the epic theatre inherently creates estrangement, the dialectical opposite

²⁰¹ *Ibid*

²⁰² *Ibid*, 257.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 260.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*

²⁰⁵ Jens Jørgen Thorsen, Jørgen Nash, and Hardy Strid. «CO-RITUS MANIFESTO» translation by Jakob Jakobsen in Bolt Rasmussen and Jakobsen eds. *Cosmonauts*. 125

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*

²⁰⁷ Thorsen, “Communicative,” in *Cosmonauts*, 257-58.

to alienation.”²⁰⁸ Through the union of the epic and the dramatic theatre, Thorsen explains that the absurd theatre came into existence, intended to oppose Brecht by free art. “Mixing the absurd theatre with Zen Buddhism, Happenings rose, growing into environments, Fluxus, etc.»²⁰⁹ Thorsen identifies, at one point avant-garde, artworks by the likes of Oldenburg, Kaprow, and Vostell as examples of anti-art, leaving”... the spectator just as open as does the so-called open performance.”²¹⁰ Thorsen further elaborates on the functioning of audiences in happenings, writing “an audience at a Happening is still sitting gazing as if it were in a theatre or in front of a painting looking for the true basic conception. The conclusion: is open art any different from basic conception? Is it still art?»²¹¹

As such, co-ritus positions itself as an anti-happening. Interestingly, Group 66 includes their co-ritus in the same lineup of evening events as their happening, calling into question either how deeply engaged or in agreement Group 66 was with Thorsen’s concepts of anti-art.

Co-ritus is essentially an intervention into the art world and its dictation of art’s value (both literally and figuratively) in society. Like Group 66, Thorsen believes that through co-ritus old systems will be torn down, and in their place, a new way of life will form within the communicative phase.²¹² This new way of life is centered around integrating art and everyday life in a way that seeks to alleviate man’s suffering and alienation by society.²¹³ A co-ritus is one strategy for achieving the communicative phase.

However, the idea of a communicative phase in art whose purpose is to tear down the barriers of both art and people alike leads to the very formula and conceit of the co-ritus to be called into question. Through participating in the ritual that is co-ritus, the audience is received into an arguably privileged space. Within this space, the artists are granted greater control and determinacy over the aesthetic process, and audience’s response than they would be granted had they let their audience interact with said artwork through a more traditional medium in a typical gallery or museum space. The artists are giving the audience a sense of comradeship and belonging by allowing them to partially join in on the process. The process’ purported outcome is clearly stated by artists--raising the rhetorical question of what happens to an artwork and its spectator when the critical distance between the two is completely removed?

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 257.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 258.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 258.

²¹² See Thorsen, Nash, Strid. “Co-Ritus manifesto,” in *Cosmonauts*, 125.

²¹³ See Per Hovdenakk. “Lasse Anno 66.” *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. February 26, 1966. translation by the author.

The Situationist Happening

The co-ritus' originators adamantly claim that happenings belong in the category of anti-art, to which they present co-ritus as the alternative. In their co-ritus manifesto, Thorsen, Nash, and Strid assert that the European cultural tradition is still trapped in the individualistic heritage of the renaissance. "From here there is only one position to view things from at a time: the position of the artist or the audience."²¹⁴ Thorsen, Nash, and Strid claim that "the cultural ritual" bred by the renaissance tradition "made the exhibition a confining trap," or supported the white cube gallery space to use O'Doherty's vernacular, which happenings still fall victim to.²¹⁵ However, it seems rather evident that co-ritus have more in common with happenings than their artists would like to admit. As established, the Drakabygget artists were submerged in situationism, and they connected the co-ritus artform to this tradition. Nevertheless, as perhaps sensed by Group 66 and evident by their inclusion of both practices in their series of evening events, the two share, on the surface, a common performance framework. This observation has already been explored by the art historian Jon Erickson who notes that "for all their differences, both kinds of performance – the situation and the happening - share a common ground in "everydayness," and even a common art-historical starting point."²¹⁶ Comparing happenings and situations, Erickson explains that both artforms derive their central ideal of reconnecting art and life from dada and surrealism. However, as explored in this thesis' previous chapter, the American happening artists adopted the traditions of dada and surrealism devoid of their original social context. Happening and Situationist artists "both are concerned with either evading or confronting a commercialized art establishment coupled with an administrated culture."²¹⁷ The overarching goal of happenings and co-ritus are roughly the same, but the artists' numerous social and cultural differences reveal themselves in their methods and aesthetics.

As established in the previous chapter, happenings like co-ritus were concerned with changing the conception of audiences. Like happenings, including their foray into the medium, Group 66's co-ritus permitted its audience to participate under the guise that their participation is directing the co-ritus' focal point; the painting. However, unlike happenings,

²¹⁴ Thorsen, Nash, Strid. "Co-Ritus manifesto," in *Cosmonauts*, 125.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*

²¹⁶ Jon Erickson. "The Spectacle of the Anti-Spectacle: Happenings and the Situationist International." *Discourse* (Berkeley, Calif.) 14, no. 2 (1992): 37.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*

co-ritus had emerged from a tradition involved with two other activities of intervention: détournement and dérive. Détournement (diversion) “consisted of appropriating the products of popular and mass culture and, through physically altering them, turning their ideological subtext back upon themselves, and revealing their manipulative effects upon consciousness.”²¹⁸ On the other hand, the dérive (drift) is to time, what détournement is to a particular space. More specifically, the practice of dérive, or drifting, consisted of wandering through urban spaces based on an awareness of psychogeography to identify the controlling structures of urban spaces. In his essay on the communicative phase in art, Thorsen explicitly states that he wants to turn passing (derive) into Co-Ritus.²¹⁹ Thorsen believes that the derive is outdated and that the *Verfremdung*-situation that operates the derive is in co-ritus replaced by communicative activity.²²⁰

With Group 66’s co-ritus, détournement is the situationist quality or technique that most overtly presents itself. Group 66 is diverting the abstract expressionism painting and painter by recontextualizing the format by having it temporarily exist in a communal ritualistic space. Furthermore, the group détourne the white cube gallery space, in this instance represented by the locales of the Bergen Art Association. A review of the co-ritus in the newspaper *Bergens Tidende* notes that “the performance shows several things, including the conciliatory, that the group can joke with what we must believe it takes with more seriousness than anything else – modern painting.”²²¹

As established in the previous chapter, Allan Kaprow identified the artistic lineage of happenings from abstract expressionism, but with Group 66’s co-ritus, the focal point of the ritual is an action painting.²²² The painting resulting from Group 66’s co-ritus is a large, somewhat typical abstract expressionist painting. Its sheer size envelopes the onlooker confronted with great gestural strokes of paint that appear almost tactile as if one can see and feel the artists’ visceral movements. Merely viewing the painting outside of its context, it could easily be confused as a traditional painting in the dominating style of the decade before Group 66’s co-ritus. When trying to investigate and understand what Group 66’s co-ritus was, the painting left behind is an interesting entry-point as it connotes power structures the

²¹⁸ Erickson, 46.

²¹⁹ Thorsen. “Communicative” in *Cosmonauts*, 260.

²²⁰ *Ibid*

²²¹ Li. ««Ko-ritus» i Kunstforeningen.» *Bergens Tidende*. 25 March, 1966. Translation by the author. Original text: «Forestillingen viser flere ting, blant annet det forsonende at gruppen kan fleipe med det vi må tro den betrakter med større alvor enn noe annet - moderne maleri.»

²²² In this context I view action painting as a sub-category of abstract expressionism, distinct from other sub-categories like color-field painting and abstract imagists.

group is actively opposing. Looking at the historical context of the co-ritus' painting may hold some answers to understanding some of the co-ritus' intentions and mechanisms. The painting displays what American art critic Harold Rosenberg famously called the outward turning nature of abstract expressionism or an arena on which to act.²²³ Rosenberg's existentialist ideas helped support the image of abstract expressionist art as offering the onlooker an intimate view of the artist's creative process. These ideas perpetuated the notion that such works offer a piece of the artist's subconscious mind in the vein of Breton and Freud. This narrative emphasizes the individual artist, and the spectator is relegated to the role of consumer expected to absorb the artist's encounter with the canvas rather than participate in the process.²²⁴ Herein lies one of the distinguishing features of co-ritus. However, in his 1958 essay, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," the originator of the happening, artist Allan Kaprow writes, "Pollock's near destruction of this tradition may be a return to the point where art was more actively involved in ritual, magic, and life than we have known in the recent past. If so, it is an exceedingly important step and in its superior way offers a solution to the complaints of those who would have us put a bit of life into art. But what do we do now?"²²⁵ Group 66 and Jens Jørgen Thorsen seemingly answers Kaprow's question with co-ritus. Although the painting remaining from the ritual may look like a typical action painting, it represents a collective creation process.

Whether this choice is a Freudian slip or intended as pure comedy is left for the viewer to grapple with. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the early American happenings were a direct reaction to the legacy of abstract expressionist painters. The happenings ephemeral and distinctly non-commodifiable nature meant that their art could not be peddled as symbols of

²²³ Harold Rosenberg. "The American action painters." In *Reading Abstract Expressionism*, pp. 189-198. Yale University Press, 1991. "At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena on which to act – rather than a space in which re-produce, re-design, analyze, or "express" and object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event." P.190.

²²⁴ By absorbing the artists encounter with the canvas, I refer to the expectation that the viewer should form a one-to-one relationship with the painting, in which the painting is seen as an individual. See for example, Mark Rothko. "Statement." *Tiger's Eye. New York*, vol.1, no.2, (Dec. 1947):.44. Also this relates to the exchange between surrealism and Abstract Expressionism through their use of automatic painting. See Martica Sawin. "'The Third Man,' or Automatism American Style." *Art Journal* 47, no. 3 (1988): 181–86. <https://doi.org/10.2307/777044>.

Furthermore I relate this to Amelia Jones' «Pollockian Performative». See Amelia Jones. "Body Art: Performing the Subjective." (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.)

; Also, See Jones, Caroline. "Finishing School: John Cage and the Abstract Expressionist Ego." *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 628–65.

²²⁵ Kaprow, "Legacy of Jackson Pollock" in *Essays*, 6-7.

American artistic triumph and provide products for the capitalist art market.²²⁶ Instead, “to the extent that a Happening is not a commodity but a brief event, from the standpoint of any publicity it may receive, it may become a state of mind.”²²⁷

However, Erickson writes that “it is apparent today that one can no longer identify the commodity with an *object*, when time and ideas themselves can be commodified.”²²⁸ Yet, in a post-industrial society, the move away from art as a product to art as experience or service, the happening format does not circumvent capitalism in the manner its artists may have hoped.²²⁹

Erickson points out that happenings, unlike situationist activities, were still recognized as art events. “Thus, whatever occurred within the space and duration of the happening was designed to free the participants within a collective enterprise that was more a social “reality testing” within a circumscribed area than an interventionary practice within the actual spaces of everyday life.”²³⁰ However, Erickson further explains that the happening, “...-containing within itself the destruction of aesthetic success (abstract expressionism) as well as the erection of impermanent structures of sociality.”²³¹ This shows how much more closely related to happenings than to situationist activity, co-ritus was. Co-ritus quite literally follows Erickson’s explanation of the happening as a site-specific action, in that the co-ritus strips the abstract expressionist painting of its power by removing its objecthood and individualism and replacing it with an ephemeral communal ritual.

Furthermore, both happenings and situations presumed that post-war prosperity and modernization of society served as the foundation for a transformation of everyday life, or rather the re-uniting of art and life.²³² Erickson notes that, “for both, the regimentation of the work ethic was to be replaced by a celebratory focus on self-creation: manufactured needs were to be replaced by individually expressed desires.”²³³ Or rather, as expressed by Group 66 artist Lars Grundt, “art is intended to create a counterbalance to this pressure,” and in art

²²⁶ See Frances Stonor Saunders. *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*. (New York: The New Press, 1999,) 252-278.

²²⁷ Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene,” in *Essays*, 25-26.

²²⁸ Erickson, 41.

²²⁹ «This attempt to outwit commodification by creating temporal and self-destructive works was repeated some years later by conceptual artists, unconscious of a major shift in capitalism itself: from a *production-* to an *information-* or *service-*oriented society.” Erickson, 40-41.

²³⁰ Erickson, 52.

²³¹ *Ibid*

²³² *Ibid*, 53.

²³³ *Ibid*

people can experience something new and potentially, "...dissolve the knots and relieve the pressures and give people back the appetite for life."²³⁴

"Both happeners and situationists pursued the authenticity of self-produced experience."²³⁵ This similar type of self-produced experience offered the co-ritus' participants a counterbalance to the pressures of everyday life, as Lars Grundt put it. By participating in the co-ritus, the audience can tie their artistic experience to the production process, which in turn can be used as a blueprint in their daily lives.

(The Illusion of) Audience Participation

"The position of the audience is impossible within CO-RITUS. CO-RITUS wants to abolish the notion of audience- not like Fluxus that bores them into leaving or makes fools of them by making dry caricatures of European theater - but by making the audience co-creators."²³⁶

Concerning the co-ritus' audience/participants, an interesting dichotomy exists between the audience as game pieces and active game players. On the one hand, according to Thorsen, "art is simultaneously an ethical and an aesthetic way to activate human beings."²³⁷ However, it is unclear if ethics and aesthetics are reconcilable in Group 66's Co-ritus, or in its other iterations. In fact, it remains unclear if there ever was a 'true' co-ritus, or if such a thing only existed as a platonic ideal in the writings of Thorsen and Nash. Jens Jørgen Thorsen claimed that "by realizing the idea that art is not something which unfolds either inside the artist or inside the spectator, but is a game unfolding between people, we are contributing to the renewal of the terms of art, the process of creation and social construction."²³⁸

One of the primary critiques against Group 66's co-ritus was the discrepancy between the promised audience participation and how the event played out. Coverage of the Co-ritus by the conservative newspaper *Bergens Tidende* reveals some inconsistencies with Group 66's Co-ritus and the Co-ritus model designed by Jørgen Nash and Jens Jørgen Thorsen. The newspaper describes the audience as not particularly large but strongly activated as if on the

²³⁴ Per Hovdenakk, «Lasse Anno 66» *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. February 26, 1966. Translation by the author.

²³⁵ Erickson, 54.

²³⁶ Thorsen, "Co-Ritus Interview," in *Cosmonauts* 209.

The following section, "(The Illusion of) Audience Participation" is an adaption of a previously submitted text for a course in art history, KUN321 Spring 2020, by agreement with the supervisor and the department of Linguistic, Literary, and Aesthetic Studies.

²³⁷ *Ibid*

²³⁸ *Ibid*

brink of grabbing paint brushed and joining in on the process physically, as is supposed to happen during a true Co-ritus.²³⁹ Furthermore, the article describes how Stefan Rink, referred to as the conductor, “decided” the style and technique. This less than glowing review reveals that Group 66’s Co-ritus interpretation did not fully adhere to the ideas prescribed by Nash and Thorsen. The audience did not physically participate in the painting ritual; instead, they are reduced to cheerleaders, cheering on the artists as they perform the ritual. Even if we suppose that the audience’s cheers and suggestions were guiding the Co-ritus, the power remains in the hands of the artists in front of the audience, holding the paintbrush and performing the ritual. In fact, Group 66’s happening featured more interaction between artists and participants, most prominently demonstrated by the physical interaction between Kismul and Rink. This hierarchical model prevents Group 66’s Co-ritus from being a true Co-ritus. Rather than letting the audience fully unleash their latent creative energies in the ritual, the audience watches the two artists at work. As a result, the audience is in the odd position of half spectator, half participant. Instead of fully participating in the ritual, the audience is watching two male artists complete an abstract expressionist painting that is sold immediately after to a male member of the bourgeoisie so that he can decorate his chalet with it.

A similar dynamic played out during Nash and Thorsen’s co-ritus premiere at Galerie Jensen in 1962. These two instances show how deeply embedded the socially constructed roles of artist and audience are to both artist and audience. Despite this social conditioning, the motives behind the co-ritus should be questioned. On one level, the co-ritus is highlighting and attempting to dismantle the artist-spectator division. However, the implications of the practice’s claim that participants too can be artists and apply co-ritus to their everyday lives should be examined. On the surface, the ambitions of Nash, Thorsen, and Group 66 sound benign, making it easy to forget that both groups are driven by revolutionary dreams, albeit on different involvement levels. Hence why writers like Jakob Jakobsen have referred to co-ritus as a “cult-like activity.”²⁴⁰ The cult-like initiation process co-ritus participants are privy to most glaringly reveals itself in the role played by the artist in the ritual. Co-ritus does not display the same overt connections to theatre as happenings. However, co-ritus appears determined to remove the artist with a capital a, which among many things, displays a tinge of Artaudian cruelty in the same manner as happenings. Artaud writes that “the old duality between author and director will be dissolved, replaced by a sort

²³⁹Li. “«Ko-ritus» i kunstforeningen”. Bergens Tidende. March 25, 1966.

²⁴⁰ Jakobsen. “The Artistic Revolution,” in *Expect Anything*, 260.

of unique Creator upon whom will devolve the double responsibility of the spectacle and plot.”²⁴¹ In co-ritus, this “unique Creator” is the ritual’s organizers/artists. Artaud’s *Theatre of Cruelty* uses a variety of effects to override the audience’s senses. Co-ritus lets the audience/participants do this themselves in a group setting as a part of the communal ritual. The effects and devices used to activate the audience to break away from the western cultural tradition are different, but the purported outcome aspires to comparable results.

Conclusion

Presenting themselves as socially inclined artists, Group 66 offered their co-ritus audience a re-evaluation of our collective relationship to and experience of art. By displaying and emphasizing art’s physicality and collective qualities, the group presented an alternative to the sterile and removed relationship between the spectator and the artwork. For Group 66, this contrast translated to the plights of everyday life, and they hoped that through co-ritus, people could learn to stand up to the capitalist machine by re-uniting art and life. However, as this chapter has explored, the implications of uniting politically progressive art and everyday life are not as benign as they may appear on the surface. The danger or somewhat false promise held by Group 66’s co-ritus is the promise of self-actualization. Co-ritus, as a concept, does little to promote cogitation in its acolytes. In retrospect, can the practice be seen as an example of the type of activity fueled by a desire for individuality that underwrites a neo-liberal economy? Perhaps unwittingly, Group 66’s co-ritus is not only symptomatic of a new generation, as they claim, but display through art the social and individual changes in values that followed the move from Keynesian economic policies towards a free market. Perhaps these types of artworks, like Group 66’s Co-ritus, display an inherent incompatibility between Marxist theory and art. This was a concern of Debord’s and disagreement over art’s role in the revolution was one of the causes behind the exit of Nash and others from the SI. If this potential incompatibility is left unacknowledged, artworks or artistic models like co-ritus can, in theory, peddle neo-liberal values under the guise of comradeship and equality. If this is the case, it seems that the promise of individual development under the name of psychic renewal is what Group 66 use to attract audiences, effectively recruiting them to join the revolution.

²⁴¹ Antonin Artaud. *The Theatre and Its Double*. trans. Mary Caroline Richards. (New York: Grove Press, 1958) 94.

CHAPTER 5: Psychic Renewal and the Individual : Group 66's Audience

The two Group 66 artistic practices, co-ritus and happening, discussed in the two previous chapters, explored how these two practices handled audience participation. As explored, the co-ritus and the happening dealt with their audience in different yet similar manners. This chapter looks closely at the techniques and strategies employed in the two practices. The question this chapter grapples with is what were Group 66's intentions for their audience/participants of their co-ritus and happening, and how do the mechanics of these two practices reveal these intentions? In the group's manifesto, Lars Grundt asks, "Why should Bergen teeter behind like tepid tea water as the whole world now psychically renews from the stable, academic norms?"²⁴² This chapter looks to the idea of psychic renewal to explore the relationship between Group 66's happening and co-ritus and their audiences. It appears that Group 66 thought that evoking change in the individual could lead to change in society. Changing the consciousness of the individual could reverberate throughout society and be a catalyst for collective change. However, there is another facet to Grundt's statement. The call to move away from established norms, is equally a call to action for artists and a challenge to traditional art history. However, to unlock how Group 66 tried to activate psychic renewal in their audiences it is necessary to look outside of art history. Looking to sociology and theatre studies allows for a deeper understanding of the underpinnings behind the term psychic renewal.

As observed, in a previous chapter concerning the group's happening practice, the term psychic renewal is related to Artaud's concept of a poetic state, which he discusses in his *Theater of Cruelty (Second Manifesto)*.²⁴³ Within the poetic state, which Artaud describes as a transcendent experience, individuals may be awoken to a higher state of consciousness, which equates to a psychic renewal in Group 66's vernacular.²⁴⁴ This chapter will look closer at the Artaudian and Brechtian techniques, introduced in previous chapters, employed on Group 66's happening and co-ritus audiences to ignite psychic renewal in the individual.

In addition to looking closer at some of the techniques introduced in the two previous chapters, this chapter will examine the role of the everyday in Group 66's happening and co-

²⁴² Lars Grundt. «Group 66 Manifesto.» *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. February 26, 1966. Translation by the author.

²⁴³ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, 123.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*

ritus. It appears that the audiences pay for their entry ticket into Group 66's co-ritus and happening with their everyday lives. The audience serves as a commodity in the artworks; they materially represent the everyday lives of regular people. However, the audience also serves a secondary function in Group 66's greater vision. By shifting the consciousness of each individual audience member, they can act as agents for change on behalf of Group 66 out in society. As this chapter will explore, there is a fine line between the artist's wish for art and everyday life to be reunited and the necessity of the audiences' everyday life to serve as material for their artistic productions.

Audience Participation

It appears that to ingratiate their vision for change with their happening and co-ritus audiences, Group 66 wished to use these two artistic productions to ignite a state of psychic renewal in individual audience members. The premise presented by the group is that both of these artistic productions are intended to serve the group's overall vision. However, did the happening and co-ritus employ the same techniques to achieve a higher consciousness level in the individual audience member/participant?

The previous chapter established that through their co-ritus, Group 66 invited their audience to participate in a collective ritual meant to abolish the individualism of the artwork and this chapter mainly looked at the co-ritus through a situationist framework. However, many of the theatrical techniques discussed in relation to the group's happening appear to be present in their co-ritus as well. One of the co-ritus concept's inventors, Jens Jørgen Thorsen, claimed that "an audience at a Happening is still sitting gazing as if it were in a theatre or in front of a painting looking for the true basic conception. The conclusion: is open art any different from basic conception? Is it still art?"⁵⁶

As previously established, Group 66's co-ritus iteration underdelivered on the promised audience participation. It could be claimed that the audience of the co-ritus was assembled as a theatre audience observing two artists creating a painting in the same manner they would watch a play. The audience passivity in this instance leads to wanting to examine what techniques they were subjected to, as psychic renewal seems not to have been gained through their actions but rather indirectly imposed on them by the co-ritus' operations.

Some of the utilized techniques, adopted from theatre like Brecht's alienation effect and Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*, were introduced in previous chapters. As explored in the third chapter, "It's all Happening," Susan Sontag identified the Artaudian abuse audiences at

happenings are subjected to, writing that a happening “is designed to stir the modern audience from its cozy emotional anesthesia.”²⁴⁵

A review of Group 66’s happening published in a local newspaper seems to echo Sontag’s point. “The mistake at Group 66’s event last night at the Arts Association was that the program was not in relation to the audience. If you want to blow off the audience, you have to show that you do, make a real point of it. As it was the great indifference among the performers prevailed.”²⁴⁶ Perhaps it is precisely the artists’ indifference towards the audience that can be read as constituting cruelty. Using Sontag’s definition of a happening’s cruelty, Group 66’s audience members serve as objects in the production to a certain extent. Their role as a mumbling choir is a crucial component of the happening. If we follow Sontag, the objectification of the audience, constitutes a form of terror in that it not only directs but also manipulates and controls the audience. Art historian Judith Rodenbeck, looking at happenings, has pointed out that the entire conceit of the artform implies passivity, as in “it’s happening to me.”²⁴⁷ Rodenbeck writes that this implies “an interesting desubjectification: the presence at an event of an objectified person.”²⁴⁸ Applying Rodenbeck’s observation to Group 66’s happening and co-ritus, what material does the audience as objects in the artform contain, and what purpose do they serve in the artists’ formulations of the two events? Or rather, from the artists’ point of view, what are the audience’s contributions?

Most strikingly, in the second half of the happening, the audience, under the leadership of Kismul, seemingly rebels against this abuse and takes back control by attempting to douse the conductor with a bucket of water. The audience also crumbles up the newspapers they were mumbling from earlier, effectively abolishing themselves from one of the sources Group 66 claims exercises control over their everyday lives. If nothing else, Group 66 allows the audience to play out a scenario in which they attack the man exercising control over their actions. On a micro-scale, the audience is confronted with a dynamic Group 66 claim that plays out in their everyday lives and is responsible for a person’s societal alienation and is the cause of their suffering. According to Group 66 member Lars Grundt, “art is intended to create a counterbalance to this pressure. In art, people should find

²⁴⁵ Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 275.

²⁴⁶ E.E, «Gruppe 66’s Mandagsmanifestasjon», *Bergens Tidende*. March 29, 1966.

. Original text: Feilen ved Gruppe 66’s manifestasjon i Kunstforeningen i går kveld var at hele opplegget ikke sto i forhold til publikum. Skal man gi blaffen i tilskuerne, får man vise at man gjør det, lage et skikkelig poeng av det. Som det var, hersket den store likegyldighet blant de opptrædende i så måte. Translation by the author.

²⁴⁷ Judith Rodenbeck, "Madness and Method: Before Theatricality." *Grey Room* (2003), 59.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*

opportunities to experience something different, to respond to their rage and humility.”²⁴⁹ However, Grundt fails to mention the tactics employed by the artists to provide audiences with something different.

A Ritual for Everyday Life

“You renew everyday life for us.”²⁵⁰

As explored in this thesis’ two previous chapters, Group 66 emphasizes the interplay between the everyday and art, but what is the everyday in this context? Did Group 66 want to reunite everyday art and life by enriching ordinary people’s everyday lives with art, or was the everyday content for their artistic practices? The group professes to empower people by giving them access to an artistic ritual to enrich their everyday lives through artistic mediums such as co-ritus or a happening.

Through their emphasis on daily life, Group 66 approaches a terrain outside of the art theoretical landscape they usually operate. This thesis’ two previous chapters have explored how Group 66 use and situate themselves in relation to the two artistic concepts of happening and co-ritus. However, in their use of the everyday there are no obvious art historical concepts to explore the group’s use of daily life as both material and as impetus for artistic expression. As such, this discussion will rely on theories of the everyday by the French philosopher Michel de Certeau. Through de Certeau as a vehicle, this discussion will explore the tensions found in the interim between the everyday in Group 66’s co-ritus and happening practices.

Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* outlines a theoretical investigation into the everyday practices of users (consumers) to show the systems of operational combinations that make up a “culture”.²⁵¹ De Certeau sees consumption as a creative act and is interested in the *spielraum* of the consumer. Applied to the topic of art consumption, the consumer is, for example, the ordinary museumgoer who, in his interaction with art, is afforded a marginalized personal space consisting of his unmediated interaction or consumption of art. However, as explored in previous chapters, an unmediated personal

²⁴⁹ Per Hovdenakk. «Lasse Anno 66» *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. February 26, 1966. Translation by author.

²⁵⁰ «Dere Fornyer Hverdagen for Oss» *Morgenavisen*, March 14, 1966. Original text :Dere fornyer hverdagen for oss. Translation by the author.

²⁵¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Steven Rendall. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988)

experience between spectator and art is challenging within the white cube gallery or museum. Many of de Certeau's observations apply to Group 66 and their co-ritus and happening audiences. On the surface, Group 66 and their co-ritus and happening formats offers users a way out; however, through their strategies and tricks, they take on the role of the dominant operators of culture, luring audiences into a new culture by inverse use of popular art practices. The group uses participation as an artistic strategy. De Certeau differentiates between strategies and tactics. Defining a strategy as "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment".²⁵² A strategy is composed of an *espace propre* capable of "generating relations with an exterior object distinct from it."²⁵³ A tactic, on the other hand, lacks "a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization)" and must instead rely on time to seize on the opportunity to insinuate "itself into the other's space, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance."²⁵⁴ Overall, Group 66 and their artistic production make use of tactics to insinuate themselves into the roam of cultural decision-makers and their arenas. However, in the relationship between the group's co-ritus and happening and its audiences, the audiences are left with tactics, and Group 66 inhabits the role of the dominator in their proper place, making use of strategy.

De Certeau proposes that consumers can interject into the dominant narrative by engaging in the subtle art of renters. He writes, "imbricated within the strategies of modernity (which identify creation with invention of a personal language, whether cultural or scientific), the procedures of contemporary consumption appear to constitute a subtle art of "renters" who know how to insinuate their countless differences into the dominant text."²⁵⁵ In the case of co-ritus, the renters de Certeau refers to are, in theory, both the artists and the participants. In Group 66's Co-ritus, the artists use the dominant style of abstract expressionism and play with the style's conventions and history. Their intervention consists of employing tricks that range from mockery and parody to protest, all based on the idea of inverse use of the style's conventions and framework by basing their act on turning the audience into participants and supposedly letting these participants have a say in the ritual's unfolding.

²⁵² *Ibid*, xix

²⁵³ *Ibid*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, xxii.

Although Group 66 and co-ritus criticize the art world and art history by removing the figure of the individual artist genius, they inadvertently reveal that they too, perhaps unwittingly and more egregiously, through their use and abuse of participants, embody the solipsistic pathology of their generation and profession. By letting the audience believe that they are participating in the co-ritus through the vocal direction of the painting/ritual constitutes a level of trickery that by far outweighs those employed in traditional museum spaces. Co-ritus is one operational strategy that constitutes Thorsen's proposed communicative phase of art. The primary mechanism of Group 66's Co-ritus' operational system is to play on ordinary peoples' sense of alienation and disenfranchisement by traditional artistic mediums. As explored in the previous chapter on Group 66's co-ritus, the cheers and excitement of the co-ritus' audience/participants are enforced by the belief that they are directing the ritual. This belief is a strategy employed by the ritual's orchestrators to confirm their dominance.

As for Group 66's happening, a similar scene unfolds. In the happening's first part, the mumbling choir, consisting of the audience, "read" from newspapers under the direction of Stefan Rink as conductor. Perhaps this scene can be read through de Certeau's terms as constituting the use of strategy by Group 66. In this instance, Group 66 constitutes the dominant force exercising their power over their subject, the audience. However, in the second part of the happening a shift occurs in this dynamic as the audience using trickery attempts to overthrow their dominators' strategy. The audience's tricks consist of objecting through various means by using the opportunities that present themselves to insinuate themselves into the artwork, in this case, either by rumpling up newspapers or attempting to douse the conductor with a bucket of water.

De Certeau writes that « everyday life invents itself by *poaching* in countless ways on the property of others.»²⁵⁶ De Certeau refers to the consumer as a poacher of cultural products or experiences. However, with Group 66, this dynamic is inverted, and the question becomes who is poaching whom? Although, as previously explored, Group 66 present themselves as egalitarian minded artists, in the cases of their happening and co-ritus the group appear to be poaching the everyday lives of their audiences to be used as material in these two artistic productions. Both the happening and the co-ritus are contingent upon the participation of audiences, and that these audiences utilize their daily lives to fuel the artworks.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, xii.

As cultural theorist Ben Highmore has pointed out, the very idea of everyday life implies otherhood. If everyday day life consists of the mundane activities of regular people, Highmore asserts that the everyday is expressed by dominated people and is juxtaposed by the existence of an elite or otherwise privileged people who lead a non-traditional everyday life.²⁵⁷

However, suppose we accept that models of participatory art or rituals such as co-ritus and happenings serve as an antidote for the ailments of everyday people. In that case, we run into the realization that such artistic productions then and now are privileged spaces. If group 66 placed the actual responsibility of participation and production on the audience, this question would be moot. However, the practice breeds exclusivity and privilege because Group 66 instructs a select group of people in what they sell as a ritual for everyday life. On the other hand, as argued by art historian Patrick van Rossem, controlling the aesthetic process and response was of utmost importance to artists producing participatory art in the 1960s.²⁵⁸ By turning the audience into participants acting on instructions, as in Group 66's co-ritus, the artists retain their control of the artwork. Unlike traditional artworks, it has greater determinacy in the spectators' experience of said artwork. Group 66's happening and Co-ritus are presented as interventions into everyday life. However, the participants' everyday lives are leveraged and re-appropriated as material for the artworks. To circle back to de Certeau, the audiences are presented with a set of beliefs and shown both *faire-croire* and *savoir-faire*.²⁵⁹ If this is the mechanism at work can the audience meaningfully participate and exert control over the ritual?

De Certeau puts forth the concept of *La Perruque* (the wig), the worker's own work disguised as the work for his employer or « « enunciative » » practices (manipulations of imposed spaces, tactics relative to particular situations), the possibility is opened up of analyzing the immense field of an "art of practice" ...²⁶⁰

"For example, *la perruque* grafts itself onto the system of the industrial assembly line (its counterpoint, in the same place), as a variant of the activity which, outside the factory (in another place), takes the form of *bricolage*."²⁶¹ In the case of Group 66's co-ritus and

²⁵⁷ See Ben Highmore. *The Everyday Life Reader*. (London: Routledge, 2002.)

²⁵⁸ Patrick van Rossem. "Getting Up-close and Personal with Aunt May and Uncle Jim: Some thoughts on how to deal with your audience in the 1960s." *Performance Research* 22, no. 3 (2017): 69-76.

²⁵⁹ De Certeau, *Everyday*, 178.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 24.

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, 29.

happening it is its artists who are wearing the proverbial wig. The Bergen art association has granted them free artistic reigns. Yet, they apply tactics whose purpose is to indoctrinate the audience in a way that would not benefit organizations like the art association (i.e., art devoid of any economic potential).²⁶² Group 66 “succeeds in “putting one over” on the established order on its home ground.”²⁶³ With Group 66’s happening and Co-ritus there exists a continuous two-dimensional power struggle in which the artists simultaneously take on the role as the dominator and the dominated.

De Certeau asks what consumers “make of what they “absorb,” receive, and pay for?”²⁶⁴ The same question should be directed at Group 66’s audiences. Are audiences able to interject, either personally or socially, into the co-ritus or happening, or are they left playing the role of the pure receiver? If so, this position is more prominent in, for instance, the co-ritus ritual than between the traditional artwork and viewer, as the artists yield more control over the co-ritus artwork as it unfolds than if audiences were to encounter its remnants on a museum wall.

How then can, if at all, audiences circumvent the power relationship between themselves and the artists? De Certeau, writes that “...the setting aside of the subject-object relation or of the discourse-object relation is the abstraction that generates the illusion of “authorship.”²⁶⁵ Another way to answer the question of the audience’s potential circumvention of an oppressive situation is that in theory the mark left on either the co-ritus or the happening by the audience alters it, and the notion that such artworks could not exist without an audience.

Maybe what Group 66 hope to grant their audiences through co-ritus and happenings is not necessarily a consciousness shifting experience, but the ultimate do it yourself-instructions for life which conveniently align with the artists’ political inclinations. However, if Group 66’s co-ritus and happening serve as induction rituals with the idea of adopting said rituals into one’s daily life, a shift in consciousness would eventually take place.

It appears that to begin to understand the mechanisms behind Group 66’s co-ritus and happening we need to look outside of art history. Given that one of Group 66’s goals was to challenge and change the norms imposed on artists by traditional art history, it is perhaps not

²⁶² I do not mean to imply that the art association is devoid of any altruistic ideals, but in the context of this discussion they represent the dominant order.

²⁶³ *Ibid*, 26.

See also Dezeuze, Anna. “Assemblage, Bricolage, and the Practice of Everyday Life.” *Art Journal* 67, no. 1 (2008): 31–37. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20068580>.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 31.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 44.

unexpected that an answer is not found within the confines of established art history.

Durkheim, a central figure in the sociological tradition in which de Certeau operates, defines the art of operating as;

« An art is a system of ways of operating that are adjusted to special ends and the product of either traditional experience communicated through education or the personal experience of the individual.”²⁶⁶ Following Durkheim, Group 66’s audience can only “acquire” the artwork by either watching or participating as it unfolds in real time. By “acquiring” the artwork, audiences are initiated into Group 66’s vision. Group 66 asserts their vision through their art, which is contingent upon leveraging people’s everyday lives to serve as content that re-affirms Group 66’s vision and ideals.

However, how and by what techniques do the audience acquire these artworks? If we assume that an acquisition of these artworks is confirmed by the psychic renewal of an individual audience member, how exactly do the techniques employed by the artists aggravate this transaction? As touched on in previous chapters, theories from theatre studies on audience participation can in part explain the techniques behind this transaction. Therefore, a look into the Brechtian and Artaudian techniques present in Group 66’s practices can help clarify the interactions and transactions between the artwork and its audiences.

The Baxandall Hypothesis

Leftist writer, Lee Baxandall’s article, “Beyond Brecht: The Happenings,” presents an overview of the Brechtian techniques utilized in the happening format.²⁶⁷ Baxandall sees the goal of the happening to be similar to Brecht’s: to turn the spectator into a detached and observant social critic equipped with skepticism and a historical perspective. Baxandall notes some of the techniques used in Brechtian theatre, including interruptions, cold scientific lighting, direct address by an actor to an audience, and plot summaries to shift the audience’s focus away from the outcome onto the process. He also points to Brechtian theatre’s insistence on disclaiming the actor’s role, that is, they are simply an actor, to overcome communication barriers.

“ The A-effect consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one’s attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking, and unexpected. What is obvious is in a

²⁶⁶ Durkheim quoted in de Certeau, *Everyday*, 68.

²⁶⁷ Baxandall consistently refers to these practices as action theatre throughout the article.

certain sense made incomprehensible, but this is only in order that it may then be made all the easier to comprehend. ...”²⁶⁸

How exactly, or if at all, does Brecht’s *verfremdungseffekt* present itself in Group 66’s happening and co-ritus? In the case of Group 66’s co-ritus, Baxandall’s summary of Brecht’s alienation effect could very well be a description of the co-ritus. In the co-ritus, instead of an actor directly addressing the audience, this is done by Jens Jørgen Thorsen as he addresses the audience by informing them of the idea behind the co-ritus prior to its commencement. Also, as discussed in the context of the co-ritus manifesto in the previous chapter, the whole production is predicated on disclaiming the role of the artist as an individual genius figure. The artist disclaims his role as an artist to overcome communication barriers. By explaining the co-ritus, he is shifting the attention away from the outcome and onto the process. The ordinary object introduced to the audience is the creation of a painting. However, the ordinary creation process is turned into something extraordinary by making the process a collective ritual. This ritual replaces the painting as the object, or the artwork.

The co-ritus audience is primed for a psychic renewal by employing alienation effects. Brecht’s goal was to turn the spectator into a detached and observant social critic equipped with skepticism and a historical perspective. However, with Group 66, it appears that these characteristics were welcomed as long as they were oriented towards the sources of the group’s critique. However, it is unclear if Group 66 welcomed their audiences’ pointing their newfound consciousness towards the group itself.

Baxandall identifies the happening’s ultimate goal as a re-education of its audiences through shifts in perception. Happenings can be “bewilderingly provocative experiences unmediated by explanation” that not only provides the audience with a new perspective on daily life but potentially awakens, or re-trains, their critical thinking skills.²⁶⁹ Baxandall writes that “the refusal to interpret is basic,” but that in a happening, “the public is unable to get away from the surface of these events (“inside”), and may declare itself bored.”²⁷⁰ However, in this context, boredom is irrelevant because the experience (the happening) by, for instance, showing everyday actions in a new context, prompts associations that are inevitable and penetrates the minds of audiences on some level regardless of their enthusiasm.

²⁶⁸ Lee Baxandall. "Beyond Brecht: The Happenings." *Studies on the Left* 6, no. 1 (January February 1966,) 29.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 30.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*

Through the happening, the everyday is aestheticized. “Action theatre in some instances projects the outlines of everyday life for the post-compulsive post-manipulated man.”²⁷¹“ Happenings remove people from the illusory world which, swathed in abstractions, is their everyday life, and put people into the actual world through devices which freshens perception.”²⁷² Baxandall concludes that life becomes a happening, and as such, life presents itself as an aesthetic problem. Baxandall’s hypothesis, which shares a conclusion held by many happening artists, presents some obvious problems. The most glaring is that the alienation effect cannot empirically guarantee the outcome he presents, whether in theatre or a happening. Secondly, by likening the effects of a happening, on an individual level, to the effects of an ayahuasca trip, Baxandall steps into dangerous territory on which happenings can be used in the same way the advertising and the trappings of capitalist society Group 66’s happening participants are being detoxed from. In Group 66’s quest for reuniting art and life, similarity to the modes employed in Brecht and Artaud’s models appear blatant. However, we should not automatically assume that the ultimate goal of Group 66 is the same as Brecht’s, as this could lead to an all too easy and possibly false narrative.

In response to Baxandall, Darko Suvin discusses in his essay “Reflections on Happenings” what he calls Baxandall’s “Alienation Antidote” hypothesis.²⁷³ Suvin singles out “left-wing or radical critics” Baxandall and Schechner and presents Baxandall and Schechner’s hypothesis of happenings as an antidote to the alienation of modern man at the hands of mass media and capitalism.²⁷⁴ On the premise of a happening where audiences are participants and experience “a shock of poetic cognition” spurred on by the happenings thematic field, with a basis in their own interior life and environment, Suvin asks if these events actually have the desired effect on their participants? ²⁷⁵ If yes, does not the happening risk indoctrinating the participants in the very same manner as the forces from which they attempt to liberate the modern alienated man?

Suvin asks, “Are Happenings really all that demystifying, or do they bear in themselves a new mystification ?”²⁷⁶ If we return to the question of the happening’s desired effect on audiences, Suvin concedes that under the right circumstances, i.e., an “ideal”

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, 33.

²⁷² *Ibid*

²⁷³ Darko Suvin. “Reflections on Happenings.” *The Drama Review: TDR* 14, no. 3 (1970): 139.

²⁷⁴ See Lee Baxandall and Darko Suvin. “Happenings: An Exchange.” *The Drama Review: TDR* (1970): 147-150.

²⁷⁵ Suvin, «Reflections», 139.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 140.

happening that meets a specific set of criteria, the happening should have a particular effect on the audience. Suvin dives into Baxandall's Alienation hypothesis, writing that "They," Baxandall and Schechner, "argue that Happenings use special devices to overcome communication barriers in a manipulated consumer society, in an age of TV-addiction, public relations credibility gap mass propaganda techniques marketing everything from pollutants to genocidal imperialist wars such as in Vietnam. In such a context, a re-education of audience perceptions, a de-pollution of senses, is most urgent; mimetic recognition (anagnorisis) in Happenings functions as therapy counteracting the brain-washing effects of profit-oriented life and demystifying ruling relationships both in life and on stage."²⁷⁷ Suvin's summation echoes the sentiments of Group 66, with Lard Grundt stating in an interview that "The art should dissolve the knots and relieve the pressures and give people back the appetite for life. Personally, I'm naive enough to think that art can be a kind of therapeutic aid, a treatment method for people with complexes and knots on the soul."²⁷⁸

One cannot help but wonder, if, as Baxandall, Schechner, and Group 66 propose, that a facet of the happening is a "de-pollution" of the senses, has the artist in this scenario taken on the role of the Shaman, and the artwork a cleansing/healing ceremony whose effects sound eerily similar to those promised by a variety of new-age practices. Reading Baxandall in 2021, his reflections on the effects of happenings make them sound akin to current wellness trends and make it seem like there is slight difference between a happening and attending a sound bath weekend retreat in Joshua Tree. This inference may perhaps provide a snapshot of why ephemeral artworks like happenings and co-ritus have remained somewhat outside of mainstream art history. In the public consciousness, they are, to many, intertwined with the counter-culture movement and later embrace of new-age practices of the 1960s. Artworks like these do not easily lend themselves to traditional art historical research. Secondly, the "demystification" of ruling relationships directly questions the Artist /the Artwork's supremacy, which targets the very core of art history. It is worthwhile noting that although happenings suggest wanting to dismantle the power struggle that exists in the triangular relationship between artist-artwork-viewer, the Baxandall hypothesis does not challenge this relationship. Instead, it endows the artist/artwork with a new role, that of the re-educator, which only further lifts the pedestal onto which the artist/artwork is already standing.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 139-40.

²⁷⁸ Per Hovdenakk. "Lasse Anno 66." *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. February 26, 1966. Translation by author.

Regarding Group 66's happening, the way the dynamic between artists and audience plays out is very revealing. Art Historian and Journalist Per Hovdenakk describes in his review of the happening the following scene: «A final happening took a different course than the organizers had intended. For their part, the program was more of a theatrical performance with the audience as passive participants, but the audience took matters into their own hands and threw themselves into the dramatic process with cheers and excitement. And thus it became a happening as a happening should be.»²⁷⁹

The review points to the audience's passivity and describes the event as a theatrical performance where the audience is merely spectators. However, Hovdenakk's review acknowledges that in the second half of the happening, the audience actively took part in the direction of the happening. To challenge this, it is worth highlighting that this happened at the helm of Kismul, an artist who initiated the happening's second half. Although Kismul was not a member of Group 66 and presumably present as just another audience member, it was an artist/audience member who transformed into an active participant in the happening. It is somewhat "unfortunate" that it took a fellow artist to challenge the audience-artist relationship. The indifference towards the audience, which was mentioned in a review by *Bergens Tidende*, does not necessarily surmount to a failed happening but, as previously established, could constitute a version of Brecht's alienation effect or Artaudian cruelty.²⁸⁰ Indifference could most certainly refrain the audience members from identifying too closely with the artist-performers and allowing for critical absorption of the messaging. However, it is worth noting that while Group 66 probably did not plan for Kismul's action, it seems likely that the techniques they employed in the first half of their happening intended to activate and trigger a response in their audience. This poses a conundrum in that it becomes difficult to ascertain if the audience's response in the second half is a self-motivated action or if their actions result from grooming and suggestion by Group 66. As for Group 66's co-ritus, reviews point to this event as underdelivering in the audience participation department. A review published in *Bergens Tidende*, notes that the event did not live up to its name, as there

²⁷⁹ Per Hovdenakk. «Moro med Gruppe 66» *Bergens Arbeiderblad*. March 29, 1966.

Original text: En avsluttende happening tok et annet forløp enn arrangørene hadde tilsiktet. Fra deres side var opplegget mer en teaterforestilling med publikum som passive deltakere, men forsamlingen tok saken i egen hånd og kastet seg inn i det dramatiske forløp med jubel og begeistring. Og dermed ble det en happening som en happening skal være. Translation by the author.

²⁸⁰ E.E, «Gruppe 66's Mandagsmanifestasjon» *Bergens Tidende*. March 29, 1966.

was little collaboration, at least physically, in the ritual.²⁸¹ However, the same article mentions elevated levels of enthusiasm and engagement among the audience.

Suvin writes that “it becomes evident what Happenings assume: that the techniques of mass persuasion have badly weakened the normative powers of reason, and the only approach left is to subject people to a nonexplicit, more primitive and aggressive kind of experience, which will reorient them through “direct perception”.”²⁸²

Theatre professor Charles Gattnig jr., writes in his essay, *Artaud, and the Participatory Drama of the Now Generation*, that “the total effect” of happenings “seems to be designed to stir the audience to active participation.”²⁸³ Gattnig further explains that “simply stated, this new drama is theatre in which both the creation and the performance of the play is a total sensory experience for everyone in the area of the activity.”²⁸⁴ Gattnig proposes we look to Artaud to explain this new activity. Artaud’s theatre of cruelty would induce trance and purge man of his irrational appetites.²⁸⁵ As previously highlighted, Susan Sontag is among the people who have critiqued happenings’ Artaudian abuse of its audiences, noting that “the event seems designed to tease and abuse the audience.”²⁸⁶ However, Gattnig points out that for Artaud cruelty is a necessary evil for the betterment of humankind, which he compares to the effects of a plague, a comparison that in 2021 is eerie to read.

“The action of theatre, like that of plague, is beneficial, for impelling men to see themselves as they are, it causes the mask to fall, reveals the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world;...and in revealing to collectivities of men their dark power, their hidden force, it invites them to take, in the face of destiny, a superior and heroic attitude they would never have assumed without it.”²⁸⁷

Gattnig proposes that through questioning the relationship between performers, or in the case of Group 66, the artists, and the audience there seems to present three stages of art. The highest stage is the tribal in which “spectators, performers, and authors are

²⁸¹Li. “«Ko-ritus» i kunstforeningen”. *Bergens Tidende*. March 25, 1966.

²⁸² Suvin, "Reflections," 142.

Also see, Lee Baxandall and Darko Suvin. "Happenings: An Exchange." *The Drama Review: TDR* (1970): 147-150

²⁸³ Charles Gattnig Jr. "Artaud and the Participatory Drama of the Now Generation." *Educational Theater Journal* 20, no. 4 (December 1968), 485.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 489.

²⁸⁶ Susan Sontag. “Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition”, in Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966) 263-274.

²⁸⁷ Artaud quoted in Gattnig, *Artaud*, 289.

indistinguishable; everyone is an artist united by communal, multi-sensory participation.”²⁸⁸ The second level is the aristocratic consists of “the artist (represented by a Rembrandt or a Shakespeare—an elevated, special personage of “genius”) is totally responsible for the work; a coterie audience may only look or listen—from a distance.”²⁸⁹ The third level is the impressionistic, where “the artist (represented by the “madman” figure of a van Gogh) initiates the artifact but forces the spectator to participate by completing the scene.”²⁹⁰ Relating these three stages of art to Group 66, it is evident that the group aspire to create a tribal art. However, it appears that their happening and co-ritus remain in the realm of the impressionistic stage of art teetering on the edge of the tribal stage. The inability to fully reach this so-called tribal stage appears to be due to the group’s insistence on reuniting art and life without fully relinquishing their artistic control in the process.

Suppose we accept that through Artaudian and Brechtian techniques, the aim of the happening is to have the participant arrive at a place of awakened consciousness, involving the refusal of commodity fetichism. In that case, we risk losing sight of the subjective and material value of happenings. Furthermore, most American happening artists claimed their art was apolitical, creating a collision between the narrative given by Baxandall and the artists’ intentions. Despite the problematics, this narrative presents within the American context, as Group 66 displays, it more seamlessly aligns itself with European happenings and performance art, which has always had a much more overt political tradition than their American counterparts.

Conclusion

“Although the impetus of the mixed-means theatrical movement seems to reside in American, the works here parallel activities all over the world. ...There exists constellations of mixed means practitioners in Germany, France, Holland, Scandinavia, and Czechoslovakia, all of whom interact with each other as well as learn about American phenomena.”²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Gattnig, *Artaud*, 291.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*

²⁹¹ Kostelanetz, *Theater of Mixed Means*,31. Italics by the author.

A clear distinction between American and European happenings is, as pinpointed by Art Historian Gunther Berghaus, the inherently political dimension of European happenings.²⁹² Berghaus asserts that there was a much more overtly political dimension to European happenings, and American happeners have themselves identified their art as apolitical or declined to broach the subject.²⁹³

Group 66, like their European colleagues, displayed facets of their political program through their happening and co-ritus. While it may seem limited to identify Group 66's political messaging as its *raison d'être*, their art productions' materials and formal elements are inextricably entwined with the group's greater vision. This greater vision is two-fold; on the one hand, the group is calling for concrete reforms in the working conditions of artists in Bergen. On the other hand, they want to offer an antidote to alienation so that participants can receive an art-life realization and create a fuller everyday existence for themselves. However, despite the group looking to international models of contemporaneity, their focus remained on engaging with local issues through their art. The group not only proclaim wanting to improve people's daily lives, but as this chapter has shown people's everyday lives are in certain instances leveraged by the artists to serve as content in their artistic productions.

As this chapter has explored, a part of the group's strategies around audience participation involved shifting the consciousness of individuals. Whether this strategy was deployed out of philanthropy, serving the group's political goals, or both, remains unknown. However, what is apparent is that the group believed that by psychically renewing their audience, individual shifts in consciousness could potentially reverberate throughout society and help bring about collective change.

²⁹² Günter Berghaus. "Happenings in Europe in the '60s: Trends, Events, and Leading Figures." *TDR (1988-)* 37, no. 4 (1993): 157–68.

²⁹³ Even if we can conceive that these American artists working against the backdrop of a capitalist society infused with the inheritance of McCarthyism can produce non-political works, they claim to want to reunite art and life. If art and life are one, the reality of people's lives, and by extension, their art, is political. Even if we concede that the happeners' choice to eschew the traditional art museum culture and work outside of it was simply an expression of passivism, not one of opposition, it still leaves us with the fact that if art and life are the same, politics are inevitable.

CHAPTER 6: Modern Times

In 1961, Norway was the last western-European country to introduce television. By 1966, television had only recently become available to the general Norwegian public, and it featured only one Norwegian TV channel, NRK. In 1966, if one wanted to reach a majority of the television watching Norwegian public en-masse, there was only one route to take. Group 66 realized this, and on February 24, 1966, the cultural program *Epoke* (Epoch) broadcast by the Norwegian state-run broadcasting network, NRK, included a segment in which they introduced their national audience to Group 66.²⁹⁴ Sitting around a table with a checkered tablecloth, drinking beer, Per Remfeldt interviewed the group in their stomping grounds, Café Paletten, which had been decked out with Group 66 exhibition posters on its walls. The interviewer asks the group, “So what do you really want? Are you rabble-rousers?” To which, the nineteen-year-old poet Terje Skulstad replies, “People are society’s smallest unit. The individual does not exist, we are not.”²⁹⁵ Skulstad laughs, and other members of the group attempt to interject over one another, until the forty-two-year-old artist Lars Grundt hands Skulstad a piece of paper from which he proceeds to read one of his poems. Next, Olav Herman Hansen introduces a book that includes poetry and graphics, published by Group 66, and hands the book to Lars Grundt so that he can read his self-penned manifesto, which serves as the book’s introduction:

“What is art good for? Is it not the people who engage in the possibilities of emotional expression. What discipline should young sinners be forced into in order to be abolished in artistic expression? Is it then that they go into the school formation and kiss Aunt Norway. Why should Bergen teeter behind like tepid tea water as the whole world now psychically renews from the stable, academic norms.”²⁹⁶

After reading the first part of his manifesto, Grundt dramatically shuts the book close. The interviewer also asks the group if they expect their project to have longevity? Which is met with mumbles of a resounding no. Grundt replies that the group wishes to open souls and that the most important thing is that they leave behind a more open and unrestricted art scene

²⁹⁴ «Episode February 24, 1966,» *Epoke*, NRK1, NRK, February 24, 1966.

²⁹⁵ NRK, timestamps: 04:04-04:18. Original statement: «Folk er samfunnets minste enhet, individet eksisterer ikke, vi er ikke.» Translation by the author.

²⁹⁶ Lars Grundt. «Group 66 Manifesto.» *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. February 26, 1966. Translation by the author.

for coming generations.²⁹⁷ Terje Skulstad says that he hopes that the bourgeois fear will no longer be stuck in artistic expressions and states that, “Our task is expression.”²⁹⁸

Like the interviewer asked Group 66, “what do you really want?” this chapter begins its inquiry by asking related questions. Firstly, what did the ideas expressed by the Group in the *Epoke* interview and their manifesto attempt to communicate? In both instances, the group proposes concrete changes to cultural life in the city of Bergen while simultaneously spouting radical idea(s) regarding the role of not just the artist but of regular people in society. Paramount to understanding the group’s ethos is perhaps what appears to be their idea that art should be democratic and available to all kinds of people. Group 66 is also calling for a settlement with the authorities, who they claim espouse and enforce old-fashioned and tendentious parameters for artistic expression in Norway. While the previous chapter explored the idea of psychic renewal on an individual level, this chapter further explores psychic renewal on a collective level. However, to reflect on this idea, it is necessary to briefly look at some of the sociological and historical determiners in the Norwegian art world of the 1960s.

An outsider, unfamiliar with the specific situation of the Norwegian art world and its artists in the mid-sixties, may feel inclined to respond with either condescension or indifference to Group 66’s art and agenda, as it was not particularly scandalous or provocative outside of Bergen. Although it is often claimed that the Norwegian art world was lagging behind the global art world (western art’s centers) until well into the 1970s, it has been a failing not to consider the art produced prior within its parameters. While this thesis’ previous chapters have looked abroad for contextualization, this chapter seeks to reorient the discussion by grounding it in the national art historical narrative. The national characteristics present themselves through Group 66’s emphasis on the everyday lives of people, which they present in their manifesto, and as has previously been explored, they utilize as material in their artistic expressions. The styles of many examples of post-war Norwegian art, such as that produced by Group 66, arrived late to the party in a manner of speaking. This type of art offers an example of not only the peripheries’ art history but offers insight into parts of art history that have previously been left out. Aside from the presumption that art history should aim to be more inclusive and diverse, the inclusion of so-called peripheral art history offers new and expansive insights that cannot be gleaned from an art history that its centers only

²⁹⁷ NRK, *Epoke*. Timestamps: 08:00-08:07.

²⁹⁸ NRK, *Epoke*. Timestamp: 08:41.

dictate. This line of inquiry is not meant to brand Norwegian artmaking and Group 66 as provincial or backward thinking; this thesis does not adhere to Alfred Barr's diagram of modern art as gospel. However, the idea of provinciality, of being outside the center, is embedded in the history of Norwegian art more often than not. This chapter seeks to explore these undercurrents as they present themselves in Group 66's call for collective local and national change through art. Notions of quality, originality, or newness that so-called provincial art is typically accused of lacking are somewhat irrelevant to this discussion. What is relevant is exploring how Group 66 negotiates the terms of their art practice within the context of the tension between periphery and center. This chapter will engage in a discussion based on the perceived artistic peripherality of Norwegian art in the 20th century. Group 66 presented their artistic project, including their happening and co-ritus as vehicles for the renewal of ordinary people's everyday lives. By extension, these changes hold the key to potentially unlocking greater change in society at large.

Background

In 1966, the main critique launched against Group 66 and their exhibition was a lack of originality and accusations of not being on par with and lagging behind the trends of the international art world. Artist Waldemar Stabell, in his critique of Group 66's exhibition, writes that "avant-garde art works with quite different things today than the beaten-down clichés Group 66 offers."²⁹⁹ He points to American artists like Frank Stella, Robert Morris, and Donald Judd as the true avant-garde artists of today and claims that Group 66's art would be ridiculed and dismissed by the international art world.³⁰⁰

While it is true that by 1966, New York's artists and art consumers were no longer engrossed in the once ground-breaking happenings put on by the likes of Allan Kaprow. In Norway, and especially in Bergen, Group 66 sent shockwaves through the country. To understand what Journalist and Art Historian Per Hovdenakk meant when he wrote that "in the mid-sixties when the rest of the art world was flooded with pop-art, the Norwegian art scene was still debating the moral aspects of abstract painting, a decade behind the rest of the world»³⁰¹ It is necessary to look at what events had shaped the Norwegian art world in the

²⁹⁹ Waldemar Stabell. "Gruppe 66 i kunstforeningen" *Morgenavisen*. March 19, 1966. Translation by the author.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*

³⁰¹ Per Hovdenakk, «Synspunkter på 60-årene» in *Kunst i tiden: Bergens Kunstforening 150 år*. Ed. Reidar Storaas, (Bergen: Bergen Kunstforening, 1988)172. Translation by the author.

preceding years. At the entrance to the 1960s Norwegian art was in the odd position of lacking a national tradition of Cubism, Surrealism and Dada. Art Historian Susanne Rajka has noted that this contributed to the lack of openness towards new and experimental art by art critics and the art establishment.³⁰² Rajka asserts that in Norway there is a direct lineage between the abstract painters of the 1950s and the artistic experiments of the 1960s. She writes that “There is an unbroken line between the demand for reassessing Modernism and the right to use contemporary forms of expression. The demand for freedom provided the frame of reference in 1960s Norway.”³⁰³ She further notes that, “turning to New York and to contemporary American culture was natural for a generation in conflict with the French-educated art world in Norway.”³⁰⁴

In 1961 Kunsternes Hus showed an exhibit of Arnold Haukeland and Jakob Weideman, an exhibition which marked the breakthrough for abstract painting in Norway.³⁰⁵ In comparison, in the same year, across the Atlantic MoMA showed the exhibition, “The Art of Assemblage”, and the Martha Jackson Gallery showed “Environments, Situations, Spaces”, which included Claes Oldenburg’s “The Street”. Closer to home, Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum shows Allan Kaprow’s “Environments,” The “Festival du Nouveau-Réalisme” happens in Nice, and in London the Whitechapel gallery shows, “Young Contemporaries,” which includes David Hockney, Peter Phillips, and Allen Jones.³⁰⁶ The rest of the western art world had most decidedly moved on from the abstract art that was finally gaining traction and approval in Norway. The rest of the mid-sixties in the Norwegian art world follow a similar trajectory. The cultural establishment begins to slowly accept and embrace a wider variety of styles and artistic expressions. However, despite the glacial pace the art establishment was moving at, artists and artist groups were experimenting with new styles and forms while seeking out new models for the working conditions of artists. Group 66 reflects this shift and

³⁰² Rajka, Susanne. «-Norway in the ‘60s Image of a Decade” in *The Nordic ‘60s : Upheaval and Confrontation 1960-1972* , eds. Birgitta Lönnell and Halldór Björn Runolfsson. (Helsinki: Nordic Arts Centre, 1990,)156-161.

Exceptions to the legion of conservative art critics were a younger generation that included art historian Per Hovdenakk writing for Bergens Arbeiderblad and instrumental in Group 66’s exhibition.

³⁰³ *Ibid*, 157.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid*

³⁰⁵ See «chronologies 1960-72» in *The Nordic ‘60s*, 52.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*; In the same year Sonja Henie and Niels Onstad donate their art collection and to Høvikodden the beginning of the Henie Onstad Museum, to be followed two years later by the opening of the Munch Museum. Also Nam June Paik performs in Oslo 1961, film recordings of this event have unfortunately been lost.

represents the ushering forth of a new generation of Norwegian artists, reflecting larger societal shifts in Norway.

At the same time as the Norwegian art world started to incrementally take steps towards acceptance of more experimental and “avant-garde” artforms, these achievements reflected a move towards modernization that was becoming apparent in the Norwegian society at-large. According to the Norwegian sociologist Lars Mjøset the period he dubs the long 1960s in the Nordic countries (1958-1973) was in western Europe informed by significant social changes. “Some social scientists refer to these changes as modernization, others as Americanization.”³⁰⁷ Mjøset notes that, “the American need to contain Communism in the eastern European countries from 1945 onwards became the basis for a western Europe marked by pervasive economic and cultural contacts with the USA.”³⁰⁸ In combination with the economic growth experienced in western Europe in the 1960s, “modernization set its mark on working life and on lifestyles outside work. Within industry, American ideas of rationalization were adopted, via time-and-motion studies, the assembly line, and widespread application of human knowledge.”³⁰⁹ Despite the increase in living standards, which in the home translated to modern appliances, technology, and an increase in leisure time, the “modernization of daily life in the Nordic countries did not lead to the disappearance of national characteristics.”³¹⁰ Mjøset postulates that the deep seeded trauma from the occupation of Norway during the second world war, and its dramatic liberation, provided the anti-modernists with a stronger position that lasted well into the 1960s.³¹¹

It was this background that informed Group 66. Group 66 was a group of young artists ready to embrace new modes of expression in a stagnant art milieu. From a purely formal artistic perspective, Group 66 found themselves at a moment in time when new and more radical artforms were finally about to gain traction in the Norwegian artworld. On the other hand, the group saw firsthand the effects on both the individual and the collective of the modernization Norway had recently undergone. These two conditions seem to have been the impetus behind the group, gleaned from the sentiments they express in their manifesto.

³⁰⁷ Lars Mjøset. «The Long 1960s in the Nordic Countries» in *The Nordic '60s : Upheaval and Confrontation 1960-1972* , eds. Birgitta Lönnell and Halldór Björn Runolfsson. (Helsinki: Nordic Arts Centre, 1990,)19.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*

³¹⁰ *Ibid*

³¹¹ *Ibid*, 21.

However, a roadblock facing the group was that a specific set of critics, like the artist Waldemar Stabell, saw the group and their art as inherently provincial.

The Provincialism Problem

Australian Art Historian Terry Smith explains in his 1974 essay “The Provincialism Problem” that “provincialism appears primarily as an attitude of subservience to an externally imposed hierarchy of cultural values.”³¹² According to Smith, it is universally accepted that New York is the center of the art world. The masses adhere to this system, believing that only if an artist or an artistic style “makes it” there it is avant-garde, or at the very least worth serious attention. These sets of beliefs construct the backbone of the international art market, but more alarmingly informs what art we see and how it is received, which trickles down into art criticism and discourse and decides who and what art history includes in their narrative. “Object-less” art like Group 66’s happening and co-ritus further escapes art’s markets and history due to their inherent non-commodifiable nature. Thus, as art historians, we are forced to face some uncomfortable truths about our discipline.³¹³

According to Smith, one of the main stylistic characteristics of provincial art is that the whole foreign character is not adopted and that “their character is distorted because acquaintance with them is late, usually with the mature forms of the style.”³¹⁴ Smith underlines that “in short, models and prototypes arrive in the provinces devoid of their genetic contexts.”³¹⁵ This type of criticism could be, and was, directed at Group 66. However, the very nature of many artforms, like happenings and co-ritus, used by Group 66 does not leave room for comparisons to previous iterations, as the whole idea behind the artworks is that they are the direct result of its milieu in its short lifespan. Smith, does, however, formulate a tension the local artist is enmeshed in.

“Their worlds are replete with tensions between two antithetical terms: the urge to localism (a claim for the possibility and validity of “making good, original art right here”) and a reluctant recognition that the generative innovations in art, and the

³¹² Terry Smith, “The Provincialism Problem,” *Artforum*, vol. XIII, no.1 (September 1974): 54

³¹³ See Amelia Jones, “Live Art in Art History: A Paradox?” In *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2008,)151-65.

³¹⁴ Smith, 55.

³¹⁵ *Ibid*

criteria for the standards of “quality,” “originality,” “interest,” “forcefulness,” etc., are determined externally.”³¹⁶

Albeit unintentionally infused with condescension, Smith’s formulation could very well answer the question of why there have been so few “great” Norwegian artists in the last century?³¹⁷ It may seem redundant to state, but the artists who are included in the world’s art history directly correspond to if they worked in a time when their native country yielded political power reveals this problem. Within art history’s canon, history appears to be the discipline’s determining force. Faced with this problematic truth, Smith explains that “the provincial artist, then, sees his commitment to art in terms of *styles* of art’ of competing notions of art’s *history*-all determined in the metropolitan center.”³¹⁸ Smith’s formulation is dependent upon the artists “buying into” the idea of the center’s art as gospel, which leads them to seek an education in the center before returning to their native countries educated and metropolitan. However, once back home, the artist is left without a constant influx and access to “new” ideas and forms of art and ends up at a standstill in their progression.

To counter Smith, if we accept the impossibility of disregarding the art world as dark looming force puppeteering and maneuvering the artist and their audiences it is impossible not to admit that artists breed artists fueled by a combination of collaboration and (mostly) competition. The question then becomes how do we look at provincial artists who worked in a time when the world was not yet fully globalized? Smith claims that “Few can persist in pretending that instinctual devotion to an amorphous metaphysical entity “art” frees them from the responsibilities which clearly follow from recognizing art-making for what it is: a thoroughly context-dependent activity, in which most of the contexts are socially specific and resonant throughout the cultural settings in which they occur and to which they travel.”³¹⁹ If as Smith claims, that “the provincial artist cannot choose not to be provincial” how does a provincial group of artists like Group 66 react to their station?³²⁰

Group 66’s very existence appears to be contingent on these very conditions. In their manifesto they state:

³¹⁶ Smith,56.

³¹⁷ By “great” international recognition and success is implied, on the level of artists included in art history textbooks outside their native countries.

³¹⁸ Smith,57.

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, 59.

³²⁰ *Ibid*,56.

“What is art good for? Is it not the people who engage in the possibilities of emotional expression. What discipline should young sinners be forced into in order to be abolished in artistic expression? Is it then that they go into the school formation and kiss Aunt Norway. Why should Bergen teeter behind like tepid tea water as the whole world now psychically renews from the stable, academic norms. There are now so many stricken people - here are enough forces to make the city an avant- garde nest - from here they can be released a great deal if any ties are loosened. Some ties spun by moralists, aliens and criminals in the municipality, associations, schools, newspapers, and other stores. Of course, it is up to every old, beheaded artist to renew himself, but it is not easy when the head is cut off and the rest buried in religious demagoguery. Being buried here in the city just means the murder happened here. Such senselessness must not be allowed to continue. When there is no trigger for young artist, his fate is half suicide - half environmental murder. We need a modern museum without traditions - a free economic scene for drama, a workshop for young independent artists. Here, respite is needed for young fresh souls before they suffocate in their own blood. Art is no longer pictures in frames - art is the colors of the soul, the mental state, the human being itself in concentrated form. Does Bergen stand a Chance?”³²¹

Reading the group’s manifesto, it is not entirely apparent if the group fully believe in the idea of an art center. On the one hand they are rebelling against this very notion by actively working towards making Bergen “an avant-garde nest,” on the other they want the city to rid itself of its provincial attitudes. They assert, like Smith, that in the small provincial city of Bergen there is no trigger for young artists, the blame placed partly on the artists themselves for choosing Bergen as their base and partly on the city for being too provincial. However, by wanting to create change in Bergen Group 66 may have found a way out of the periphery-center dilemma. If the group can change the working conditions for artists for the better, artists can feed off the city and its culture for artistic inspiration and will no longer need to look to the center for guidance. This project will not change the art world and art history, but the artists of Bergen will have escaped from the doomed narrative that they

³²¹ Lars Grundt. «Group 66 Manifesto.» *Bergen Arbeiderblad*. February 26, 1966. Translation by the author.

would otherwise be entrapped in. However, there is more to the group's project than improving the working conditions for local Bergensian artists like themselves. As Smith concludes, "there are no ideologically neutral cultural acts."³²²

It may seem in poor taste to center this discussion, which is essentially a discussion of postcolonialism, around Group 66. It needs to be acknowledged that, as a group of white, mostly male, western European artists educated in France and Denmark, it is plausible that the group had every opportunity to "make it" in the international art world. However, it appears that Group 66 had no such ambitions; they wanted to create change on a local level. What is more telling in this situation is the fact that up until recently, the group has been largely ignored by Norwegian art history. In 2021, when art and artists are highly international and diverse, this speaks to a much more concerning set of problems within Norwegian art history. Although, it is not and should not be the role of the national art historian to champion local artists onto the world stage so that they can achieve international acclaim and success, the fact that the type of art practiced by Group 66 has not warranted greater investigation by Norwegian art history leads to the question of why art that exists as commodifiable objects appear to hold more value than their ephemeral counterparts. Furthermore, it reads as odd that the art history discipline in a country like Norway has remained especially conservative, perhaps even more so than in countries where the discipline is much more intertwined with the commercial art world's developments and "achievements".

Returning to the Group's manifesto, it is clear that the main goal is not only to makeover the Bergen art scene for its artists' benefits. As explored in this thesis' previous chapters one of the group's central tenets was to offer audiences new participatory art experiences that would change the individual relationship between viewer and artwork and emit change on a collective level by altering the individual's perception of their everyday life. The need for collective change seems to have been exasperated by the seemingly unstable and unforeseeable state of the world in the 1960s.

A Political "Avant-Garde Nest"

In 2011 Group 66 member Olav Herman Hansen penned a text in which he described the impetus behind the formation of Group 66.

³²² Smith, 59.

“The year was 1966, the world around us was changing, new thoughts were in the ether. The young people wanted to find their identity, tired of parents’ attitudes and current concepts of morality. Economic exploitation and repression, the Vietnam War, and conflicts in South America. Nuclear armaments and pollution, the liberation of women. This was part of the reason for the enthusiasm that galvanized large groups of young people to gather in the belief in a better and more just world. The artists were often at the forefront of this renewal.”³²³

In Olav Herman Hansen’s recollection, art imitates life, and the political activation of young people, such as the majority of Group 66’s artists, was a determining force behind the group.

In their manifesto, Group 66 claim to see the potential of Bergen to become an avant-garde nest. The term *avant-garde*’s original military meaning, in French, connotes an affiliation between the avant-garde and modernism and the notion of this type of art’s political content. In *The Shadow of War: Political Art in Norway 1914-2014*, art historian Kari J. Brandtzæg, editor of the book and curator of the titular exhibition, asserts that the project illustrates “how collective and individual utopias arise in the wake of devastating events.”³²⁴ She notes how the Vietnam war and 1968 uprisings served as impetus for artists like Group 66, in the same manner as the first world war informed the practices of artists in the interwar years.³²⁵ She writes that artists like Group 66 and the GRAS group, “like the earlier “tendenz” artists, these too wanted to communicate with “the people” and were ideologically inclined to the left.”³²⁶

In the same volume, Norwegian philosopher, Espen Hammer explores in his essay, “The Art of War and the War of Art: The Ethics of Avant-garde Iconoclasm,” how post-WWI avant-garde artists concerned themselves with ethics, or morality, rather than the previous generation’s concern with aesthetics, or the representation of beauty, when confronted with war.³²⁷

“When drawing this connection between art and peace, I have several things in mind. One is how, as a practice, art - especially in “the age of mechanical reproduction” - no longer bears the marks of its beginnings in magic and cult. If anything, art in this

³²³ Olav Herman Hansen, “Gruppe 66”, *Kunst Plus 1* (2011):6-7.

³²⁴ Kari J. Brandtzæg, *Politisk Kunst I Norge 1914-2014 = The Shadow of War : Political Art in Norway 1914-2014.* (Oslo: Teknisk Industri, 2015,)13.

³²⁵ *Ibid*

³²⁶ *Ibid*

³²⁷ Espen Hammer, “The Art of War and the War of Art: The Ethics of Avant-garde Iconoclasm,” in Ed. Kari J. Brandtzæg, *Politisk Kunst I Norge 1914-2014 = The Shadow of War : Political Art in Norway 1914-2014.* (Oslo: Teknisk Industri, Kunstneres Hus 2015,)14-21.

period needs to imagine that it was made for a mass of essentially isolated individuals; thus, accepting a work is to relate to it as one of those individuals. Related to this is art's identification *with* the individual experience, its shunning of the merely representative address."³²⁸

Hammer clarifies this statement by underlining that he does not mean that politically conscious art escapes ideology, but rather that a shift from the individual to an inhabitation of the other, through art, takes place.³²⁹ Furthermore, Hammer claims that "the mandate typical of the kind of art that, since the 1960s, has addressed the problem of war seems more than anything else to have been that of communication."³³⁰ While Hammer's point is generally correct as far as a generalization goes, in the case of Group 66 it is perhaps more accurate to say that communication is one of the artwork's mechanisms, or instructive vehicles. Hammer, leaning on Benjamin, writes that the latter saw communicative art as distinctly non-auratic.³³¹ However, it should be pointed out that like Adorno's concern that Benjamin replaces the artwork with ideology, Hammer's point only applies to re-producible forms of art and in making this point exclusively refers to painting. However, Hammer saliently observes how the earlier Norwegian *tendenz* artists wanted to shock the viewer, in perhaps an Artaudian fashion, and that "its temporality is socially utopian while its presence, grimy and hard, is that of the immediately allusive: *This* is what war does! *This* is the cause! *This* is what you need to do! And *this* is what we may hope for!"³³² Hammer notes that in the art of the 1970s the politics become more explicit.³³³ However, where does that leave Group 66 who in the mid-sixties are in between the *tendenz* artists and the overt politics of the 1970s? Perhaps in the examples of Group 66's happening and *co-ritus*, the cleverness and clandestine nature of the works' political intentions lead to them escaping the categories proposed in Hammer's essay.

The "story" presented so far of Norwegian avant-garde artistic production in 1960s has presented itself in a rather straightforward fashion, dealing primarily with a break with a conservative past and a wish to achieve "modernity" in the arts. This seems to in, separate ways, translate to the vision of modernity available as a model to Norwegian artists from the West's dominating nations. However, in this period there were still several oddities in Norway's artistic landscape that were reflective of national characteristics.

³²⁸ *Ibid*, 17.

³²⁹ *Ibid*

³³⁰ *Ibid*

³³¹ *Ibid*

³³² *Ibid*, 19.

³³³ *Ibid*

The Norwegian Paradox

“Young artists break with museal ceremony»³³⁴

Group 66’s exhibition and series of evening events has presented as a paradox warranting closer inspection. Group 66 wanted revolution and change, presenting themselves as rebels wanting to “release, activate, egg on, annoy” the audience to ignite change in the provincial city of Bergen.³³⁵ However, they chose to display and commit their groundbreaking art in Bergen’s most bourgeois location under the watchful eyes of members of the city’s cultural establishment. While not a white cube gallery space, Group 66 held their exhibition in the last century’s equivalent: The Bergen Arts Association. Founded in 1838 by the Norwegian artist I.C. Dahl, the association was the epitome of the cultural establishment that had for over a century been a center of cultural life in the provincial city of Bergen.³³⁶ It is worthwhile noting that in the social-democratic welfare state of Norway, this partnership does not present as an anomaly, and Norwegian readers might not even registrar the oddity. Art historian Tania Ørum observes that “...the democratic idea of bringing down ivory towers, of deconstructing the romantic genius, of opening up the artwork, engaging the viewer and re-contextualizing the form and content of art, chimed in nicely with the political goals of the Nordic welfare states.”³³⁷ She further elaborates on this by noting that an essential item on the agenda of the Scandinavian social democratic parties in the post-war decades was the democratization of the arts. In Norway, we see this tendency with the Labor Party’s creation of public cultural institutions and public funding of the arts in the post-war years under the Gerhardsen administration. A prominent example of implementations of these policies is the founding of the Norwegian Arts Council (Norsk Kulturråd) in 1964, whose one of its main functions and duties is the disbursement of grants to Norwegian artists.³³⁸ However, it is worth noting that these conditions raise the question of how the avant-garde

³³⁴ «Unge Kunstnere bryter Museal Høytidelighet». *Dagbladet*. March 10, 1966. Translation by the author.

³³⁵ Li. “Gruppe 66 samler trådene foran spennende uke i Kunstforeningen”. *Bergens Tidende*. March 1, 1966. Translation by author.

³³⁶ See *Kunst i tiden: Bergens Kunstforening 150 år*. Ed. Reidar Storaas, (Bergen: Bergen Kunstforening, 1988)

³³⁷ Tania Ørum, “Interventions into Everyday Life” in Eds., Tania Ørum, and Jesper Olsson, *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1950-1975*, (Leiden:BRILL, 2016.)586-87.

³³⁸ Rajka, “-Norway in the ‘60s,”158-159.

thrive in the sort of social-democratic utopia Norway envisioned itself as in the post-war years? While it is tempting to answer this question by referring to Norwegian artists' contributions (or lack thereof) to the international art world, the provinciality of Group 66 as received by contemporary critics prompts reflection. If we consider Group 66's place in the world through the lens of traditional art history, which, through its tumultuous yet mutually beneficial relationship to the art market, places value on the perception of progress and universal acclaim, Group 66 did not start from a favorable location geographically nor nationally.

Intellectual Historians, Stefan Nygård and Johan Strang present the idea of a universality consisting of a dynamic, or exchange, between centers and peripheries. In that case, we accept that "ultimately, it is about power-relations and hierarchies that determine who can afford to ignore whom."³³⁹ Quite plainly laid out, the power structure Group 66 finds themselves entangled in is as follows: Firstly, there is a power struggle between Bergen and Norway's capital of Oslo. Although one could argue for Bergen as a historically richer cultural hub than Norway's capital, in Norway, the center for artistic production and administration has traditionally been centered in Oslo. However, in the recent past, Norway has been peripheral and submissive to their Swedish and Danish neighbors within the Scandinavian context.³⁴⁰ Although part of the "civilized" world (Europe), Scandinavia has traditionally been seen as an artistic and intellectual periphery in Europe. Nygård and Strang describe "studying universalism at the northern edges of Europe is thus about exploring the specific dynamics of being close to, but not quite part of, the core."³⁴¹ The center in the modern European artistic context has traditionally been Paris; however, a shift occurred following the second world war with New York as the center of the art world.³⁴² The effects of this shift from a euro-centric to an American-centric dictation of the art world is worth briefly exploring as it informed Group 66 and their reception.

An article published by *Bergens Tidende* entitled "When the Nordic Painters Encountered 1920s Classicism" does not compare Group 66 to contemporary American artistic developments, but instead look to the recent European past for comparison and

³³⁹ Stefan Nygård and Johan Strang. "Conceptual Universalization and the Role of the Peripheries." *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 12, no. 1 (2017): 56.

³⁴⁰ Prior to her independence in 1905, Norway was in a union with Sweden from 1814-1905. From 1524-1814 Norway was under Danish rule. From 1397 to 1524 Norway was part of the Kalmar union, with Denmark and Sweden.

³⁴¹ Nygård and Strang, 58.

³⁴² I wish to underline that center is not equivalent to a specific place or location, but could just as easily equate to a person or an idea etc.

contextualization. The article asserts that the Parisian Dadaists and surrealists of the 1920s “were much better and especially newer than certain related members of the present Group 66 - all 46 years earlier.”³⁴³ However, as noted by the Swedish art critic and museum director Folke Edwards the shift from a euro-centric to American-centric world mitigated a dramatic shift in both art’s aesthetics and contents. “Traditional European metaphysics had to give way to insolent American Pragmatism. What had once been profound was suddenly only superficial.”³⁴⁴ Edwards asserts that what unites the many varied styles of 1960’s art production, grouping together pop, color-field painting, photo-realists, and minimalism is the sense of temporariness.³⁴⁵ Furthermore, Edwards connects this quality of instantaneousness to consumerist culture, pointing to artforms including happenings and performance, which by their emphasis on experience and ephemeral nature defy art’s historical European tenets.

“To summarize, we could say that the early American ‘60s avantgarde diverges from a number of the sacrosanct principles of Classicism and aristocratic Modernism by defying the demand for timelessness and universality
defying the demand for material, form and style
defying the demand for clear divisions between different art forms, between art and life, and between artist and viewer.”³⁴⁶

Especially regarding his last point, Edwards places the blame for this development on Duchamp, and asserts that “the work of art was dematerialized, and the artist transformed into an intellectual shaman poised between comedy and profundity in a cult that was autographed by both Neo-Primitivism and Neo-Platonism.”³⁴⁷ Like the anti-modernist instigators of the seemingly never-ending Norwegian style debate, in its various iterations, of the first half of the twentieth century these sentiments are reactionary in nature. When reactionary forces are coupled with an awareness of one’s peripheral place in the world, as seen in Norway it results in an odd attempt of both self-erasure and revisionism.

³⁴³ “Da Nordiske malere møtte 1920-årenes klassisisme” Bergens Tidende. March 26, 1966. Translation by the author.

³⁴⁴ Folke Edwards. “The International Background”. in *The Nordic ‘60s : Upheaval and Confrontation 1960-1972* , eds. Birgitta Lönnell and Halldór Björn Runolfsson. (Helsinki: Nordic Arts Centre, 1990,) 45.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 46.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 46.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid*

Further feeding into the idea of Norway as provincial, generally, and artistically, is the engagement of Norwegian art historians in a continuous self-effacing narrative centered on the retardation of Norwegian art that is ultimately a self-fulfilling prophecy.³⁴⁸ Examples of this are plentiful in the great tomes of Norwegian art history by the likes of art historians Leif Østby and Gunnar Danbolt, considered authorities on Norwegian art history. Norwegian art historian Henning Alsvik blatantly displays this narrative, blaming economic downturns and low socio-political status as the source of the perceived provinciality of Norwegian art. Some prime examples include:

“Not only politically and economically, but artistically, the recession years meant a relaxation.”

“It was inevitable that Norwegian art in the recession would have to have a helpless provincial feel.”

“The art at home largely follows the European styles but is always retarded.”³⁴⁹

These types of sentiments informed the foundation of Norwegian art history, stuck in a co-dependent relationship with the idea of Norway as a culturally lacking, ahistorical country ever since. The most prevalent narrative trope in older Norwegian art history consists of the young artist embarking on a Grand tour, then returning home cultured and educated, ready to teach what they have learned in the center through their art. The artist’s new role in their homeland is that of a cultural translator, or a transfer agent. As previously discussed, Smith claims that for the artist, their return to their native country impedes them from receiving input from the centers and as such puts an expiration date on the potential of their art. However, a more accurate description of the expatriate artist returning home is found in Nygard and Strang’s description of the consciously peripheral intellectual with one foot in the center and one in the peripheries, who is in the unique position of looking at universalisms

³⁴⁸ Even today this view of Norwegian art remains pervasive. See, Tonje Haugland Sørensen. "Proudly Peripheral." *Visual Resources* 35, no. 3-4 (2019): 237-65.

³⁴⁹ Henning Alsvik. *Norges billedkunst i det nittende og tyvende århundre*. (Oslo: Gyldendal. 1951) Original texts: “ikke bare politisk og økonomisk, men også kunstnerisk betydde nedgangsårene en slappelse.» (p.5) «Not only politically and economically, but artistically, the recession years meant a relaxation.» «det var ikke til å unngå at den norske kunsten i nedgangstiden måtte få et uhjelpelig provinsielt preg.» (p.7) “It was inevitable that Norwegian art in the recession would have to have a helpless provincial feel.” “kunsten her hjemme følger stort sett de europeiske stilartene, men alltid retardert.» (p.8) Translations by the author.

from several points of view. This figure, presented here in the form of Group 66, is simultaneously in and of “the world” yet also watching from the sidelines. This circumvents the dichotomous thinking that informs Smith’s article, and results in the statements like those by Alsvik. Nygård and Strang describe the role of transfer agents as “active agents who selectively import and redefine concepts.”³⁵⁰ As previously established, most of Group 66’s members were educated abroad and returned home to use their education by utilizing it within the local Bergensian context. As such, it is clear that the artistic productions of Group 66 do not emerge from a vacuum; they are part of an extensive network of transnational artists, which is further evidenced by the collaboration with Danish artists like Jens Jørgen Thorsen. However, the historically peripheral status of Norway coupled with the self-effacing narrative trope of its art history, Norwegian artists like Group 66 find themselves, consciously or not, acting as the consciously peripheral artist.³⁵¹ Which in the case of Group 66 allows the artists to embrace and make use of a variety of, and often contradictory, artistic mediums and practices all at once because they do not have to consider any national universalisms. Their role as a transfer agent appears straightforward. However, concerning several of Group 66’s artistic productions, especially co-ritus and happening, the role of the transfer agent is, unconsciously, implicit to the artwork in that the audience, in their contributions, acts as a source the artists are drawing from. The form of the artwork may be universal, but its contents cannot help but be provincial when said contents are the everyday lives of provincial people.

Working on the periphery as provincial artists appear to be a conscious choice by Group 66. One of the most salient contributions of the group and their art is their simultaneous acknowledgement and knowledge of, and rejection of universalisms. In the examples of the group’s co-ritus and happening, these productions are interventions into universal conceptions. Group 66 asserts their peripheral vantage point by actively using their local (provincial) audiences as material that they actively interject into concepts adopted from the center’s universalisms. Rather than blindly “copying” the styles of the center, they manage to escape Terry Smith’s dire formulation of the provincialism problem. Group 66 avoids distorting the “foreign character” of styles by interjecting their own genetic context into their artworks. Alternatively, as Nygård and Strang offer from the field of conceptual

³⁵⁰ Nygård and Strang, 59. Full quote: “From this perspective, intellectuals in the peripheries must not be understood as passive receivers of discourses and concepts produced in the centers but rather as active agents who selectively import and redefine concepts.”

³⁵¹ Nygård and Strang, 74.

history, this can be seen as a “transnational turn,” an example of “the manifold ways in which concepts travel between national and regional contexts.”³⁵²

Concluding Remarks

This concluding chapter has explored Group 66 as visionary reformers and transfer agents in Bergen and Norway’s art worlds. However, their relationship with their audiences/participants remains their most important vehicle for change. Perhaps, their role as artist/re-educator in their happening and co-ritus remains their most effective role for achieving individual and collective change. Through their happening and co-ritus, Group 66 presented a formulation consisting of man, alienated by capitalist society, being awoken to a higher consciousness through process-based art designed to demystify and assist shifts in perception, hopefully leading to structural shifts in society. Kostelanetz offers a reflection on the potential of artforms like Group 66’s happening and co-ritus. He writes the following:

“By cultivating the total sensorium, the new mixed-means art seems designed to help man develop a more immediate relationship with his surroundings; for not only does the Theatre of Mixed Means return the performer-audience situation back to its original, primitive form as a ceremony encompassing various arts, (...)”³⁵³

As such, the artist takes on a more pedagogic role. Kostelanetz describes the artist’s role as, “That is, he creates works or activities that make us more conscious of our common existence.”³⁵⁴ In the context of their happening and co-ritus, Group 66 shifts their audience/participants’ perception, who through the happening and co-ritus were subjected to an awakening of consciousness. Kostelanetz writes that “unlike orthodox Marxists, the new artists, as well as the new radical thinkers, presume that a change in consciousness *precedes* a change in social organization; and the new art is thoroughly implicated in this political process.”³⁵⁵ Group 66’s hope seems to be that a change in consciousness, leading to a shift in perception, can ultimately result in structural changes in both society and perception itself.

This thesis has explored the goals and visions of Group 66 and looked at how they implemented mechanisms to communicate these goals into their happening and co-ritus. In the introduction, I stated that Foucault’s *L’Archéologie du Savoir* served as inspiration for this thesis’ methodology. In these concluding remarks, I want to highlight another

³⁵² Nygård and Strang, 57.

³⁵³ Kostelanetz, *Theatre of Mixed Means*, 34.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 37.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 42.

Foucauldian aspect that has emerged through analysis of Group 66's happening and co-ritus. Foucault viewed power as a fluid concept that can be negotiated. In the context of this thesis' discussions, power continuously and rapidly shifts between artists and audiences, artists and institutions, and between centers and peripheries. Furthermore, I proposed in the introduction that the local represents the personal and the global the political. In this conclusion, I would like to reformulate this statement. I instead propose that this set of equivalencies equate to the individual and the collective, and in the context of Group 66, this translates to a psychic renewal of different levels.

However, questions raised in the introductory chapter of this thesis of how to approach ephemeral artworks like Group 66's happening and co-ritus remain unanswered.

In relation to Norwegian art history, its lack of scholarship in this area and well-established paradigms that consider the national context and the many specificities of ephemeral Norwegian art that escapes classification like that practiced by Group 66 makes research difficult. As someone faced with the task of writing about Group 66's happening and co-ritus, I have had to navigate and negotiate with the provisions and state of Norwegian art history. Coupled with the ephemeral nature of these artworks, I have been forced to question if such a task was even possible.

In this thesis' introduction, I explained my decision not to include any photographic documentation of the two artworks discussed, as I felt their inclusion would take away from communicating the difficulty these transient works present. Furthermore, I now propose that photographic documentation does not constitute primary sources in this context. As the two artworks discussed in this thesis were transient and time-constricted, the ideas and visions espoused by Group 66 in their writings and interviews are what remain in their original state. The many recent exhibitions discussed in the second chapter that have displayed Group 66 archival materials support this point. However, I need to underline that these archival materials, whether artists' writings or newspaper articles display a fragmented and often contradictory story, and as such, working with these sources has forced me to make critical selections and constantly question these sources. These difficulties have been surmountable, yet one question looms; how can one write about art one has not experienced?

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to approach these two artworks in manifold ways, yet I have not fully succeeded in exposing their core. Perhaps one of the points, or characteristics, of artworks like these is that they remain unknowable. As it stands, I am left with perhaps more questions than when I started writing this thesis. Perhaps, I have been subjected to a psychic renewal myself?

The difficulties and struggles that present themselves looking at these two artworks in 2021 must indeed underline their groundbreaking and challenging nature.

In 1966 Per Hovdenakk wrote, “ten or two years ago, it was almost impossible to imagine such a group in Bergen at all. What has happened in the meantime is unknown. Perhaps it will be the job of an art historian sometime in the future to find out.”³⁵⁶

This thesis has attempted to contribute to this exploration. By seeking to uncover new aspects of a selection of Group 66’s artistic activities, this thesis wishes to contribute to the existing and future scholarship on Group 66 and other cross-disciplinary art.

³⁵⁶ Per Hovdenakk. «Lasse Anno 66» Bergen Arbeiderblad, February 26, 1966. Original text: “For ti eller to år siden var det bortimot umulige tenke seg en slik gruppe i Bergen i det hele tatt. hva som har skjedd i mellomtiden er ikke godt å vite. Muligens blir det jobb for en kunsthistoriker en gang i fremtiden og finne det ut.” Translation by the author.

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