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Happening

(_drama, _sjanger) Dramalignende hendelse med overraskelseeffekt, en spektakulær kunstnerisk begivenhet. Hendelsen er preget av ikke-intensjon, dvs. at de som får den i stand, ikke har noen bestemte eller spesifikke intensjoner og hensikter med det som skjer. En hendelse som er ikke-kalkulert, tilfeldig, uten klar begynnelse eller avslutning, uten noe mål, men igangsatt av en kunstner.

“The happening, as Kaprow developed it, is a non-verbal, theatrical production that abandons stage-audience structure as well as the usual plot or narrative line of traditional theatre. Although a compartmented organization may be used, the performers are considered as objects – often kinaesthetically involved – within an overall design of environment, timing, sound, colour and light. Found environments are often used and built upon, but the events are not casually arrived at, nor are they entirely accidental and spontaneous.” (Claude Marks m.fl. i <http://www.ubu.com/historical/kaprow/index.html>; lesedato 30.12.11)

Det inntreffer eller utfolder seg noe som ikke er et tegn – i hvert fall ikke et tradisjonelt, tolkbart tegn. Det som skjer, uttrykker ikke et begrep eller et sett av begreper på en rasjonell, forståelig måte. Det har ikke en tydelig intensjon og kan ikke tolkes slik vi er vant til å tolke kunst. Både hvorfor, hva og hvordan er åpent.

Elementene som en happening består av, inngår ikke i klare innbyrdes konstellasjoner, men spriker i ulike retninger eller spenner så å si bein på hverandre. Helheten virker intensjonsløs. Et av målene for sjangeren er å skape eksistensiell bevissthet, et fokus på hva som er autentisk og erkjennelsesskapende. Derfor er happening et slags teater om teater, kledd av til å dreie seg om essenser basert på ureduserbare innslag fra en kunstners “private” verden. I tradisjonell teaterkunst er dramatikerens oppgave derimot å allmenngjøre sine ideer, å overføre sin personlige tankeverden til et offentlig tilgjengelig språk. Hendelsene kan vanskelig rasjonaliseres. Günter Berghaus hevder at tyskeren Joseph Beuys prøvde å “foster a prerational form of consciousness” hos sitt publikum (i Sandford 1995 s. 330). Happeninger kan dermed beskrives som eller anklages for å være en slags primitivisme.

Fenomenet happening utviklet seg trolig fra delvis improviserte gateframføringer og fra kunstneriske aksjoner i små private studioer (ifølge RosaLee Goldberg i Lischka 1988 s. 109). Andre hevder at den første happening kan dateres nøyaktig: En “Untitled Event” i 1952 ved Black Mountain College i USA ble happening-kunstens fødsel (Düssel, Edel og Schödlbauer 2001 s. 308-309). Schwarz hevder at John Cage gjennomførte den første happening (Schwarz 1997 s. 60).

Det som av mange regnes som den første happening “fann stad på Black Mountain College, North Carolina, USA, i august 1952. [...] Det kan ikkje vera tvil om at “untitled event” må reknast som ei framragande hending i den vestlege kultur si teaterhistorie, gjennom måten den forma forholdet mellom utøvarar og tilskodarar på, og forma for samspel mellom dei ulike kunststartane den skapte. [...] Medan John Cage stod i ein stige i svart dress og leste frå teksten “The relation of music to Zen Buddhism”, snurra biletkunstnar Robert Rauschenberg gamle plater på ein grammofon, medan komponist David Tudor spela på eit av Cage sine preparerte piano, før han gjekk over til å tømme vatn frå ei bøtte til ei anna og tilbake igjen, medan Charles Olson og Mary Caroline Richards leste poesi frå sine seter blant publikum. [Danseren Merce] Cunningham med fleire dansa mellom stolrekkjene, etter kvart jaga av ein oppgalra hund som i utgangspunktet var del av Rauschenbergs installasjon, som og inkluderte filmklipp projisert i taket i gradvis rørsle med solnedgangens spel nedover langs veggen. Komponist Jay Watt sat i eit hjørne og spela på eksotiske musikkinstrument, fløyter blei blåst i, beibiar gråt, og til slutt blei eit begeistra publikum servert kaffi av fire gutter kledd i kvitt. Komponist Stefan Wolpe forlét rommet i protest medan Cage proklamerte suksessen: ei anarkistisk hending, vellukka i sitt formålsause hendingsforløp. Ingen visste kva som skulle skje, og det blei grunnlaget for ei oppleving av at det verkeleg skjedde noko.” (*Morgenbladet* 7. – 13. august 2009 s. 38)

“Kaprow, more philosophical and restless, meditated on the relationship of the spectator and the work. He put mirrors into his things so the spectator could feel included in them. That wasn’t physical enough, so he made enveloping collages which surrounded the spectator. These he called ‘environments’. Finally in the Spring of 1958, he began to include live people as part of the collage, and this he called ‘happening’.” (Dick Higgins i 1969 sitert fra Kuenzli 2006 s. 282) Kaprow selv skriver at han lagde sine første happeninger i John Cages timer i 1957-58 (gjengitt etter Kuenzli 2006 s. 283).

En happening kan bestå av sekvenser og fortone seg som en kollasj av hendelser som ikke henger sammen gjennom årsak og virkning og heller ikke forteller en historie (Sandford 1995 s. 4). Fordi det ligger en anti-aristotelisk poetikk til grunn for happeninger, opplever publikum dem ofte som meningsløse. Det tradisjonelle teatrets illudering er også sterkt redusert. Den amerikanske kunstneren Robert Wilson mente folk ofte hadde feil innstilling overfor det som skjer i happeninger: “You don’t have to think about the story, because there isn’t any. You don’t have to

listen to the words, because the words don't mean anything. You just enjoy the scenery, the architectural arrangements in time and space, the music, the feelings they all evoke. Listen to the pictures.” (sitert fra Carlson 1999 s. 110) Hendelsene framstår oftest som rare og tilfeldige, og ikke minst uforutsette. Mange happeninger har dessuten noe ureduserbart privat ved seg. De har innslag som peker mot en kunstners indre, “ensom” verden. Dette står i kontrast til tradisjonell teaterkunst, der dramatikerens oppgave er å allmenngjøre sine ideer ved å overføre sin personlige tankeverden til det offentlig tilgjengelige.

I en artikkel av Markku Eskelinen og Ragnhild Tronstad om likheter mellom dataspill, performance og happening (i Wolf og Perron 2003) skriver forfatterne: “Originating in the same aesthetical and political climate as Performance Art, the Happening was nevertheless a somewhat different phenomenon. Happenings were created and performed in order to transform the notion of art altogether: to break the barrier between art and life. Happenings weren't supposed to be “art,” in the traditional sense of the term [...] Happenings had participants only – no audience. When performed in public spaces, Happenings would inevitably be witnessed by people, but these people were not addressed as an audience. They weren't to be included in the Happening in the sense audiences are included in other live art events, such as theater or Performance Art. [...] The transactional feedback loop between performer(s) and audience is naturally nonexistent in Happenings.” (Wolf og Perron 2003 s. 200)

Allan Kaprow anså Jackson Pollocks “action painting” som en av røttene til happening-kunstarten fordi Pollocks bilder er anti-mimetiske, inneholder tilfeldigheter og ble frambrakt av en kropp like mye som av et intellekt. Kaprow var selv den fremste pionéren for happening-sjangeren med sine *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1958-59). Kaprow føyde “visuelt materiale og hendelser sammen slik engang dadaistene gjorde med sine kollasjer” skriver Ruhrberg (2000 s. 583). Karin Thomas kaller en happening “en slags kollasj av hendelser” (Thomas 1988 s. 244). “Å bygge realitet inn i en skuespill-lignende inscenering: det var muligheten i happeningene” hevdet Jürgen Claus i et tidlig verk (1965 s. 208). Tidlig ble også happeninger forent på ulike måter med moderne medier, blant annet av John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg og Robert Whitman. Nettopp ulike moderne medier er godt egnet til å skape en opplevelse av et svært komplisert, ja kaotisk budskap (“the full “message-complexity” of a downtown street”; Richard Schechner sitert fra Sandford 1995 s. 217). I et intervju forklarte John Cage kaoset i happeninger slik: “If you go down a street in the city you can see that people are moving about with intention but you don't know what those intentions are. Many, many things happen which can be viewed in purposeless ways” (sitert fra Sandford 1995 s. 58). Hendelser blir intensiverte ved tilsynelatende ikke å tilhøre noen bestemt, praktisk kontekst. Begivenhetene i en happening oppleves som isolerte fra en meningsdannende ramme. Dette bidrar sterkt til å gjøre hendelsene uforklarlige og få dem til å virke tilfeldige.

“Kaprow articulated the following guidelines on how to create a Happening:

1. The line between the Happening and daily life should be kept as fluid and perhaps indistinct as possible.
2. Themes, materials, actions, and the associations they evoke are to be gotten from anywhere except from the arts, their derivatives, and their milieu.
3. The Happenings should be dispersed over several widely spaced, sometimes moving and changing, locales.
4. Time, closely bound up with things and spaces, should be variable and independent of the convention of continuity.
5. The composition of all materials, actions, images, and their times and spaces should be undertaken in as artless and, again, practical a way as possible.
6. Happenings should be unrehearsed and performed by nonprofessionals, once only.
7. It follows that there should not be (and usually cannot be) an audience or audiences to watch a Happening.”

(i Wolf og Perron 2003 s. 201-202)

“The following examples of available activities in one of Kaprow’s Happenings are chosen to illustrate how the instructions to a Happening may sometimes nevertheless resemble ordinary paidia rules [dvs. spillregler som ikke er innrettet på seier/tap]:

- On the shoulder of a stretch of highway, a fancy banquet table is laid out, food on plates, money in the saucers. Everything is left there.
- People stand on bridges, on street corners, watch cars pass. After 200 red ones, they leave.
- Two people telephone each other. Phone rings once, is answered “hello.” Caller hangs up. After a few minutes, other person does the same. Same answer. Phone clicks off. Repeated with two rings, three rings, four rings, five rings, six rings, seven, eight, nine, etc. ... until a line is busy.
- On the street, kids give paper flowers to people with pleasant faces.

However, in Happenings the rules are given, while in play rules are self-assertive, established by the player.” (i Wolf og Perron 2003 s. 203)

“Kaprow developed an “action-collage” technique in which he employed such materials as straw, wadded newspaper, twine and flashing lights. Influenced by the kinaesthetic paint-dripping methods of Jackson Pollock, as well as by the Abstract Expressionists' emphasis on the act of painting itself, Kaprow became a crusader for artist-spectator involvement over an extended field of operation. Pollock and the avant-garde composer John Cage were the two major influences that steered Kaprow to the first happenings. The work of Pollock, the apotheosis of an art of action, provided Kaprow with a rationale to progress beyond traditional painting. An exhibition of Pollock's work provided the inspiration for Kaprow's own experiments in the total, enveloping environment they created. In a 1958 *ArtNews* article, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” Kaprow wrote that his canvases were so huge and all-embracing that “they ceased to become paintings and became

environments”; they pointed the way to a new form of art in which “action” would predominate over “painting.” “Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, and a thousand other things....” In fact this was the way Kaprow's own art was developing: toward what he called “action-collages” (as in *Penny Arcade*, 1956, and *Wall*, 1957-9).” (Claude Marks m.fl. i <http://www.ubu.com/historical/kaprow/index.html>; lesedato 30.12.11)

“The other major influence was that of Cage. While he still made assemblages and painted such constructions as *Grandma's Boy* (1956, Pasadena, California Museum), between 1956 and 1958 Kaprow was studying musical composition with the *avant-garde* composer John Cage at the New School for Social Research in Manhattan. The notions of chance and indeterminacy as a valid means of aesthetic organization (and disorganization) that Cage advocated were instrumental to Kaprow's subsequent thinking and artistic activity. No kind of experimentation was anathema to Cage, the most radical and influential native modernist in American music; at the time, his direction was “towards theater” – where, he believed, could be found the most effective integration of art and “real” life – and all his students were thus propelled. In 1957-8 Kaprow began to create environmental works that demanded audience participation (an idea also stemming from Cage's experiments), and this integration of space, materials, time and people eventually led to the more experimental pieces. Secondary influences – really, precedents – for Kaprow's happenings were the publicly staged absurdities of the post-World War I Dadaists, the theories of Antonin Artaud, and the escapades of Yves Klein, the French New Realist.” (Claude Marks m.fl. i <http://www.ubu.com/historical/kaprow/index.html>; lesedato 30.12.11)

“In 1965 Kaprow explained his evolution from collage to environments and happenings: “The action collages then became bigger, and I introduced flashing lights and thicker hunks of matter. These parts projected further and further from the wall into the room, and included more and more audible elements: sounds of ringing buzzers, bells, toys, etc., until I had accumulated nearly all the sensory elements I was to work with during the following years....” His works expanded until they filled the gallery, creating an integrated environment for the spectator. “I immediately saw that every visitor to the environment was part of it. And so I gave him opportunities like moving something, turning switches on – just a few things. Increasingly during 1957 and 1958, this suggested a more ‘scored’ responsibility for the visitor. I offered him more and more to do until there developed the Happening.... The integration of all elements – environment, constructed sections, time, space, and people – has been my main technical problem ever since.” ” (Claude Marks m.fl. i <http://www.ubu.com/historical/kaprow/index.html>; lesedato 30.12.11)

“The first such work was called *18 Happenings in 6 parts* – presented in October 1959 at the Reuben Gallery on Fourth Avenue in New York. It is from this

performance that the now-famous term “happening” is derived: used originally to indicate a very determined, rehearsed and heterogenous production, the word has picked up the connotation of a spontaneous undirected occurrence – a meaning not altogether intended by Kaprow’s entitling of the original event. He had divided the space into three rooms with clear plastic walls. The visitors, whose tickets directed them to specified seats in each room at particular times and with strictly choreographed movements, witnessed, among other events, a girl squeezing oranges, an artist lighting matches and painting, and an orchestra of toy instruments. Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Alfred Leslie, and Lester Johnson were among the performers. Although tightly scripted and planned, Kaprow’s early happenings maintained an air of unstructured spontaneity. This was because they had none of the usual trappings of theatre – plot, dialogue, character, or professional performers – and no resemblance to the traditional visual arts. According to drama critic Richard Schechner of the *New York Times*, what Kaprow and others in the field were producing was “a new theater [that] combines associative variations on visual-aural themes, chance permutations, games and journeys.” ” (Claude Marks m.fl. i <http://www.ubu.com/historical/kaprow/index.html>; lesedato 30.12.11)

“*18 Happenings in 6 Parts* was quite successful, and for a time happenings and performances by Kaprow and others were eagerly sought out (they were sometimes hard to find, being staged in lofts, empty lots, stores, classrooms, train stations, and other unconventional places) by the fashionable looking for the latest trend. Undoubtedly, this period of trendiness helped inject the term “happening” into the idiosyncratic vocabulary of the 1960s. Encouraged, Kaprow regularly staged events in the New York City area through the decade. After 1960 he devoted himself to publicizing, creating and establishing the happening as a viable form of art in America. His concern, like that of such early Pop artists as Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Whitman, Claes Oldenburg and Red Grooms, with whom he originated this all-encompassing form of environmental theatre, has been to break down the traditional distinctions between life and the categories of art. Among the events he staged at this time were *Apple Shrine* (1960, at the Judson Gallery, Greenwich Village, which he directed), *A Service for the Dead* (1962), *Eat* (1964, at the Old Ebling Brewery in the Bronx), and many others. In *Coca Cola, Shirley Cannonball?* (1960), a huge boot (of cardboard) kicked an oblate ball around a school gymnasium to the beat of a fife and drum, while in *A Spring Happening* (1961) the audience was terrorized by a power mower and an electric fan “attacking” them in a dark tunnel. In *Words* (1962), spectators were invited to rearrange words painted on cardboard on the gallery walls. For the Museum of Modern Art’s “Hans Hofmann and His Students” travelling show, Kaprow created *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann*, which consisted of two furnished rooms that could be rearranged by visitors. (Some older women, Kaprow noted, were appalled and began to houseclean.) In this attempt to enlarge the realm of art beyond gallery display and museum situations, many of the happenings have been performed in such untraditional settings as lofts, stores, gymnasiums and

parking lots. *Yard* (1961), for example, consisted of a backyard full of rubber auto tires heaped randomly for viewers to climb in and around.” (Claude Marks m.fl. i <http://www.ubu.com/historical/kaprow/index.html>; lesedato 30.12.11)

Det er knapt noen filosofisk dybde i happeninger; de er nærmest absurde hendelser som peker mot meningsløshet. Happeninger foregår på og i et framstillingsnivå, og uten at publikum skal lese en (intendert) undertekst. Det som framstilles er ambivalent og vanskelig eller umulig å rasjonalisere. Den tyske happening-kunstneren Wolf Vostell forklarte at hans happening som foregikk i et svømmebasseng fylt med blant annet gule, blå og røde plastsekker samt knokler fra okser, skulle konfrontere publikum med “absurditeten i det absurde” (sitert fra Claus 1965 s. 209). Happeninger tematiserer det personlige og allment ubegripelige. De har det Michael Kirby kaller “an alogical function” (i Sandford 1995 s. 10). Heller ikke for kunstneren har det som skjer i en happening en intellektuell klarhet. Det dreier seg ikke om å formidle ferdigtenkte tanker til publikum, men å formidle noe fra en privat verden på måter som vekker private tanker hos andre. Slik sett er ikke en happening et kunstnerisk møtested, men en aksjon som eksponerer avstand og fremmedhet. I en happening framstilles noe, men dette noe ligger over eller under et enkelt verbaliserbart nivå.

I tillegg til det kaotisk-tilfeldige betones i mange happeninger også det autentiske ved situasjoner og det kroppslige nærværet til alle deltakere. Ofte foregår aksjonene i friluft eller i store saler, i offentlige eller halv-offentlige rom som åpner for uventete innslag fra tilfeldige tilskuere. “Spontane reaksjoner er når som helst mulig”, både fra kunstnerne og tilskuere som blir deltakere (Thomas 1988 s. 245). Men Michael Kirby minner om at “[t]he creation was done by the artist when he formulated the idea of action. The performer merely embodies and makes concrete the idea” (Sandford 1995 s. 8). Andre teoretikere enn Kirby ser publikums muligheter som langt mer åpne. Robert Morris velger termen “proto-audience” (Sandford 1995 s. 172) om publikum/deltakerne i happeninger. For Kirby er det imidlertid ikke mengden av kunstnerens eller publikums innflytelse som er det sentrale, men de effektene som oppstår i et samspill. Happening-artisten Jean-Jacques Lebel forestilte seg konstallasjonen publikum/artist som en god mulighet for dekonstruksjon: “The necessity of going beyond the aberrant subject-object relationship (looker/looked-at, exploiter/exploited, spectator/actor, colonialist/colonized, mad-doctor/madman, legalism/illegalism, etc.) which until now dominated and conditioned modern art” (Sandford 1995 s. 269).

I en happening av den tyske artisten Bazon Brock i 1965 ble en rekke stoler stilt opp på en travel gate i Berlin. Billetter ble solgt til forbipasserende for at de skulle ta plass og betrakte hverdags-skuespillet som foregikk rundt dem. Østerrikeren Otto Muehl ble så kjent at han har blitt kalt en “Happeningstar” (Kreuzer 1975 s. 115).

Japaneren Kudô Tetsumi ble berømt for sine harakiri-happeninger (Kuenzli 2006 s. 285). Tetsumi lagde sin første happening i Tokyo i 1957, kalt *Anti-Arts*. Senere

happeninger han har stått bak er *Philosophy of Impotence* og *Harakiri of Humanism*. Ofte dreier det seg om oppløsning og menneskelige rudimenter (<http://www.zeit.de/1970/27/kunstkalendar; lesedato 16.09.16>).

“Den New York-baserte kunstneren Miru Kim ligger sammen med to griser i en glassboks i en installasjon kalt “Jeg liker griser og griser liker meg (104 timer)”. Denne happeningen foregår på Art Basels messe over samtidskunst i Miami i Florida i disse dager [i 2011].” (*Dagbladet* 3. desember 2011 s. 68)

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