

Article

Live Experiences
in the Theater Gardens of Contemporary Art

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Affective Curating and Exhibition Experiments with Theatricality

By Charlotte Sprogøe

Death and The Narrator

We have an appointment with you. Four days – four banquets. Repetition will be a constant, flashbacks will come and go. When you think it is over, stay longer, more can happen. You might enter a vicious cycle of never-ending shadow games. You might feel trapped in a broken record that repeats a constant note, but through repetition comes enlightenment. And even if you think something random happens maybe it belongs to your experience. Open your eyes, be alert. The more passionate, the more trained you are to see through the fog, the more evidence you will discover about our plot. Some of you – at random – will find in your private rooms a little set of gifted objects which you have to decode through your survival skills and that might or might not be useful to overcome what is about to happen. Open your eyes, be alert, what seems passing by might be a silent omen. We will travel together from Baghdad to Samarra, from Stromboli to the dead city of Pompeii, find your travel companion and unveil the enemies. Resign soon, there is no escape from this journey. Ascending could mean descending; you can end up much faster underground than you think. The domestic turns archaeological, the sculpture turns back into stone and vice versa. Hurry up, it's time. This appointment is inescapable.¹ (Teaser Volcano Extravaganza 2019).

The teaser from *Death*, the Volcano Extravaganza 2019, turns every part of the art event into something performative; the audience member, addressed in the second person singular, performs the show, the sculptures move and transform, the mediation info consists of props and clues. The teaser unfolds as a post-performative medium in itself, acting / performing, – and the storyline becomes a structuring part of the exhibition as form.² Implicitly the viewer holds a performative perspective, creating a theatrical experience.³

Through the intensification of theatrical tropes such as narrator, stage and backdrop certain radical and thoroughly orchestrated exhibitions become a lived experience for the audience and manage to come alive as lucid dreams. This feeling of experiencing both the fundamentals of theatre and the display situation of an art exhibition is at the core of this article: Fluctuation between presentation and representation – life and image.

1) Based on *The Appointment in Samarra*, a Mesopotamian tale recounted by English playwright W. Somerset Maugham in 1933.

2) The post-performative, here understood as in curator and writer Marie de Brugerolles terminology as an expanded view on what performance can be when elements in artworks perform and performance begin to infiltrate several dimensions of the art experience. As presented in her series of articles in Mousse Magazine no. 63, 66 and 73.

3) A key point in professor in Philosophy and Aesthetics Julianne Rebentisch's excavation of the general theatricality of art (see Rebentisch 2012, p. 71). The aesthetic object needs a performative viewer to come into being – to constitute it. The aesthetic experience is a process that is played out between the subject and the art-object – a relation that demands both parties.

Volcano Extravaganza, held each summer on the small Italian volcanic island of Stromboli, north of Sicily, is an exclusive, hidden and highly acclaimed experimental art-scene event. Artistic director and curator Milovan Farronato, of the Fiorucci Art Trust, has created the yearly recurring Extravaganzas as a “a series of ephemeral and fortuitous events based on improvisation and chance”. The events are founded on the notion of a *strategic narrative*, Farronato explains,⁴ and has become what could be termed as a series of multi-referencing, theatrical and curatorial stagings of contemporary art. The fictional and conceptual narration is central, as such it represents an approach to curating fundamentally different from what has been referred to as “Nordic Welfare State Curating” with a didactic and normative approach molded around ideals of non-hierarchical transparency.⁵ The different iterations each have their own conceptual proposition and story-telling, setting the tone and creating a formal structure for the festival of that year.⁶

The active volcano, that can be climbed and walked upon, is integrated as a character into the *stra-vaganzas*, as a “theatre-cum-volcano”⁷. Thus, presenting an extended and extravagant version of many contemporary off-site curatorial commissioning projects internationally that actively seeks to let the surroundings become part of the affect rich settings of the shows. Theatre has been a model for curatorial experiments throughout the history of experimental exhibitions. In contemporary curatorial practice this coupling between the drama of theatre and the structure of exhibition formats has only become more amorous. Art historian Claire Bishop goes as far as arguing for a “rethinking of the history of twentieth-century art through the lens of theater rather than painting” (Bishop 2019, p. 3). *The Volcano Extravaganza* does evoke the historical avantgarde’s action-oriented performances; from the futurist use of the then very popular medium of theatre, its affective dynamics and crowd involvement to the surrealist collaborations on theatrical stagings. But most frequently *The Volcano Extravaganza* makes subtle reference to much older theatrical traditions, such as the theatres of antiquity with processions, recitals and scenic landscape backdrops, medieval theatres with its clear acts and narrator, and the Baroque theatre garden with its intricate foldings of spaces and story lines. The question here is what kind of theatrical tropes, concepts and methodologies are used in the curatorial work – and to what end.

The Speaker is Dead

Death, the 2019 version with artist Maria Loboda as artistic director, that in its curatorial use of theatrical tropes will be our opening case here, evoked the mystical, the allegorical – and the dead. The event began on Stromboli and culminated in a Pompeian site, *Villa dei Misteri*, decorated with images of Dionysian ecstasy and ritualistic flagellation. Each day had a dress code, a theme and an intertwined line-up of recitals, dinner banquets and performances by a range of artist; Anthea Hamilton, Prem Sahib, Agnieszka Brzezanska, Nicholas Byrne and others. With the tag-line ‘*The Speaker is Dead*’ – the narrator, or promptor from earlier times’ proto-theatres, who was both ‘inside’

4) As told in an unpublished interview with Farronato, 19 March 2021.

5) A quote from an editor and art critique Pernille Albrechtsen.

6) With titles such as: *Total Anastrophes*, 2018, a project in collaboration with The Vinyl Factory and Runa Islam as artistic leader, *I Polpi*, 2017, *I Will Go Where I Don't Belong*, 2016 curated by Camille Henrot with Milovan Farronato, *In Favour of a Total Eclipse*, 2015 focusing on alchemy, etc.

7) The theatrical references are clear in the presentation of the 2018 iteration of *Volcano Extravaganza*: “On July 27, 2018, a total lunar eclipse will occur: the Moon will pass through the center of the Earth’s shadow, as our theatre-cum-volcano will raise its stage curtains once again in Stromboli.” Quoted from: <http://fiorucciarttrust.com/works/volcano-extravaganza-2018-total-anastrophes-7/>

and ‘outside’ of the play, was both brought to the fore and declared dead. A negative aesthetics was thus created through the curating, creating a double of highly choreographed live experience and a void, or abandonment of morale.⁸

Indeed, theatricality was front and center throughout the festival: from tragedy to comedy, the sacred to the profane, the absurd to the grotesque, and everything in between. In the fashion of 14th-century Italian novellas à la *The Decameron*, the event’s four days were narrated like tales through a series of cryptic emails sent daily to all attendants and titled after obscure historical references. (Loiseau, 2019)

The narrative style is key. As in the medieval Italian novellas, it can be seen as what was formed by *Death*, was a mosaic world-image, a document of life in motion – with different states of affect invoked, different parts of life depicted. With a line-up ranging from an eerie Prem Sahib cruising performance with the sound of roaring scooter engines set after dark and with characters hidden behind shadows of the villas pillars, to 50’s like movie-set characters appearing throughout the day, acting out only glimpses of their stories – to interstices of an Anthea Hamilton improv choreography, in lizard looking tricots using the ruins of Pompeii as a *shakkei setting*⁹, a borrowed landscape of earth tones and death. The narrative strategy was not to convey a linear dogmatic narration, as a modernistic museum exhibition presenting ‘the full story’. It was rather a ‘logic of the And’, as described by philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, an event without a beginning or an end.¹⁰ Thus creating a sense of action, process and movement, a living form encapsulating the intricately curated event.

As art historian Bruce Ferguson has shown, museum exhibitions can be seen as dominant “strategic systems of representation”. Art institutions to him are characters with personalities and traits – a speaking and performing body, which becomes apparent in the exhibitions. Further, “[t]hey are narratives which use art objects as elements in institutionalised stories that are promoted to an audience” (Ferguson 1996, p. 175). In *Death* the narrator is brought to the fore and then killed off – i.e. ‘The Speaker is Dead’. Instead of going for a seemingly non-hierarchical, normative curating, the character of the institution Volcano Extravaganza as a speaking and performing body is emphasised, and the institutional voice, stage, mediation used as mediums for artistic exploration.

Farronato himself explains that the Stromboli events are not scripted, but rather drafted as storyboards exploring the potentiality of ideas proposed. Thus, the final format presents a merging of exploring, producing and exhibiting / performing; letting “back-stage and front stage become one”.¹¹ The audience thus are invited not only onto the stage (and inside the *gesamtkunstwerk* like structure that the event constitute itself as) but also to the backstage area, into the rehearsal room of the project. Notions of inclusion and exclusion are played upon in several ways: Who is invited to the island, who is served at the banquettes and how do the experiments relate to the location surrounding it? Themes that are relevant for all exhibitions to address but usually not imbedded in

8) Perhaps a reference to Roland Barthes *Death of the Author* “there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now” thus becoming a “multi-dimensional space” (Barthes 1977: 145).

9) A Japanese concept for the uses of a dramatic natural elements in the design of gardens, such as a mountain as backdrop for a private garden.

10) ‘Logic of the And’ is described by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their presentation of the rhizomic, without beginning or end but in constant process (Deleuze and Guattari, p. 25).

11) As told in private interview 19 March 2021 to the author.

the curatorial strategies themselves.

The Exhibition as Stage

The notion of the exhibition as stage and a form of theatre is a recurring theme in contemporary curatorial theory. Curator Jens Hoffmann, originally trained in the theatre world as a director and later turned curator, is one of the prominent advocates for this conception of exhibitions: “I conceive of the exhibition as a stage set in which the objects on display are performers” Hoffmann writes (Hoffmann 2015, p. 28). His curatorial aim is ‘creating a lived experience for an audience’, referencing modernistic theatre experiments such as theatre director Erwin Piscator’s epic theatre.

Hoffmann elaborates on another occasion on his dramaturgic approach to curating art:

[T]here is a certain dramaturgy to it. I begin with a certain introduction and then carefully put together what piece comes after the next, how the pieces interrelate, how to create a dramatic flow so that visitors are not constantly bombarded by visuals, but rather have moments of silence interspersed with action (...) It is a dramatic and dynamic situation. (Somers n.d.)

The result can be seen as an ‘affective curating’ aiming for situations with intensity and compressed levels of energies, where the scale and presentation of one artwork affects the impression and experience of the next. The concept of affect in this context is focused on intensities and pre-personal experiences, not on the emotional and discursive side of affect studies.¹² “L’affect (Spinoza’s affectus) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. L’affection (Spinoza’s affectio) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include “mental” or ideal bodies)” (Massumi 1987, p. xvi). In line with the classic definition of affect, elements, in this affective kind of curating, are aimed at impacting the senses as well as the mental state, adding a spark of life to the shows.¹³ Everything here is focused of experiential states – between the subject and the art objects she experiences.

The intertwining of the theatrical play of representations (as in theatre) and the aesthetic experience of the artwork as autonomous form / thing (as is the situation in an exhibition) that occurs in projects where artworks are staged theatrically, create a situation where each encounter with the art is an affective encounter – dramatised by the curator. This way of conceptualising curating also emphasises the ways in which each part of the exhibition holds a level of agency and a performativity of its own. Resulting in shifts in positions, viewpoints and in creating a heightened interplay between the elements in the exhibitions as a whole. A way of animating the exhibition experience and maybe also of transforming it into a what is in numerous texts described as a ‘lived experience’.

The dramaturgy of the theatre is present in this kind of curating as tropes, concepts and plays with structural references. Not in its totality, as an actual fully formed stage play but in a somewhat abstract virtual form, that only come into being on a conceptual level for the audience, i.e. that

12) As conducted by Sara Ahmed, Lisa Blackman and many others.

13) As opposed to the Eye that art historian Brian O’Doherty positions as the main target of ‘White Cube’ exhibitions in his *Inside the White Cube*.

'come alive in their heads'. Here the theatrical key-element of representation is abandoned, the dramaturgic arc of tension and resolve for instance, and the actor's representation of a script. "The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce and connect" philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi writes. (Massumi 2002, p. 30) The virtual does unfold on an actual level but presents itself as a multiplicity of many possible states and situations. These exhibitions as well embrace this multiplicity and open-endedness – and seek to escape final representation. This kind of exhibition making is thus a matter of curating intensities or energy plays, creating a vibrant virtual form of fluctuating states of experience; reached by the many varying encounters, the seduction of a narrative and the shifts in positions throughout the event. Farronato terms his curatorial practice as '*Exhibition as Lucid Dream*'.¹⁴ It seems real but is only coherent on a virtual level.

The setting, in Farronato's case the volcanic island, becomes a character in the production – or the theatre itself, as previously stated; "Theater-cum-Volcano". The movement around the island and the incorporation of its dynamic eruptive nature plays into the totality of the event, and its composition and choreography. Adding a layer of the non-man made and highly affective state of raw matter of volcanic lava to the exhibition. It confronts us with the materiality of the site and emphasises the organic nature, temporal scope and physicality at work in the experiencing of art. The changes of location throughout the scenic landscape of the island furthermore functions as passages into different acts of the drama. In this use of the landscape, Volcano Extravaganza resonates with another experimental art exhibition project: *Theatergarten Bestiarium*.

Garden Theatre and the Lived Experience

Theatergarten Bestiarium was an exhibition made as a model from the outset, a 'proto-type' for an exhibition. The experimental and processual project was developed in Europe but first exhibited in 1989 at Institute for Contemporary Art, PS1 in New York, and subsequently in cities in Europe – and again in another form at Haus der Kunst in Munich in 2011. The aim was, in PS1 director Alana Heiss's words, to find ways to "destabilize", "defy authority" and "provoke questions", and work towards a living transforming exhibition.¹⁵

Produced by the Belgian art and theatre historian Chris Dercon, later on director of Tate Modern, Haus der Kunst and the Volksbühne theatre in Berlin, it was initially formed as a stage, or a series of stages, set in a garden landscape. A total work of art, where the different artists were working collectively, and where the all the different artistic projects were being built into the exhibition as a whole, somewhat refusing individual separation. For Dercon this project stands out as emblematic for contemporary curatorial experiments with the notion of the exhibition itself. Stating that the traditional format is stagnant, and that curators need to continuously be open to experimentation that allows for the format of the exhibition to follow the development of art and its contemporary conditions. If not, he predicts, artist will take over and become the curators of the future, thus making the non-artist curators seem obsolete and dated.¹⁶

The proto-type exhibition *Theatergarten Bestiarium* was referencing the tradition of theatre-gardens, the common form of theatres before 1500, and still used significantly, in later times in

14) His key point in a Lecture at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts Copenhagen, November 2020.

15) In 'An Exhibition as a Zoo'. Foreword to the catalogue p. 6.

16) Stated in his talk '30 Years of Theatergarten Bestiarium' held at a conference related to 'Theater, Garden Bestiary' Ecal on 14.12.2016.

various forms. These were scenic designed landscapes that historically have been structured as both setting, backdrop and stage for theatrical events – and thus operationalised as a method for rethinking the notion of stage itself. This living, organic, yet at the same time overtly composed form of staging can be seen as a predecessor to both Land Art and the performance oriented post-minimalist art forms with a notion of theatricality at its core, and also to the many off-site projects in contemporary art. But it also serves as a very clear example of the changing ways of how we are made to look at things – and how we are positioned as spectators in varying cultural formations. Through the changes in the theatre-gardens it becomes clear how visibility is constructed, as the projects aims to show.¹⁷

The concept for the exhibition was based on the idea of gallerist Rüdiger Schöttle and his text '*Bestiarium: Theater and Garden of Violence, War and Happiness*'. Searching for the foundation of the modern regime of visibility and looking for ways to create exhibitions as an “emotional lived experience“, as an alternative to a traditional, more static and less organic exhibition format, Schöttle looked back upon the historic garden-theatres and their way of shaping our way of seeing and experiencing. From the development of the scenic stages of Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque theatre-gardens to the amusement parks of his own time – dreamworlds he named them.

“Psychomachy tells the story of a garden called Bestiarium – a garden facing both past and future, shining down on us as a golden age,” Schöttle writes in his essay for the project (Schöttle 1990, p. 8) In this hybrid garden of “the conflict of the soul” (i.e. psychomachy) different theatres from different times are gathered, each presenting variations of (optical) formations and epistemologies of different times. From the Greek theatre, the medieval theatre to the loge theatre of the courts. The complex theatre gardens serve for Schöttle as an alternative to the modern, symbol ridden, and self-obsessed: “Metropolis of Visibility”: “... a self that was all eye. Through a window, the eye sees a world of objects linked to the reflection of the eye itself.” The modern metropolis and the modern woman self-immersed in the glass jungle of the commercial cityscape.

The experiments in the exhibition (as model) resulted in a series of works that ranged from a staircase by Fortuyn/O'Brian, a collapsed office building by Jeff Wall, referencing both loge-theatre and bureaucracy, a 'Cinema Theater' by Dan Graham playing a film, a beltwalk variation through a scenic landscape by Christian Philip Müller, and an empty museum display case by James Coleman (*Imposed Value*) etc.. “Coleman's work underscores the theater of museum as a theater as representation,” Chris Dercon states in his presentation of the theatre themed complex of artistic contributions, (Dercon 1990, 141 ff). As do all of the works in each their own way, one might add.

If this proto-type experiment for an exhibition were to be realised in a 1:1 scale, it would have approximately the same dimensions as the Stomboli Extravaganzas – a life-like scale of landscape that visitors could move around in. It would also, in a similar way, offer a journey through a series of all-encompassing types of performative encounters with works of art. The stagings of the two very different exhibition experiments, both offer a form of choreography for the spectator. They are composed as a line-up of varying situations for engaging and experiencing the artistic elements. In a historical theatre-garden the different spatial sections and allegorical elements each had a place and part in the dramaturgy: “The gardens as a whole could be viewed as a theatre in which one strolled from one stage to another, from scene to scene, and in so doing, reactivated certain memories and

17) For a discussion of this angle on the project se Filipa Ramos interview with researchers Tristan Garcia and Vincent Norman (Ramos 2018).

allegorical images within the environment.”¹⁸ The later Baroque gardens were also intricate pathways and constructs where sculptures, grottos, caves and fountains served as cues to the overall story, as well as allegorical and symbolic characters ritualising the visitors’ experience. An example of this is the grottos of the seventeenth century English poet Alexander Pope, decorated as a kind of camera obscura with mirrors and shells, creating “an organism for the creation of images.”¹⁹

The volcano of Stromboli and the excavations of Pompeii, functioning as stages in *Death*, offer similar mythical stagings, which (potentially) heighten affective sensibilities. They present a combination of the natural and artificial, allegorical and real, and can be perceived as choreographing different ritualistic possibilities, or different kinds of theatre. These spaces are also “organisms for creating images”, as Pope’s grotto. They render both metaphorical and physical, highly situated experiences. Engaging the viewer on mental, psychological levels as well as on a bodily level, thus directing, or curating “a lived experience”.

Theatricality and Exhibitions

With such a prominent position of the stage of the exhibition, the status of the single artwork in itself becomes contested and precarious. For what does it mean for an artwork to be curated into such a massive framework.

Theatergarden Bestiarium was almost 30 years after its opening an inspiration for the research project *Theater, Garden, Bestiary* at Ecal in Lausanne. Here the researchers Vincent Normand and Tristan Garcia proposed to have excavated *A Materialistic History of Exhibitions*, ranging from the practice of evidence based criminal exhibitions, over the formations of knowledge in the natural history museums and Zoos, to art exhibitions and their links to discursive formations and cultural history.²⁰ In an interview conducted by German Professor in Philosophy and Aesthetics, Julianne Rebentisch, Normand and Garcia state that they are looking at “the self-reflective and performative structure of the aesthetic object, it’s ‘stage presence’ or, in other words, its exhibition.” (Garcia, Vincent and Rebentisch 2019, p. 57) When an artwork enters an exhibition, it begins to function performatively, in line with Hoffmann’s idea of the artwork as acting and having agency but also in another sense as becoming exhibition, entering into another kind of ontological situation.²¹

“The exhibition can be seen as a stage on which this drama is played out: the question of what constitutes aesthetic objects is subordinated to the specific exhibition structure (its material, architectural, social, institutional protocols) that, by granting a texture of space and time to our experience of them “codes” the conditions of their presence,” Garcia and Norman claim.

Rebentisch, who in her *Aesthetics of Installation Art* argues for the fundamental theatricality

18) One of the participating artists in Theatergarden, Dan Graham writes on the history of garden theater. Here specifically on the memory theater that was practiced before the use of written scripts. ‘Garden as Theatre as Museum’ in *Theatergarden bestiarius: the garden as theater as museum*. p. 88.

19) See Cheetham and Harvey (2002) and their connection between the cave, grotto, volcano and earths interiors as a metaphor for women, that can offer different perspectives and create eruptions.

20) See especially Dorthea Hantlemann’s contribution on how the institution of museums follow the epistemological formations of the times they are created in: ‘Art Institutions as Ritual Spaces. A genealogy of Gatherings’. The research project’s general objective being to look for ‘implicit scripts’ and look upon the exhibition as a genre.

21) The situational and durational ‘becoming exhibition’ is a focus point for both curator Paul O’Neill and art theorist Lucy Steeds arguing for an understanding of how art operates, unfolds or takes place within the context it is presented in O’Neill et al. (2019).

of all art, holds another position, stating instead that the artwork is a “theatrical double” forever holding a potentiality, bigger than life, open for possibilities of interpretation. The artwork is not a subordination to the totality of the exhibition, or stage. It is not a dominant relationship but a fluctuating, ambiguous situation. “[T]he frame, the border of a work of art is nothing static,” Rebentisch claims, “the context sensibility of contemporary art” points to the “open structure of artistic experience”. Instead of it locking and defining the work of art the highlighting of the stage lets us become aware of our conditions for experiencing art. The stage presence lets the exhibition structure “come to the fore and be reflected upon”. (García, Vincent and Rebentisch 2019, p. 60). The readiness to become something other, to change with the viewers experience, context and staging to some are seen as a kind of prostitution of the artwork, a way of submitting to the viewer. Critics of arts ‘theatricality’ are thus vary of the “asymmetrical and consumerist relation between a viewer and the characters in a theatre situation.”²² But in both *Volcano Extravaganza* and *Theatergarten* the theatricality is never complete, it is present as a quote, a trope or symbol, thus this theatricality becomes part of the content not just a symmetric or asymmetric relation or form.

The final case there takes off from exactly this complicated position between audience and performer, nuancing it further.

Dead and Alive / The Performer as Image or Presence

A third and final affective stage setting is found in Anne Imhof’s *Faust* at the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennial 2017, the last case here of theatrical tropes and affective curating in contemporary art. Anne Imhof build a stage out of glass in her performative installation in the pavilion. Under it, on it, behind it and over it, performers acted out the durational performance of *Faust*. As in Schöttle’s description of the glass city; where all historical depth and clear relational positioning is gone, and the endless reflections of the all-seeing eye and symbolic mirroring of the self in surfaces is the rule. Imhof’s backdrop, staging and overall visibility was influenced by the scopic regimes of the contemporary society surrounding her production:

It always comes from the idea of composition or perspective, allowing the viewer to navigate the space while engineering moments of inaccessibility for the performance to create a very distinct viewpoint towards an image. In *Faust*, I wanted to work with industrially fabricated glass. I was walking through Frankfurt, with its large skyscrapers, banks. I noticed how glass separates you physically but not visually: its materiality is transparent while being reflective. I liked the simple fact of it being the window to something. In the German pavilion, there was the horizontal glass of the floor, and then there were vertical plates that parted the apse in the back of the main space. I was interested in how the glass reflected you as the viewer, while also allowing you to see what’s behind it and creating some sort of depth, all while serving as a framing device for the images that the performers created. The glass simultaneously reflected the viewers and the space in front of the surface, allowing me to create images that were partly mirrored on top of each other, almost like a thin layer of oil or a double exposure. (Kouligas 2019, p. 111ff)

The glass stage in the work of Anne Imhof, open and closed at the same time, mirroring hyper-capitalisms aesthetics, both became a character in the piece and functioned as a kind of “organism for creating images” In this incorporating of stage and creation of a landscape, *Faust*, like our other cases, highlight backdrop, framing, display-structure and form as perhaps even defining elements

22) See Rebentisch (2012, p. 69) on the philosopher Stanley Cavell’s attempts to overcome this situation with the notion of Drama.

of the work itself. The framing devised is used to enhance the intensity and visuality, and it is acknowledged as an integral part of the experience.

The uses of affect were not only to be found in the intensity of the performance, the choreographies volatile content and its confrontational attitude, but were also situated in the physicality of the viewers' position and seeming proximity to the bodies of the audiences. Everything was acted out on a stage where the audience was invited in. As in the *Volcano Extravaganza* there were no fourth wall between the performers and the audience – but here one could sense a partition between audience and performer, thus showing us the simultaneous bodily proximity and simultaneous distance that exist between artwork / performer and audience. In the catalogue for *Faust*, Juliane Rebentisch writes:.

In its vampiric interest in the transformation of life into image, Imhof's art — which she describes as painting — indeed extends into a very different art form. Even where the performers emphasise their living presence, they turn out to be strangers, belonging to an “inaccessible elsewhere” another ontological order, as though behind glass.” “Similarly, the precisely choreographed duality in her pieces of movement and motionlessness, of running and reclining, feeds into a latency period, an extended dramaturgical void, in which whatever is taking its course seems to happen to the performers rather than being performed by them. (Rebentisch, 2017, p. 26)

Performers do not seem to be sharing the same space time as the viewers, and the landscape of glass is echoed in both the dramaturgical void, the distance and inaccessibility of the performers. The audience is again both in a theatrical situation and in an exposition / exhibition situation where the relation between art and viewer is held as a tense and affective core of the project.

Brought to the Fore

As Julianne Rebentisch has shown all artworks are imbedded in theatricality. Even the autonomous artwork is both a *thing* and a *sign*, always holding a potentiality for being experienced in a new and different way, performing differently in another perspective, situation or staging.²³ The experimental exhibition formats, in extended scale, use concepts such as *Narrator*, *Stage*, *Backdrop*, *Performer* to create a similar oscillation between the artwork as a presentation and re-presentation – to enforce the tension between thing and sign. Dead and Alive.

The *mise-en-scene* and choreography of living, natural elements (landscape, performer, matter) into 'artificial' form are curatorial ways of animating the exhibition as form, and curating exhibitions that come alive. The different worlds, that function as stages in these more experimental exhibition formats, are affect inducing elements in themselves and the use of backdrop thus is part of the curating of affect. It's a matter of worldmaking, of orchestrating the entire 4D experience of the exhibition to create these all-encompassing stagings: A way of transferring the sensibility of the singular art pieces to the overall structure and formation of the show – or of transferring the sensibility or the world onto the exhibition.

The integration of theatrical tropes into the composition of the exhibition, can thus be seen as a way of positioning and affecting the viewer without going fully into the realm of theatre. The

23) On a more general conceptual level the notion of arts' theatricality has been debated since the 1960s following Michael Fried's seminal text "Art and Objecthood" where he criticizes the theatrical minimal object and its opening up for the surroundings and the viewer's participation. "What seems 'incurably theatrical' for Fried seems to be precisely the constant self-reversal or self-transformation of these objects, their oscillation between literalness and meaning. This is what we call 'stage presence'." Ibid. p. 59.

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mise-en-scene and the rituals of the theatre are instead dismantled and brought back in pieces, folded and twisted, in order for us as viewers / witnesses / audience to look at the machinery behind the staging and the exhibition. The different theatrical tropes in these cases: The Narrator, The Stage. etc. all become mediums, concepts and positions that can be altered, complicated, highlighted and made into artworks themselves. The construction of the garden, of the theatre and of the exhibition become form in these projects. They create the grounds for the *Lucid Dreams* of the exhibitions but also function as figures and tropes traversed.

In *Volcano Extravaganza*, *Theatergarten Bestiarium* and in *Faust* the relation between object and subject / artwork and viewer are thus complicated in various ways. What they offer are experiments with art's fundamental theatricality, with relations between the performative viewer and the performative art exhibitions. Presenting us with our own implicitness in the drama of art.

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