



Article

Exhibiting the Present,  
Staging Contemporaneity

# Exhibiting the Present, Staging Contemporaneity

## Museum of the Future and Theatre as a Site of Curatorial Research

By Anders Thrué Djurslev

YEAR ZERO. The proclamatory title of the Copenhagen-based theatre Sort/Hvid's season repertoire of 2020/2021 performed historical gravity. Rebooting the calendar, the season title reenacted the founding of world religions and historical revolutions. For instance, in the late eighteenth century, the French Revolution introduced the Republican Calendar, changing the duration of weeks, months, and years, beginning from year one. While zero might signal the end of a countdown as well as a new beginning, the curatorial proclamation of the season reanimated a revolutionary task: not merely to change the world, but to change time.<sup>1</sup>

The *Year Zero* season repertoire consisted of plays and performances dedicated to “igniting the political imaginary.”<sup>2</sup> Concluding the season, Sort/Hvid was to enter a cross-institutional and cross-aesthetic collaboration with the contemporary arts institution Kunsthall Aarhus on the theatre exhibition project entitled *Museum of the Future*. In a collaboration between the art institution and the theatre, contemporary visual artists and theatre makers, *Museum of the Future* set out to explore the notion of futurity in contemporary imaginaries through a constellation of aesthetic practices. But alas, times did change: as the COVID-19 pandemic closed down societies and venues, *Museum of the Future* itself was hurled into the future, extending *Year Zero* until further notice.<sup>3</sup>

*Museum of the Future* was—and remains—furthermore framed as a curatorial doctoral research project anchored at Aarhus University, investigating the potentials of crossing the institutional frameworks of Sort/Hvid and Kunsthall Aarhus and the temporalities of the art forms produced by the institutions. In the interdisciplinary role of dramaturg, curator, and curatorial researcher, I am situated within the collaborative process of curating the theatre exhibition and in turn developing this process as an object of curatorial research, investigating the production of temporalities in contemporary art and theatre practices.

In this article, I present the curatorial *proposition* embedded in *Museum of the Future* and discuss the framing of the project as curatorial research in its cross-institutional and cross-aesthetic prefiguration. First, I will reiterate recent arguments for using curating and the curatorial in the context of the performing arts. Drawing on curator and writer Simon Sheikh's advancement of curatorial research as a propositional inquiry, I propose qualifying these arguments further, namely as means to enable the theatre as a site of research, much like the visual art institution is today. Second, I characterise the ontological divide that haunts the institutional reality of both performing and visual arts, namely the opposition of the live and remains, respectively privileging temporality

- 
- 1) A reference to the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben: “(...) every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to ‘change the world’, but also – and above all – to ‘change time’.” (Agamben 2007, p. 99).
  - 2) Not usually titling its seasons, Sort/Hvid coined *Year Zero* on the occasion of the theatre's overtaking of Teater Momentum—a theatre in Odense that changes its artistic direction annually—and its collaboration with contemporary arts centre Kunsthall Aarhus and Aarhus Teater on *Museum of the Future*.
  - 3) *Museum of the Future* will open at Sort/Hvid in June 2022 and at Kunsthall Aarhus in August 2022.

in theatre and historicity in visual art. I suggest visual art's "ontology of historicity" as part of the explanation as to why the curatorial holds research legitimacy in visual art institutions. Through a constellation of theatre and performance studies, contemporary art history, and curatorial theory, I attempt to bring together these supposedly opposed ontologies through the curatorial proposition of *Museum of the Future*. Thirdly, I articulate some of the immediate potentials and challenges that the cross-institutional and cross-aesthetic process has unveiled, regarding institutional conceptualisation, artistic development, and research eligibility, in order to finally propose the dramaturg as the curatorial researcher of the theatre institution. This articulation is made while the work is still in progress, marked by the context of the ongoing pandemic and the challenges it poses for the project and the temporal-historical complex it engages with.

### Curating Performance

In recent years, curating has become a term more and more often used in the context of the performing arts. Within the theatre institution, curating is often synonymous with repertoire-planning (Trencsényi 2015, pp. 31-50). Conversely, invoking curating at performing arts festivals tend to equate curating to programme-making (Malzacher 2014, p. 118). As such, curating in the performing arts seems to entail the selection of more or less finished plays and performances, perhaps signifying a heightened awareness in terms of access, diversity, and dissemination.

Originating in the museum, however, the notion of curating arrives with an extensive and ongoing discursive negotiation of the potentials and challenges curating might entail in the visual arts field. In the last decades, the discourse has emerged as "the curatorial" and implies a philosophical meta-inquiry into curating as a broader constellatory practice of not only prefiguratively selecting artworks for the temporal medium of the exhibition, but also of constellating publics, offering education, creating contexts, setting relations in motion, and producing knowledge (Bismark 2010; Rogoff and Martinon 2013; O'Neill and Wilson, 2015).

From the perspective of the performing arts, the meta-discourse of the curatorial ironically emphasises the performative or even theatrical dimensions of exhibiting, as performing arts curator and writer Florian Malzacher has noted (Malzacher 2014, p. 117-118). The curatorial is theorised as "performative" (Maria Lind 2012), while exhibitions are considered as "dramatic constructions" (Hoffmann 2015, p. 56-62). The curator Jens Hoffmann uses theatre as a metaphor for exhibition-making in his book *Theater of Exhibitions*, while theorist Bridget Crone terms the curatorial "*the sensible stage*." (Crone 2019, p. 208). Distinguishing between curating and the curatorial, theorists Irit Rogoff and Jean-Paul Martinon also invoke theatrical metaphors:

If 'curating' is a gamut of professional practices that had to do with setting up exhibitions and other modes of display, then 'the curatorial' operates at a very different level: it explores all that takes place on the stage set-up, both intentionally and unintentionally, by the curator and views it as an event of knowledge. So to drive home a distinction between 'curating' and 'the curatorial' means to emphasize a shift from the staging of the event to the actual event itself: its enactment, dramatization and performance. (Rogoff and Martinon 2013, p. ix).

In other words, the curatorial signifies a shift of focus from the curator's prefigurative staging of the exhibition to the refiguration in the experience of exhibiting—the moment, event, or process

when the exhibition is engaged with by publics, spectators, readers, artists, curators, and critics.<sup>4</sup> As such, the curatorial privileges the temporal *present* of exhibiting art and the (unexpected) turns and insights that the curatorial constellation might provoke rather than, say, disseminating the historical *past* of the artworks displayed within the exhibition. The curatorial is thus not delimited by traditional art historical representation. Rather, the curatorial signifies the performative act of exhibiting itself.

When discussing the potential of applying curating in the performing arts, Malzacher notes that with the arrival of the curatorial, it is “hardly possible to penetrate more deeply into the neglected core business of theatre.” (Malzacher 2014, p. 117). Nevertheless, Malzacher argues for invoking the curatorial in the performing arts because the term raises new expectations of performative codependency or tension between selected works. The curatorial here widens the scope of programme-making and repertoire-planning, transforming these activities into performative ventures, effectively “turning the festival, the event, or the venue into a larger field of performative communication.” (Malzacher 2014, p. 118). In this regard, *Year Zero* could be considered an example of performative repertoire-making: The season title performs itself as a historical event, inviting the contributing artists, audiences, and critics to consider the season as a processual dramaturgy on and beyond the stage. The turn from curating to the curatorial thus entails an opening for dynamic interaction with the world and the times, beckoning dynamic dramaturgies that comply with and intervene in the changing conditions caused by, for instance, the participation of spectators, or emerging contexts provided by events and discourses outside the stage.

### Researching the Curatorial

Below, I would like to advance Malzacher’s qualification of the curatorial in the performing arts by proposing an additional dimension this endeavour: the notion of the curatorial as a mode of knowledge production. In brief, I ask whether the theatre can be positioned as a site of curatorial research.

One of the key differences between theatres and visual arts institutions today is their function as research institutions. The notion of curatorial research stems from the art museum. Art museums are research institutions by way of cultural policy. The Danish Ministry of Culture offers evaluation and funding programmes for museum inspectors to strengthen their capability for conducting art historical research projects in the collections of museums. In recent years, this feature has migrated to visual art institutions without collections. Today, art museums and public art galleries can apply for practice-based curatorial and artistic scholarships with universities. Arguably, the gallery has inherited research eligibility from the museum.<sup>5</sup>

Theatres have, on the other hand, no coherent research tradition, established infrastructure, or funding schemes available to initiate potential university partnerships for research projects.

---

4) Obviously, this turn stems from the contemporary art practices that one might generalise as performative. Influential analyses include Erika Fischer-Lichte’s notion of the performative turn (Fischer-Lichte 2008); Nicholas Bourriaud’s notion of relational aesthetics (Bourriaud 1998); Claire Bishop’s notion of the social turn in contemporary art (Bishop 2012); and James Voorhies’ history of the exhibition as a critical form (Voorhies 2017). The move from curating to curatorial is mirrored in Fischer-Lichte’s replacement of the art object with the art event, or more generally, as a move from *poesis* to *aisthesis*.

5) Prominently, the New Carlsberg Foundation and the Novo Nordisk Foundation offer scholarships targeting art research. See the New Carlsberg Foundation and Novo Nordisk Foundation websites: [ncf.dk](http://ncf.dk) and [novonordiskfonden.dk](http://novonordiskfonden.dk).

Following the Bologna process, the National School of Performing Arts instead offers funding for artistic research projects.<sup>6</sup> However, this type of research does not implicate universities let alone theatres as it is the case for visual art institutions. Universities educate dramaturgs,<sup>7</sup> but dramaturgs do not share the research opportunities at the theatre institution that museum inspectors, art historians, and curators of visual art hold in museums and visual art institutions. Before addressing one of the explanations behind this difference, I will present a notion of curatorial research that I believe holds promise for the performing arts and the theatre institution.

The curator and theorist Simon Sheikh has written extensively on the curatorial as a mode of research. Rather than fixating this mode to the exhibition of art, Sheikh suggests defining the curatorial as a propositional inquiry within a scientific framework. Replacing the hypothesis of scientific method with *the proposition*, Sheikh posits the curatorial research project as a vehicle for researching into specific questions based on speculative claims:

Whereas the thesis can be proven or disproven, the proposition advances its claims along a different rationale, namely positing its ideas as claims which, if followed, would then make certain things possible, not only logically and philosophically but also, in our case, aesthetically and politically. In this way, invoking the proposition allows for speculation, or for the curatorial as political imaginary. (Sheikh 2019, p. 102).

The exhibition of art is thus not simply a site of mediation, but of enaction. As enaction of *political* imagination, the curatorial research project experiments “with various forms of public address and congregation, building, or even antagonising communities, whether designated and located or universal and unknown, inoperative or becoming.” (Sheikh 2019, p. 99). In other words, the curatorial tests speculative propositions of political implications with participants and spectators as possible subjects. A prime example of such experimentation could be the research project *Former West* (2008-2016) at BAK – basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht in which Sheikh was involved. This long-term project proposed imagining the “persistently hegemonic conjuncture” of the West as historical past, assigning the “former” designation, applied to the East after 1989, to its Western counterpart. Exhibitions were one of many project-related activities, providing a heterogeneous field of performative communication: educational activities, individual research projects, research seminars, public talks, an online platform, editorial meetings, and finally, a publication of essays and articles by a range of artists and thinkers from different fields, all dedicated to “forming the West” as both performative and documentative activities.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the discursive qualifications of the curatorial in the performing arts context presented by Malzacher and the example that discourse on the curatorial such as Sheikh’s might provide the neighbouring disciplines, curatorial research remains predominantly tied to the museum and the visual art institution as previously described. Below, I argue that this differentiation is rooted in the ontological opposition between the traditionally distinct art forms and their institutions; an opposition we might destabilise considering contemporary art and theatre practices, claiming

---

6) In Danish, artistic research is translated to the derived “kunstnerisk udviklingsvirksomhed,” signifying a distancing to the notion of academic research. This differentiation is discussed at length in *Peripeti*, vol. 19 (2013).

7) In Denmark, dramaturgs are typically educated at Dramaturgy at Aarhus University or Theatre and Performance Studies at University of Copenhagen.

8) See the *Former West* website ([formerwest.org](http://formerwest.org)) and the publication: Hlavajova, Marie and Sheikh, Simon (Eds.), 2017. *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

new propositions, and utilising the notion of contemporary art as a site of transmutation between historicity and temporality.

### Opposing Ontologies

In his recent essay entitled “The Museum as a Cradle of Revolution,” the art critic, media theorist, and philosopher Boris Groys offers a strikingly concise definition of art: “art consists of the objects that remain after the cultures which produced them have disappeared.” The museum is a container of objects that are obsolete in the time in which they are displayed; remains of cultures dead and gone. With them, they carry knowledge of the past cultures they have survived (Groys 2020). Groys’ definition of art echoes Adorno’s remark that the museum and the mausoleum share a deeper connection than the fact that they rhyme (Adorno 1995, p. 607). As such, the ontology of the art museum is characterised by pastness, by historicity, by death.

Theatre, on the other hand, is often praised for its fundamental liveness, most explicitly fetishised by the discourse on performance. Influentially articulated by performance scholar Peggy Phelan, performance’s only life is in the present and “cannot be saved, recorded, documented” without ceasing to be performance (Phelan 1995, p. 146). In this discourse, performance art is understood as an opposition to the accumulative, historicist ontology of art, characterised instead by its presentness, by temporality, by the live. According to this logic, performance is that which disappears, whereas visual art is that which remains.

To present these definitions as highly contestable is hardly controversial. After all, more than a century has passed since the emergence of the historical avantgarde; the artworld has since then seen a multitude of cross-over formats; the arrival of digital mediated archival culture has impacted artistic practices for decades; and in a time when performance, dance, and live art increasingly find its way into museum spaces, such definitive statements seem both dated and futile. However, I will argue, the ontological abstractions still have real effects on the levels of cultural policy and academic research legitimacy as outlined above and, consequentially, in institutional practices. They persist in art criticism too: in her study of the increasingly popular move from the black box to the white cube for instance, the art historian Claire Bishop finds that the critics of this trend “equate performance with presentism, distraction and entertainment, and implicitly make an appeal for the pleasure of looking at dead objects.” (Bishop 2019, p. 22). According to critique such as this, museums should stick to displaying the remains of “dead history” rather than submit to the attention industry of perishable events, considered a product of speculation by cultural institutions to pump up visitor numbers and ticket sales. As such, the ontological binary between temporality of the live arts and the historicity of the visual arts remains present and at work.

However, in her *Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, the theatre and performance scholar Rebecca Schneider effectively deconstructs this opposition. Questioning three general assumptions of theatre and performance studies—namely “that performance disappears and text remains; (...) that live performance is not a recording; and (...) that the live takes place in a “now” understood as singular, immediate, and vanishing” (Schneider 2011, p. 87)—Schneider argues that the archive is a live performance space and that performance essentially is archival (Schneider 2011, p. 110). Picking up the line of thought from Derrida’s influential *Archive Fever* (1995), Schneider asks whether the impermanently temporal ontology of performance and its opposition to the historicity of remains does not in fact follow, rather than break with, the linear, historicist logic of modernity by designating that which *cannot* be recorded in and by the archive.

Instead, Schneider posits that theatre in fact *performs remains* through such mediums as bodies and speech: citations, gestures, dance steps, oral stories; affects embedded in and transmitted through the body of the performer—much like a dramatic script remains for its future (re)enactment in the live (Schneider 2011, p. 108). Conversely, nor are the texts, documents, scripts, and objects stored in the archive to be considered “dead” remains; they change through recirculation and reinterpretation—through the acts of reading, spectating, remembering. As such, Schneider argues that the archive itself—contra to the modern regime of historicity which generally defines the archive and consequently the museum as designators of times past—is a “theatre of retroaction” as it “performs the institution of disappearance” that characterises the live arts. Schneider thus dissolves the binary between the dead historicity of the archive (and the museum) and the live temporality of theatre by positing the archives of both museums and theatres, objects and bodies, history and the experience of temporal passing, as sites of a dialectical transmutation between historicity and temporality. According to the art historian Christine Ross, this transmutation is what determines contemporary art as contemporary, as an art of *contemporaneity*: Contemporaneity strives to “transform modernity” by confronting the modern regime of historicity through complications of its “progress-oriented articulation of past, present, and future.”

### Forming the Future

In the modern regime of historicity, as described by the historian François Hartog, the future is constituted as the primary temporal category through “the devaluing of the past and the erasure of the present” (Ross 2021, p. 5). Ross’ notion of the contemporaneity of contemporary art brings us to the curatorial proposition of *Museum of the Future*, evident in its title: that the future is over.<sup>9</sup> Namely, the singular, teleological, progress-oriented future that characterised the modern regime of historicity. Roughly speaking, this finitude evokes a condition either bemoaned as presentism or explored as a new temporal-historical paradigm of contemporaneity. Here, presentism denotes a post-historical deadlock associated with disputed proclamations of “the end of history” and the referral of political imagination to an extended present.<sup>10</sup> Contemporaneity, on the other hand, suggests the coming together of different histories and temporalities in the same present, opening the past as well as the future for reimagining. As such, contemporaneity aligns with the deconstructive thought of Schneider, destabilising the traditional understanding of (visual) art as remains of cultures past.<sup>11</sup>

---

9) An idea pursued by the Italian philosopher Franco “Bifo” Berardi in *After the Future* (2011) who in turn adds: “The idea that the future is over is, of course, rather whimsical—since, as I write these lines, the future hasn’t stopped unfolding. But when I say “future,” I am not referring to the direction of time. I am thinking, rather, of the psychological perception, which emerged in the cultural situation of progressive modernity, the cultural expectations that were fabricated during the long period of modern civilization (...).” (Berardi 2011, p. 18).

10) Ross reiterates Hartog’s historical analysis in her examination of the temporal turn in contemporary art (Ross, 2012 pp. 12-14). In *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* (2016 [2003]), Hartog describes the modern regime of historicity as a temporal semantics that privileges the future as the primary temporal category which, according to Ross, is confronted and transmuted by contemporary art. In Hartog’s historical analysis, the modern regime of historicity is replaced by the current presentist regime, signifying a loss of futurity and consequently a *stasis* of political imagination.

11) Ross problematises the presentist diagnosis by positing contemporary art as an investigation of contemporaneity as a new temporal paradigm. For other iterations of the discursive negotiation between analyses of presentism and contemporaneity, see art theorist Jacob Lund’s concise review in *Anachrony, Contemporaneity, and Historical Imagination* (2019 pp. 9-21) or Claire Bishop’s essay *Radical Museology or: What’s ‘contemporary’ in museums of contemporary art?* (2014, pp. 16-24).

The curatorial proposition of *Museum of the Future* thus positions itself, perhaps polemically and certainly speculatively, at the crux of this ontological divide. The proposition asks the participating artists and institutions—and audiences and critics to come—where our time of contemporaneity leaves the notion of futurity. The title and the curatorial proposition suggest that the futurity of modernity can be musealised, but in Schneider's sense: performed *as* past, performatively archived for future reenactment.

At least, that was what the—admittedly high-flown—proposition posed before the project began. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, erupting in the beginning of 2020, transformed the meaning of the *Year Zero* season before its arrival. *Museum of the Future* is now moved to the season after the fact, exposing it to future contexts beyond its prefigurative conceptualisation. Before returning to the reflection on these emerging curatorial contexts of *Museum of the Future*, I will address the cross-institutional and cross-aesthetic opportunities and challenges the process has shown.

### Overing the Show

THE SHOW IS OVER. The gloomy catchphrase figures in capital letters on posters, t-shirts, postcards, and stickers, greeting audiences on their arrival at Sort/Hvid's foyer bar in the Meat-packing District of central Copenhagen. The curatorial proposition of *Museum of the Future* reads as a historical-philosophical echo of the theatre's flippantly post-dramatic slogan. Avoiding the signpost of "theatre" as a part of the institution's name, Sort/Hvid presents itself as a contemporary, political, and cross-aesthetic art institution. Defined as a theatre by way of cultural policy, however, Sort/Hvid is not immediately considered eligible for research projects.

Kunsthall Aarhus is a public art gallery dedicated to exhibiting contemporary Danish and international art, based in central Aarhus at the other end of the country. Since 2015, Kunsthall Aarhus has co-hosted several practice-based artistic and curatorial research projects like my own, spearheading the emerging notion of curatorial and artistic research at contemporary art institutions without collections in Denmark. Kunsthall Aarhus does not share the research obligation of state-sponsored museums, but, considered a development of the art museum, the public art institution can apply for research funding. The grant from the New Carlsberg Foundation for the doctoral research project accompanying *Museum of the Future* was applied for by Kunsthall Aarhus, simultaneously affirming and transgressing the ontological divide between the art institutions.

However, the institutions do operate in different ways. This has come to the fore when they were brought together in the preliminary development of *Museum of the Future*. Questions like the following show how artistic development and institutional production customs coincide: Do we seek to create the same setup at both venues, painting the white cube black or the black box white? Do we open during the day as in the gallery or at night as in the theatre? Do audiences buy a theatre ticket in advance or show up during opening hours? Do we create an open space for spectators to explore as in a typical exhibition in the gallery, or do we invite an audience for a directed staging at a specific timeslot each day of the performance as the theatre would for most shows? Or both—exhibition by day, performance by night? At the very beginning of the project, these questions were open to intervention by all artists involved. However, institutional customs as well as artistic practices related to the ontological divide described above emerged during the process. Below, I will briefly present the curatorial criteria for the selection of visual artists and move on to describe the challenges of staging visual art in the theatre exhibition of *Museum of the Future*.



## Exhibiting the Present

To participate in the project, the institutions and I invited three visual artists and a team of theatre makers to collaborate, overtly instigating the process as a site of transmutation between visual art and theatre. By way of the curatorial proposition embedded in the title, the visual artists were invited due to their engagement in questions of time and temporality. In my view, their practices signify different responses—often in the form of complex, entangling questions through and across different media—to diagnoses of presentism, instead conjuring different expressions of contemporaneity that challenge binary oppositions:

Ferdinand Ahm Krag is an artist, painter, and professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Bringing together human head and planet formations, geological and psychological cartographies, virtual maps and digital imaging, cultural landscapes and natural histories in transcendental images, Krag's work collapses distinctions between nature and culture, figure and ground, the interior and the exterior.

Helene Nymann is an artist and artistic researcher working with video and sculpture. Nymann's work investigates the impact of digital culture on memory and, consequently, imagination, destabilising the dichotomy between remembrance as a relation to the past and as a projection of the future.<sup>12</sup>

Studio ThinkingHand is a Danish-Australian duo that consists of artists Rhoda Ting and Mikkel Dahlin Bojesen. Engaging with affirmative philosophies of posthumanism, the duo invites other-than-human species, robotics, and industrial materials to co-evolve in queer ecologies. As such, Studio ThinkingHand's artworks grow into sculptures of simultaneously living and dying archives.

The visual artists were invited to collaborate with playwright and director Christian Lollike, set designers Franciska Zahle and Helle Damgaard, sound designer Asger Kudahl, lighting designer Morten Kolbak, and me as dramaturg and curator. All parties were eager to enter a cross-aesthetic and cross-institutional experiment, challenging the customary practices of their own and the host institutions involved. However, the ontological divide between temporality and historicity did assert itself in the conceptualisation of *Museum of the Future*. After exchanging ideas, practices, and examples during the initial meetings between the visual artists, the playwright and me, the very first sketchy draft for a script was rejected by the visual artists. The script suggested a fictional narrator of the museum, seemingly a character telling a story. Therefore, the artists saw their ideas for contributions reduced to set design, their artworks usurped by a fictional character. The artworks came to serve the temporal exhibition rather than the history provided by their artistic practice. Of course, the artworks of the visual artists will live on in new contexts, surviving the temporal medium of the exhibition of *Museum of the Future*. Since the first discarded draft of the script, new questions have thus arisen: How do we write a script that does not “reduce” the historicity of the artworks to temporal set design? How do we temporarily stage artworks that will remain for emerging contexts? How do we perform the process of historicity? How do we render the proposed transmutation between temporality and historicity visible in the staging?

For *Museum of the Future*, the preliminary curatorial—and dramaturgical—concept involves an

---

12) Nymann's contribution is part of her own doctoral artistic research project entitled *Memories of Sustainable Futures: Remembering in the Digital Age*, hosted by Kunsthall Aarhus and Interacting Minds Centre at Aarhus University. For a presentation of Nymann's doctoral artistic research project, see the Interacting Minds Center website. ([interactingminds.au.dk/news/enkelt/artikel/helene-nymann-phd-fellow/](http://interactingminds.au.dk/news/enkelt/artikel/helene-nymann-phd-fellow/)). Accessed 10-11-2021.

audio play based on a script accompanied by live performance, following and directing groups of spectators through a sequence of installations. Three of these are inhabited by the visual artists' individual installations, while the set designers construct the spaces in the beginning and end of the performance. During the duration of the performance exhibition, the spectators are directed to become part of the exhibition, displaying their bodies in the installations of the imagined museum, performing the present as musealised past. The script and direction of the exhibition by Lollike, supported by myself as dramaturg, thus dramatises and theatricalises the act of spectating, seeking to create a participatory dramaturgy that engages the spectators in questions of the conditions of their own time through a performative musealisation of the theatrical present.

### Concluding Remarks

As early as the 1970s, the influential curator Harald Szeemann compared his work with that of a theatre director (Malzacher 2014, p. 117). In the case of *Museum of the Future*, the curatorial as research inquiry is anchored in the position of the dramaturg. In the concluding remarks, I would like to propose the dramaturg as the theatre's curatorial researcher.

In the performing arts, the dramaturg is often perceived as an “in-between figure;” an ideal of both new dramaturgies and the precarious, post-Fordist culture industry (Gade 2018). The notion of curatorial research might serve a way of anchoring this ambiguous figure as the researcher of the theatre. This is not to say that all theatres should conduct research or pursue curatorial research projects. Rather, it is intended as an echo of Malzacher's call to expand the notion of what theatre is and can be (Malzacher 2014, p. 117), adding research to the theatre's imaginary. Through Sheikh's invocation of the speculative proposition as research inquiry, the dramaturg might be the figure to formulate and follow this proposition through the dynamic contexts and continuous critique that research projects necessarily take part in; to expand the field of performative communication to research communities, public dissemination, documentation, and publication; activities that might themselves enable transgressions between historicity and temporality. Following the distinction between curating and the curatorial, we might propose and investigate the potentials in a similar move from dramaturgy to “the dramaturgical.”

At the time of writing, the curatorial proposition(s) of *Museum of the Future* remains speculative, preliminarily only tested in the community of visual artists, theatre makers, and institutional frameworks. The pandemic has moved *Museum of the Future* beyond the context of the *Year Zero* season, to contexts yet emerging. After a pandemic season that to many may have felt like a ‘year zero’—of emergency, social isolation, loss, and death—the contexts of the present are changing anew. Coinciding with the overthrowing of historical statues in the name of decolonisation, the present moment seems to signify a renewed rejection of the logics of modernity that haunt the contemporary condition still. By staging the spectators on pedestals, exhibiting their present, *Museum of the Future* might conjure a notion of the future that theorist and writer Evan Calder Williams describes as “that point of disjuncture where the present begins to appear as past—and where lines can be drawn to imagine what it would take to make such a moment stick, to undo the structures that keep the present alive and unwell.” (Williams 2016). This part is, however, yet to be revealed in and through the eventual process of the curatorial.

**Anders Thru Djurslev** is a PhD Student at Aesthetics & Culture at Aarhus University. The object of his practice-based curatorial research project, the theatre exhibition *Museum of the Future*, is developed in collaboration with Kunsthall Aarhus and Sort/Hvid, opening on each venue in 2022.

---

### Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor W., 2006 [1955]. "Valéry Proust Museum." In: Gert Balling, Henrik Reeh, Mette Sandbye, Martin Zerlang and Mikkel Bogh (eds.). *Den moderne kulturs historie*. Copenhagen: Gads Forlag.
- Agamben, Giorgio, 2006 [1973]. *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*. London and New York: Verso Books.
- Berardi, Franco "Bifo", 2011. *After the Future*. Edinburgh, Oakland, Baltimore: AK Press.
- Bishop, Claire, 2012. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London and New York: Verso Books.
- Bishop, Claire. (2018). "Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention." *TDR: The Drama Review*, Vol. 62, Number 2, Summer 2018, pp. 22-42.
- Bishop, Claire, 2014 [2013]. *Radical Museology or: What's 'contemporary' in museums of contemporary art?* London: Koenig Books.
- Bismark, Beatrice von. (2010). "Relations in Motion. The curatorial condition in the visual arts – and its possibilities for the neighbouring disciplines" *Frakcija*. No. 55, 2010, pp. 50-57.
- Cox, Geoff and Lund, Jacob, 2016. *The Contemporary Condition: Introductory Thoughts on Contemporaneity and Contemporary Art*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Crone, Bridget, 2018. "Curating, Dramatization and the Diagram: Notes towards a Sensible Stage." In: Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff (eds.). *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*. Bloomsbury Publishing, pp. 207-213.
- Gade, Solveig. (2018). "Inbetween Figure Working in a Precarious Field: Re-engaging with the Notions of the Dramaturg." *Nordic Theatre Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2018, pp. 61-77.
- Groys, Boris. (2020). "Museum as a Cradle of Revolution." *e-flux journal*, Journal #106. (<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/106/314487/the-museum-as-a-cradle-of-revolution/>.) Accessed 03-06-2021.
- Hoffmann, Jens, 2015. *Theater of Exhibitions*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Lind, Maria, 2012. "Performing the Curatorial: An Introduction." In: Maria Lind (ed.): *Performing the Curatorial*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Lund, Jacob, 2019. *Anachrony, Contemporaneity, and Historical Imagination*. Cox and Lund (eds.). *The Contemporary Condition Series*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.
- Malzacher, Florian, 2014. "Empty Stages, Crowded Flats. Performative curating in the performing arts." In: Sidsel Graffer and Ådne Sekkelsten. *Scenekunsten og de unge* [Performing Arts and The Young]. Oslo: Vidarforlaget AS, pp. 116-127.

Martinon, Jean-Paul and Rogoff, Irit, 2015. "Preface." In: Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff (eds.). *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*. London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. iix-xi.

Phelan, Peggy, 1993. "The ontology of performance." In: *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance*. London and New York: Taylor & Francis, pp. 146-166.

Ross, Christine, 2014 [2012]. *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Schneider, Rebecca, 2011. *Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. London and New York: Routledge.

Sheikh, Simon, 2019. "Curating and research – An uneasy alliance." In: Malene Vest Hansen, Anne Folke Henningsen and Anne Gregersen (eds.). *Curatorial Challenges – Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Contemporary Curating*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 97-107.

Sheikh, Simon, 2015. "Towards the Exhibition as Research." In: Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.). *Curating Research*. London: Open Editions & Amsterdam: de Appel, pp. 32-46.

Trencsényi, Katalin, 2015. "Methods: Curating." In: Katalin Trencsényi. *Dramaturgy in the Making: A User's Guide for Theatre Practitioners*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, pp. 31-50.

Voorhies, Jamens, 2017. *Beyond Objecthood. On the Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Williams, Evan Calder. (2015). "Volcano, Waiting." *WdW Review*, October 2015. ([https://www.fkawdw.nl/en/review/sediments/volcano\\_waiting](https://www.fkawdw.nl/en/review/sediments/volcano_waiting)). Accessed 24-07-2021.