

# World[build]ing Online Exhibitions, or Trying to Resist Zombie Curating

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## Introduction

In the context of contemporary art, online exhibition practices are increasingly challenging conventional notions of space, time, and curatorial roles. The artist duo *New Scenario* (Paul Barsch and Tilman Hornig) are known for their innovative online exhibitions such as *Body Holes* (2016) and *H O P E* (2017). Using the web not merely as a distribution platform but as a site of production, their pioneering formats defy the spatial and institutional constraints of traditional gallery systems, and their exhibitions operate at the intersection of curatorial experimentation and narrative architecture. However, the conceptual frameworks available to analyse such practices often lag behind technical and aesthetic innovations. Specifically, there remains a need to distinguish between the static models of digital *world-building* and the more fluid, networked approaches of *worlding* that account for relationality, (non)human entanglement, and various forms of interactivity to embrace new ways of creating worlds. In this essay, I examine how these approaches to *world[build]ing* are manifested by focusing on space, time, and curating, and illustrated through imaginary scenarios involving an observer, a player, and the characters within the exhibition, to explore how the artist duo *New Scenario* constructs and builds, or *worlds*, their online exhibitions.

## 1. World-building and worlding

While art institutions are adapting to the digital realm, *New Scenario*, the German artists and curatorial duo Paul Barsch and Tilman Hornig, were quick to

respond to their efforts. Profiling New Scenario in 2015 as »a dynamic platform for conceptual, time based and performative exhibition formats. it (sic) happens outside the realm of the white cube and is meant to function as an extension to create new contextual meaning«,<sup>1</sup> they emphasize the importance of context and critique the virtual white cube that had become a standard: a skeuomorphic representation of the physical space in which the artwork and its documentation were devalued to a low-quality image. From the beginning, their projects rejected standard exhibition protocols, in which spaces should be neutral and invisible.<sup>2</sup> The artworks are not presented on walls or pedestals but are embedded within hard-to-reach places, from a limousine, a dinosaur park, the contaminated zone in Chernobyl, to human orifices. Meticulously staged, the exhibitions are not opened to the public but documented for display on the web as a slide show, a sound recording, a video, or a VR environment. For New Scenario, physical exhibitions only exist to be documented, which becomes the only way the art is experienced:

»if the documented scene and the location in which the exhibition takes place are strong enough and if the artworks and their surroundings can interact and communicate with each other, they are able to transcend the documentation and turn it into an experience that is able to replace a spatial experience.«<sup>3</sup>

The sensual experience of the physical space is replaced by the conceptual and narrative qualities of the documentation, providing an additional imaginative space, where anything can happen. The carefully designed, self-contained new scenarios of the exhibitions can also be seen as art projects, or ›performances‹ as they describe them.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it's hard to see the exhibitions merely as attempts to present artworks, as the documentation and the translation to the

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1 New Scenario: »Info«, in: [www.newscenario.net](http://www.newscenario.net). Online: <http://www.newscenario.net/info.html> (last access: 15.08.2025).

2 Carol Duncan (1995): *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums*, London: Routledge.

3 New Scenario (2021): »New Scenario (Paul Barsch & Tilman Hornig), 1 May 2019«, in: Annet Dekker (ed.), *Curating Digital Art. From Presenting and Collecting Digital Art to Networked Co-curation*, Amsterdam: Valiz, pp. 202–211, here: p. 207.

4 Ibid.

web create a new spatialisation, narrative and experience.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, New Scenario does not just curate art, it builds new worlds.

At first sight, the ways they create and present the exhibitions seem closely related to the notion of world-building. World-building is often described as a narrative practice, closely associated with speculative fiction and its various sub-genres such as science fiction, climate fiction (cli-fi), horror, fantasy and solarpunk. In other words, genres in which internally consistent, self-contained systems, or immersive environments are constructed. Typically, world-building happens through a top-down methodology in which a character exerts control over the ontological and epistemological parameters of the fictional setting.<sup>6</sup> Hence, world-building refers to the invention of imaginary places and societies as worlds that are built with a specific logic, structure and history. As mentioned, each of New Scenario's exhibitions is set in a specific space: a limousine in *Crash*, a dinosaur park in *Jurassic Park*, human bodies in *Body Holes*, etcetera. Rather than mere backdrops, the spaces are closely connected to the main concept. As central characters or speculative frameworks, the spaces have their own internal logic, affect, tone, and politics, which are amplified through the artworks – and vice versa. In fiction, world-building involves the creation of entirely new settings, cultures, and systems of meaning. In New Scenario's practice, it becomes a curatorial method, a design of contexts that shape not just how art is seen, but how it is experienced, inhabited and understood.

While effective in producing coherent narrative spaces, world-building often exhibits limited adaptability and these worlds are not inherently designed to accommodate emergent change, relational storylines, or collaborative intervention. Such an approach would be closer to the notion of worlding as explored in the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985), Anna Tsing (2010) and Donna Haraway (2016). Here, worlding can be understood as a practice of situated, relational becoming and as an ontological commitment to co-creation that offers a more fluid and process-oriented approach to imagining and constructing worlds. Next to world-building, worlding focuses on how

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5 Annet Dekker (2024): »Curating Online: Art in Space and Time«, ISEA2024 Proceedings, Brisbane, online: [https://isea-archives.siggraph.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024\\_Dekker\\_Curating\\_Online\\_Art\\_in\\_Space\\_and\\_Time.pdf](https://isea-archives.siggraph.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024_Dekker_Curating_Online_Art_in_Space_and_Time.pdf) (last access: 15.08.2025).

6 Mark J.P. Wolf (2012): *Building Imaginary Worlds. The Theory and History of Subcreation*, London/New York: Routledge; Henry Jenkins (2006): *Convergence Culture: Where old and new media collide*, New York: New York University Press.

relations between entities and things become manifest and are continuous. This reconceptualisation shifts the emphasis from world-as-object to world-as-process. It is not oriented toward the articulation of a singular, unified world but rather toward the generation of a multiplicity of overlapping and nested realities, each capable of iteration, divergence, and mutation. Worlding involves an assemblage of human and nonhuman agencies, including artificial intelligence, algorithms, and networked technologies, wherein agency becomes distributed and indeterminate. The antagonistic approach of New Scenario seems to use worlding not to impose or shape a reality to change a worldview (as Spivak would see it); rather they want to use it to disrupt conventions. Creating unstable, speculative, and strange worlds, they reject the idea of an objective or universal exhibition format to make space for fiction, affect, and alternative ontologies, thereby echoing the worlding of Tsing and Haraway. In their framings, worlding could then be seen as a socio-political act; neither neutral or purely imaginative, their aim is to present a method through which power is distributed, narratives are dismantled and alternative modes of doing or being are built. Similarly, New Scenario is not interested in a singular, unified curatorial method but wants to generate a multiplicity of overlapping and nested realities, each capable of iteration, divergence, and mutation.<sup>7</sup>

In line with the distinction between world-building and worlding, curator and researcher Marialaura Ghidini has pointed out the difference between »curating online« and »curating on the web«. The former relates to and mimics the practice that derives from displaying museum and gallery collections, while she describes »curating on the web« as a site-specific approach that facilitates new ways of producing and displaying digital art.<sup>8</sup> In other words, »curating on the web« treats the web as a medium. For Ghidini this means that it needs to reflect on the ecology of the adopted technology, in which websites are not seen as »static and self-contained objects, but rather as ecosystems that are inhabited and shaped by third parties through various interactions between

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7 New Scenario expresses their views on the particularities of their exhibition methods in several interviews. New Scenario: »Press«, in: [www.newscenario.net](http://www.newscenario.net). Online: <http://www.newscenario.net/info.html> selection press (last access: 15.08.2025).

8 Marialaura Ghidini (2019): »Curating on the Web: the Evolution of Platforms as Spaces for Producing and Disseminating Web-based Art«, in: *Arts 8/3*, n.p., online: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0752/8/3/78> (last access: 15.08.2025).

the object (the website) and its larger context«. <sup>9</sup> Expanding on this, curatorial researcher Gaia Tedone noticed how online curation is performed by humans and algorithms with outcomes that are emergent and contingent. <sup>10</sup> In these cases, curating no longer exists as the solitary, authoritative act of a curator selecting and displaying objects, but rather as a distributed, socio-technical process involving both humans (curators, artists, and users) and machines. <sup>11</sup> This notion, termed as »networked co-curating«, closely aligns with worlding, moving from presenting finished artworks to staging processes where visibility, circulation, and interpretation are actively co-produced between curators, artists, users and the technical environment. In this scenario, technical advances such as real-time rendering, or generative and machine-learning systems have increasingly enabled responsive curatorial modes by facilitating collaborative storytelling environments and speculative design frameworks that emphasise an open-ended narrative. In what follows, by analysing two key exhibitions by New Scenario, and focusing on the use of space and time, I will reflect on the notions of world-building and worlding to assess whether these concepts could contribute to a better understanding of how online exhibitions create worlds, as well as alternative curatorial modes.

## 2. HOPE

*H O P E* explores the potential of immersive technologies and pushes the boundaries of what an exhibition can mean, using online platforms not just to display, but to world. Through deliberate world-building, it invites users to navigate complex emotions, social structures, and speculative futures. This is not an exhibition space, but a proposition, a glimpse into what could emerge when everything is equally infested, or equally alive with potentiality.

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9 Ibid.

10 Gaia Tedone (2017): »Co-curating with Cassini: from the Abyss of Commodification to the Exploration of Space Curation«, in: Marialaura Ghidini/Rebekah Modrak (eds.), #exstrange: a Curatorial Intervention on eBay, Ann Arbor: Maize Books, pp. 180–185.

11 Annet Dekker/Gaia Tedone(2019): »Networked Co-curation: an Exploration of the Sociotechnical Specificities of Online Curation«, in: Arts 8/3, n.p., online: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0752/8/3/86> (last access: 15.08.2025).

## Part 1. Space

What are the potentials of online exhibitions spaces when leveraged for speculative world-building, moving beyond their traditional role as mere display platforms? I first encountered New Scenario's exhibitions on their website around 2016. Their project *Body Holes*. *If the body were a museum there would be seven galleries* was part of the Berlin Biennale 2016. *Body Holes* presents miniature artworks in the seven openings of the human body: from the ears, nose and mouth to the genitalia.

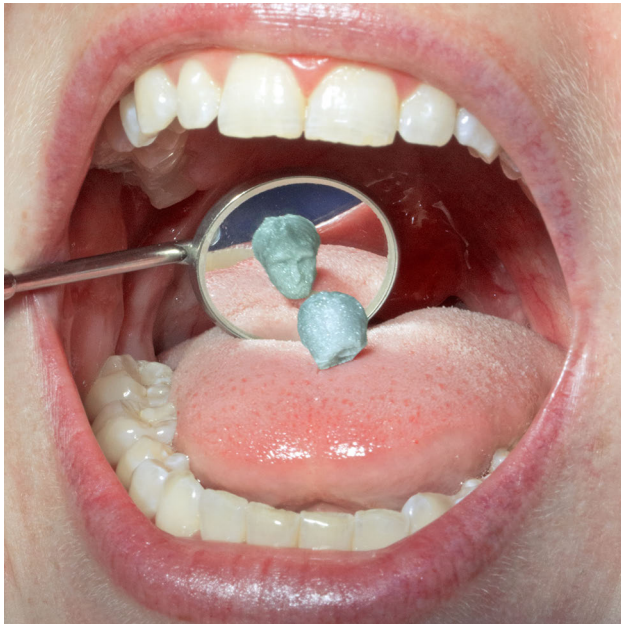


fig. 1: *New Scenario: Body Holes* – Paul Barsch, *Homo Heidelbergensis (mirror)*, 3D print, 2015

By abstracting the body's orifices to this extent, the project questions the stigmatisation of the human body and addresses, in particular, the (ab)use of the body as a social and political space in the arts. However, the project is not only about breaking existing taboos surrounding the body, it primarily aims to

shift the thinking and scale of an exhibition space from external to internal by asking if *every imaginable ›space‹ could be a space for art?* This absurdist way of presenting art, which evokes at the same time a sense of disgust, horror, beauty and surprise, could be seen as mere attention-seeking and an example of »extreme sports« curating.<sup>12</sup> Yet, by interweaving narrative texts on socio-political issues of gender, privacy or surveillance, their focus is on the broader context of how images, art and politics are discussed in the artworld.

For the exhibition *Body Holes*, New Scenario asked the artists to present existing artworks or create new ones for intimate and metaphorically charged bodily orifices. Most of the artists responded by engaging directly with the assigned ›holes‹, producing works that they either incorporated within or juxtaposed against their symbolic sites, thus inviting new interpretations. By documenting the artworks in macro photography, which provided a clinical, detailed, and objective perspective, the project neutralised the affective charge of the orifices and, in doing so, de-stigmatised perceptions of the body. In other words, it is through New Scenario's approach to documentation that even unorthodox spaces are freed from their constrained cultural, political, and sexual associations, positioning them instead as neutral and even aesthetic environments. Yet transforming the body into a seemingly sanitised exhibition space is not without ambiguity. In presenting these bodily interiors in a sanitised, detached manner (in some cases enhancing this by using a dental mirror to provide a more spatial view of the object in the mouth), New Scenario arguably follows, and perhaps even reinforces, the logic of purification associated with the modernist white cube. As art critic Brian O'Doherty observed, the art gallery is »unshadowed, white, clean, artificial – the space is devoted to the technology of esthetics«. <sup>13</sup> Indeed, after the initial shock and becoming familiar with their spatial context, when looking at the images the orifices recede into the background, turning into visual surfaces, landscapes, pedestals, or aesthetic wallpaper, against which the artworks emerge, much like a firehose in a modern museum can accidentally turn into an aesthetic conundrum.<sup>14</sup> However, moving back and forth between setting and art, the artwork starts to merge with its surroundings, forming a new image and an additional layer of meaning in which anus and art enhance each other.

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12 A. Dekker: Curating Online, n.p.

13 Brian O'Doherty (1976): *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Santa Monica, CA: The Lapis Press, p. 15.

14 *Ibid.*

Perhaps this is why New Scenario tried to create an even more preposterous backdrop for their art in their next exhibition *H O P E* in 2017. The intentionally optimistic title obscures the horror of its *mise-en-scene*, if only for a minute while the VR project loads on either the computer or the cardboard VR viewer.

### **HOPE**

*VR game space. Loading. Half of the screen slowly circles around, showing large glass windows facing a distant ceiling, interspersed with theatre spotlights mounted on scaffolding. A circle in the centre of the screen displays the names of artists – red on black.*

### **Observer**

*The observer cautiously examines the scene, holding the computer mouse firmly in the left hand, while the other grips a pen. The cursor moves slowly through the virtual space, shifting left, turning right. When it encounters people or objects, the index finger clicks, hoping to reveal an artwork.*

*The space is in state of chaos: people are scrambling for a safe space, crawling on the floor, climbing over furniture. Blood is everywhere. There is lots of noise without any sound. A lecture hall constructed like a panopticon. The observer follows a path to the right, a lecturer points to the board, drawing his distressed audience's attention to the text reading: »proposed structure for meme warfare centre«. Clicking the dot, a pop-up video appears: a lecture by Daniel Keller, The Basilisk (2017).*

### **Player**

*Putting my portable into the cardbox viewer, I quickly glance around the space: what is happening, where are the main characters, where are the clues – how do I find the artwork.*

*It's a gruesome scene. I'm falling down from the top into anarchy, blood splatters across the floor, blood-written graffiti, a lot of evidence of past mayhem. I speed across, moving my head left to right, up and down. In the right corner, I spot the art, quickly scanning it: »memes, warfare, EMC external meme centre« – hmm, makes sense in this ordeal. My quest continues... got it! Pulsating circles is what I'm after!*

### **Art/Artists**

*Here we are: crisscrossed blood splatters on the wall, stains on the carpet, papers scattered across the floor, people stumbling over fixed tables and chairs, blank stares –*

*then, looking straight at us, the lecturer in front of the blackboard, pointing at The Basilisk:*

»a fabled chimeric reptile, known to be king of serpents and said to have the power to kill anyone with a single glance. According to one version of the legend, the only person to successfully kill a basilisk did so by wearing a suit of mirrors which reflected its toxic gaze back at the basilisk, turning it into stone.«

*Zigzag out of here...*

Using the flexible software krpano, which is designed to display all manner of panoramic images on the web, *H O P E* presents a series of detailed high-resolution images that are connected through links creating various pathways through the building. The interactive 360° virtual tour is set inside the Technical University Dresden. Commissioned by Gwendolin Kremer, curator of the Al-tana Gallery at the Technical University in Dresden, the same city in which New Scenario graduated from the art academy a few years earlier in 2015, *H O P E*'s familiar setting of a university is crudely disrupted by a zombie apocalypse. Viewers can navigate 17 different rooms: from an auditorium, to laboratories, toilets, hallways, canteen, study spaces, library, offices, and an elevator. In each of the spaces, they can encounter an artwork: a pop-up video, a painting or drawing, or a text. However, these are sometimes hard to find amidst the horror. By scrolling on the landing page of the website, the visitor spirals down from ceiling height to zoom into the crotch of a student-zombie laying on the floor. Double-clicking zips the viewer through the space to land in front of what seems to be the face of a student who is wearing headphones and holding a text in his left hand, with a pencil in his right to make notes. He stares sternly into the camera. After the initial flying across the room, the navigation becomes easier, simply using the arrow keys and finding the pulsing dots for more information, perhaps an artwork, or an entrance into another space.

Navigating to where the first student-zombie is lying on the floor, a girl with a mobile phone is crouching beside him, either trying to make a call, send a text or, more likely, take a photo of him. However, clicking on the pulsating circle of her mobile opens the credits: slowly scrolling red text on a black background accompanied by Choir! Choir!'s 2016 cover of the song *Zombie* by The Cranberries, its chorus echoing the massacre and message in *H O P E*:

In your head, in your head  
Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie  
What's in your head, in your head?

Zombie, zombie, zombie-ie-ie-ie  
 Oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, eh-eh-oh, ya-ya<sup>15</sup>

Back in the lecture hall, the invasion continues, not as a singular event but as a perpetual state, slowly unfolding in an enduring zombie modus. The scene is set and the message is clear: we are spectators and participants in a world on the brink. It mirrors the familiar aesthetics of the *Living Dead* films. Yet, the choice of 360° still images, rather than film, places the viewer in a position of pseudo-agency: you are able to look around without being attacked. It is immersive but frozen: the moment of catastrophe is held in permanent suspension. The stillness, in which nothing moves and everyone is depicted in one freeze, is indeed less cinematic and closer to the painterly abyss of a Bruegelian allegory. Trapped within the confines of the precisely constructed tableau of *H O P E*, the images come to life by moving the cursor around the space, and contemporary societal anxieties emerge as they are executed by brushstrokes of code. Most VR and interactive projects offer players multiple viewpoints to choose from, either to determine the narrative flow, alter the space by moving or destroying objects, by building structures, or affecting non-playable characters (NPCs). Similarly, an allegory involves shifts in narrative and perspective. These stimulate different interpretations of the presented themes, both within and beyond the world that is depicted. The idea that the more a player can do, the more dynamic or immersive the process of worlding becomes, may provide them with a feeling of real-time agency. However, navigating and exploring a space may also feed a pseudo-agency that moves beyond the confines of the virtual experience. *H O P E* presents a liminal world, constructed, curated, and coded, which is inhabited by social and political narratives that read like visual statements, each with their own mise-en-scene in which the characters seem strangely at ease in the world they inhabit. The back-and-forth between these multiple and often contradictory perspectives is what forms the core of worlding in *H O P E*.

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15 *Zombie* (1993) by The Cranberries reflects on the decades-long conflict in Northern Ireland between nationalists (mainly self-identified as Irish or Roman Catholic) and unionists (mainly self-identified as British or Protestant). It's dedicated to two young boys, Tim Parry and Johnathan Ball, who were killed in an IRA bombing in Warrington, England, on 20 March 1993.



fig. 2: *New Scenario: HOPE* – Daniel Keller, *Proposed Structure For Meme Warfare Center (MWC)*, 2017

In a similar way, the artworks are protagonists that carry the emotional and ideological weight of the setting. Often presented in pop-ups, the individual artworks can be viewed, read or listened to. Some artists adapted their work specifically to the setting, like Jon Rafman's video contribution *Dream Journal (Hope)*, in which he weaved together, via an incarnation of camgirl Ann Lee, a deep-web imagery of repressed libidinal fantasies, masturbating androids, hypermasculine furies, and vore communities, to create a vision of an internet addict's subconscious mind.<sup>16</sup> Others were selected for their resonance with the thematic architecture of the university environment, such as Jason Hirata's *Puyallup (1942 & 2002)*, a series of prints on security paper naming every dish served for one week at the concentration camp in Puyallup, Washington, where his grandparents were interned during World War II – of course, presented in the deserted canteen strewn with unfinished meals (many fried eggs), the leftovers of an abrupt departure.<sup>17</sup> Or, Daniel Keller's *Proposed Structure For Meme Warfare Center (MWC)*, a chalkboard diagram that starts the

16 For a more detailed description see Pierre-Alexandre Mateos/Charles Teyssou (2017): »Zombie Subjectivity: New Scenario«, in: <https://www.moussemagazine.it/> (18.09.2017). Online: <http://moussemagazine.it/zombie-subjectivity-new-scenario-2017/> (last access: 15.08.2025).

17 For more information, see Zoey Lubitz (2020): »Art As Negotiation: Jason Hirata Interviewed. Artwork that complexifies the notion of authorship«, in: <https://bombmagaz>

VR adventure. Clicking on a dot on the chalkboard opens the link to a video lecture in which Keller discusses Meme Magick, known from the alt-right, pointing out how right-populist memes are reminiscent of undead images. Finally, the soundscape of the exhibition fills the space with contradictions: familiar administrative noises, such as ringing telephones, are interspersed with car honks, sounds of the slasher's circular saw clashing with harpsichord melodies, as well as calming insect rustles alongside thunderous storms. These sonic layers mimic the absurdity of a collapsing civilisation: is it half-bureaucratic nightmare, half-baroque opera, half-ecodisaster, or the latest version of I-Doser? The sounds act as a counterpoint and a companion to the visuals, underscoring the tension between dystopian imagery and nihilistic irony. The contradiction is intentional: a death wish masked as hope, or perhaps hope is only imaginable through total collapse. Barsch notes that the artworks only reach their full narrative potential in the context of the world they inhabit.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the artworks become *H O P E*'s most important characters.

Within the online format, the artifice of *H O P E* is transparent. Similarly, the detailed setting, including numerous references to online behaviours, shows that New Scenario is critically aware of how disaster is staged and performed. Hence, *H O P E* doesn't simply reference disaster; rather, the deliberate aesthetic invites reflection on the medium's role in constructing and perpetuating states of emergency. Likewise, the digital space is not merely a gallery substitute, but a stage for speculative world-building. *H O P E* explores the potential of immersive technologies and pushes the boundaries of what an exhibition can mean, using online platforms not just to display, but to world. Through deliberate world-building, it invites users to navigate complex emotions, social structures, and speculative futures. This is not an exhibition space, but a proposition, a glimpse into what could emerge when everything is equally infested, or equally alive with potentiality.

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ine.org (18.02.2020). Online: <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2020/02/18/art-as-negotiation-jason-hirata-interviewed/> (last access: 13.10.2025).

18 Matt Welch (2017): »Crisis and Infection: An Interview with New Scenario on Chaos + Positivity Ahead of Their Upcoming Project H O P E«, in: [www.aqnb.com](http://www.aqnb.com) (01.05.2017). Online: <http://www.aqnb.com/2017/05/01/crisis-and-infection-new-scenario-talk-chaos-positivity-ahead-of-theirupcoming-project-h-o-p-e/> (last access: 15.08.2025).

## Part 2: Time

How does the potentiality of online space connect to how (digital) time is experienced? This is a philosophical, material, practical and cultural question, and the understanding of time has undergone significant transformations, particularly with the advent of new technologies and acknowledgement (in the West) of other notions of time, which have redefined how it is experienced and measured. Whereas Lewis Mumford's description of time, »The clock, not the steam-engine, is the key machine of the modern industrial age. For every phase of its development the clock is both the outstanding fact and the typical symbol of the machine: even today no other machine is so ubiquitous«,<sup>19</sup> is still valid, the notion of time is also cultural and socio-political, as mentioned by Meryem-Bahia Arfaoui:

»One evening, my uncle and I sat in our courtyard in Jendouba in north-western Tunisia, talking about our homeland. In Tunisia, »we got our independence in 1956,« I said. He abruptly shot me a stern look, almost as if by reflex, before retorting, »1956... that's a French date!« [...] time and chronology are not politically neutral. And colonizer time is not the same as time kept by the colonized.«<sup>20</sup>

Computer time is also not chronological, it operates at different time scales. Even trying to program time into the computer is actually quite difficult. One has to take into account all kinds of specifics: distinctions between shifting global summer and winter times, historical anomalies, political differences within the same city (think of Israelis following a different time from Palestinians, even in the same city), and the notion of leap time.<sup>21</sup> Several people have proposed the detemporality of internet time, to signal how the acceleration of information resulted in a temporal compression in which time as a process

19 Lewis Mumford (1934): *Technics and Civilization*, London: Routledge, p. 14.

20 Meryem-Bahia Arfaoui (2021): »Time and the Colonial State«, in: <https://thefunambulist.net> (21.06.2022). Online: <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/article/time-and-the-colonial-state> (last access: 15.08.2025).

21 Tom Scott explains the convoluted part of how while programming time: »time twists and turns like a twisty-turny thing. It's not to be trifled with!« Tom Scott: »The Problem with Time & Timezones«, in: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (30.12.2013). Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5wpm-gesOY> (last access: 15.08.2025).

disappeared.<sup>22</sup> Such observations tend to see computational space as fluid and continuous; a nice uninterrupted flow of data and exchanges. However, in most experiences this space is more volatile, less like a steady stream and more like a wild river that moves at different speeds, including downtimes, blockages, missing parts, relays and dead ends. In that sense, rather than detemporality, it is a temporal incoherence.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, computer time is less a topographical or a temporal division because it corresponds to its technical specification. This is particular visible in online exhibitions, where temporality is explored through generative art, live data streams, or webcams, or where users are given control: offering downloadable ZIPs, customisable templates, or collaborative tools like Google Docs. Such formats invite participation and reinterpretation and will evolve, embracing the fluid, unpredictable rhythms of the web. By leveraging algorithms, platform features, and co-creation, such exhibitions challenge traditional notions of time, proposing alternative temporalities shaped by human and machine logic.

### **HOPE**

*INFO: krpano 1.19-pr8 (build 2016-09-30) INFO: Android 6.0.1 (Nexus 5X) – Chrome 133.0 – WebGL INFO: Registered to: BTSA. CLOSE. LAYERS. HOTSPOTS.*

### **Observer**

*Visitors navigating through this world lose their sense of time. This happens on the level of the space: the floorplan mimics a labyrinth of rooms presenting scenes that provide little foothold. The exhibition: a selection of artworks ranging from 1942 to the contemporary. The duration: VR contributes to time compression, we forget time.*

### **Player**

*I'm moving my head, clicking the dots endlessly. I must have passed through all of the spaces. Not sure if I missed some I-Doser. The time, what is the time, I must still have a few minutes to find my way out. Wait – wait? – what is the time, how long have I been here... Where is the exit...*

22 For instance, Manuel Castells (2010): *The Rise of Network Society. The Information Age. Economy, Society, and Culture*, Vol. 1 (second edition), Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

23 A. Dekker: *Curating Online*, n.p.

**Art/Actors**

*Standing still. We wait. When will we be able to move, into the future, into the past.  
Here is only the present. Our world is the now, we are present.*

Although it could be said that online exhibitions, unlike their offline counterparts, remain online (until they are no longer updated), even if only existing in a state of stasis; they are always of the present. However, from a media-archaeological perspective, technology creates a folding in time in which new forms of temporalities emerge, as explained by Sybille Krämer, in reference to Friedrich Kittler:

»What is unique about the technological era (from the gramophone to the computer) is that these technologies allow one to store ›real time‹ – in other words, those processes that cannot be fixed by syntactical structures and are thus not irreversible, but rather contingent, chaotic, and singular – and, at the same time, to process ›real time‹ as a temporal event. *Data processing becomes the process by which temporal order becomes moveable and reversible in the very experience of space* (Kittler, 1997:130–46).«<sup>24</sup>

Emphasizing processing over storage shows how online exhibitions are volatile rather than stable, creating their own temporality.<sup>25</sup> Understanding the web in terms of the processes that shape its structure, including storage and memory, has implications for how time is experienced and conceptualised online. As stated by Wolfgang Ernst, »In technologies, there is no present at all – rather differential tempor(e)alities.«<sup>26</sup> According to Ernst, the symbolic ordering of

24 Sybille Krämer (2006): »The Cultural Techniques of Time Axis Manipulation. On Friedrich Kittler's Conception of Media«, in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 23/7-8, pp. 93–109, here: p. 96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406069885>.

25 This is well-known phenomenon in game play, and particularly in VR games, where the technology influences a player's notion of time, as recalled by psychologist Grayson Muller: »I stopped playing the game, and I realized that I had no idea how much time had passed. [...] I was supposed to be taking turns with other people, and I was worried that I had played for too long because I couldn't even guess if it had been 10 minutes or 40 minutes«. *Public Affairs* (2021): »Virtual reality warps your sense of time. Psychology research demonstrates the unique ›time compression‹ effect of virtual reality«, in: <https://news.ucsc.edu> (12.05.2021). Online: <https://news.ucsc.edu/2021/05/virtual-reality-time-compression/> (last access: 15.08.2025).

26 Wolfgang Ernst (2017): »The Delayed Present: Media-Induced Tempor(e)alities & Techno-traumatic Irritations of ›the Contemporary‹«, in: Geoff Cox/Jacob Lind (eds.), *The Contemporary Condition*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, p. 11.

time is replaced by overlapping and concurrent temporalities, where everything appears to happen now; more precisely, where the ›now‹ is stretched, layered, and reactivated. In this logic, there is no singular present and time becomes a recursive loop, or perhaps a zombie; undead and unchanging until disrupted, ›slayed‹, or broken. In this way, and similar to the allegoric scenario, internet time becomes a kind of eternal present, a dynamic *and* frozen moment sustained by the processes of execution.

This framework is reflected in the rhizomatic structure of *H O P E* that employs a nonlinear curatorial logic. Its spatial arrangement defies chronological narratives; instead, it offers a transversal, zigzagging experience. Similar to space, time is not a neutral backdrop. Together they become dynamic agents in the staging of experience, i.e., producing a present. This is not a singular, fixed moment of presence, but a multiplicity: coexisting moments, imagined human presences that may be familiar or alien, rooted in the past or projected into the future – whatever lies behind the next door. These moments reflect not only the temporal multiplicity of perception but also the philosophical dimension of *presence as presentation*. To present presence is to make palpable the folds in time: actual and virtual, experienced and potential. In the philosophy of becoming, memory is never static. It is multidirectional, operating through acts of recomposition. Indeed, when opening one of the doors in *H O P E* you are never sure if it leads to a new, or an already visited space. The past is not merely recalled but returns in anticipation of the future. It is enacted in both the actual and virtual present, like a zombie who is resurrected and repurposed in new contexts, while also remaining the same. As Brian Massumi explains in his book *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), the virtual is connected to a state of becoming, a kind of pre-actualised potential that influences and informs what is actually happening in the present (the actual). The actual present is always permeated by the virtual, which represents a potentiality: a process of becoming, or a ›folded‹ aspect of experience that is not yet fully actualised. In VR this concept takes a unique form, because the past is not simply remembered or reconstructed as it would be in a book or a film. For instance, in *H O P E* the VR experience doesn't just exist in abstraction, rather it draws on the actual (the present world and the past) and reintegrates it into a space where it is re-enacted, re-experienced, and re-imagined. Hence, *H O P E* evokes a layered relationship between time, memory, and (pseudo-)agency in the digital space. The past (represented by the return of the zombie, sometimes in replica) is not merely a distant past or memory, but is repurposed in the present. The navigation that happens via numerous doors, endless corri-

dors, a flickering lift, and rows of toilets (all indicators of movement), deepens this notion. These elements suggest that the past does not merely come back in recollection, but it is re-experienced in real-time. This return is not static either: the user is invited to walk through and engage with the past as if it exists in the present.



fig. 3: *New Scenario: H O P E – Kareem Lotfy, I-Doser & (BRING YOUR OWN DOPE), Posters, 2017*

Finally, *H O P E* as a technical system is also a medium for unfolding temporalities<sup>27</sup>: an enduring interface between memory, presence and the continuous becoming of time itself. As before, the 2D renderings in the VR/360° environment are not merely static, together they emphasise the notion of the actual: a convergence of the present reality, which is shaped by past decisions, events, and experiences, but also influenced by future potentials and possibilities. This effect is further enhanced by the presentation of the artworks within these spaces, which with each encounter overwrite existing meanings, inviting renewal and rewriting: the exhibition is re-presented, producing an extended present, a compressed time window where conventional Western distinctions

27 Or, as mentioned by Ernst, new forms of tempor(e)alities, *ibid.*

between past, present, and future lose their linear order. Playing with these various modes of temporality, *H O P E* suggests a radical potentiality in curatorial practice, aesthetics and political engagement that is fundamental to the notion of worlding.

### Part 3: Curating

Curating is everywhere. The terms curator, curating and digital curation have become all the hype: everyone is a curator and anything can be curated, from online marketing to coffee shops, children's parties, energy bars, earrings, etcetera. Along the way, more conventional fields, such as information science, chipped in, rebranding traditional terms like archiving and recordkeeping as digital curation, further blurring the lines between art, information, and commerce.<sup>28</sup> The number of online galleries has been increasing over the last few years, most with obscure names, such as vFairs, Omeka, Artsteps, or VOMA, together with the rise of web builders, social media platforms, and design software like SketchUp, WallApp, or 3D modelling programs like Rhino, as well as a proliferation of online exhibition tutorials: all made available to democratise the trade. Once confined to physical institutions and galleries, the curatorial methods now omnipresent enable anyone with the required skills and internet connections to present content to a global audience. These shifts have made curating an open activity, no longer exclusive to professionals in traditional institutions.

Paraphrasing Andrew Dewdney's take on photography, what happens to curating when it is everywhere, but not as we have known it: for some time the curator has been an undead, a zombie, in which the established language, thinking, meanings and values of curating stand as an obstacle to understanding its new condition.<sup>29</sup> The current mode of online presentation, circulation

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28 A. Dekker: Curating Online, n.p.

29 In a similar way, the notion of »zombie media« is used by Hertz and Parikka to address the living dead of media culture, however, referencing Bruce Sterling's concept of »dead media«, they mentioned that focusing on the forgotten or obsolete media is a useful way to »understand better the nature of media cultural development«. Garnet Hertz/Jussi Parikka (2012): »Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archaeology into an Art Method«, in: Leonardo 45/5, pp. 424–430, here: p. 429.

and algorithmic interferences turn curating on its head and with it, is changing the role of curators, as well as the institutions from which they originate.<sup>30</sup> Like photography, curating has been freed from its conventional constraints to haunt the opaque intimacy of the web and its computational abstraction, creating new challenges to understanding curating in computational and network culture.<sup>31</sup> Although the question of how to regard the curator's afterlife is beyond the scope of this article, Dewdney's remark and method helps to redefine the notion of the curatorial in New Scenario's *H O P E*. Casting the afterlife of the curator as the fictional figure of the zombie curator, and positioning curating as a zombie method, is both a playful and a methodological way to discuss the limits of the institutional curator in contemporary cultural institutional practices (echoing the critique of New Scenario), as well as to understand its online equivalent.<sup>32</sup>

### **HOPE**

*A concept. Formulating criteria and making selections. Painting, sculptures, pedestals, lighting, distance, all design elements. Writing captions, press releases, and wall labels. Sending invitations. Documenting the scene, with and without visitors.*

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- 30 See, next to the earlier mentioned (n. 8, 10, 11), for instance, Joasia Krysa/Magda Tyżlik-Carver (eds.) (2025): *Curating Superintelligences: Speculations on the Future of Curating, AI and Hybrid Realities*, London: Open Humanities Press; Annet Dekker (ed.) (2021): *Curating Digital Art. From Presenting and Collecting Digital Art to Networked Co-Curating*, Amsterdam: Valiz; Magda Tyżlik-Carver (2017): »| Curator | Curating | the Curatorial | Not-Just-Art Curating: A Genealogy of Posthuman Curating«, in: Springerin, *The Post-Curatorial Turn 1*, online: <https://www.springerin.at/en/2017/1/kuratorin-kuratieren-das-kuratorische-nicht-nur-kunst-kuratieren/> (last access: 15.08.2025); Joasia Krysa (2014): »Can Machines Curate? Notes on History of Technology Hope and Paradoxes of Curating«, in: Y. Guasque (ed.), *Digital Art: Fractures, Proliferative Preservation and Affective Dimension*, 5th National Symposium of the Brazilian Association of Cyberculture Researchers, MediaLan/UFG, Funape; Olga Goriunova (2013): »Light Heavy Weight Curating«, in: Annet Dekker (ed.), *Speculative Scenarios: Or What Will Happen to Digital Art in the (Near) Future*, Eindhoven: Baltan Laboratories, pp. 25–32.
- 31 Here I'm echoing Dewdney's reference to photography, and applying the same mechanism to curating. Andrew Dewdney (2021): *Forget Photography*, London: Goldsmiths Press, p. 3.
- 32 Ibid, p. 10.

**Observer**

*I'm navigating through the different spaces, entering each of them and locating the artworks by clicking on pulsating dots. I can see how the narrative slowly unfolds. The zombies embody eternal time, trapped in their unyielding cycle – will I become part of them, or am I the barrier to their progress?*

**Player**

*The space doesn't move. Even the zombies are motionless. No action, except my own. Perhaps some of the artworks will offer more clues on how to escape from this endless misery.*

**Art/Audience**

*A zombie is not quite dead, it refuses to die – it can be a metaphor for the institution (the museum gallery that persists without a real function in the present day), the curator (whose ego is prominent, or hiding behind various facades in which the art plays a secondary role, if at all), the audience (wandering around without purpose or direction), or perhaps all of these together? What happens when considering the notion of zombie curating, or the long afterlife of the museum as institution?*

The title *H O P E* signifies different things. Art critic Matt Welch recalled Barack Obama's 2008 US election campaign that used »Hope« as its slogan. In their interview, Barsch explains it as a gesture of »nihilist irony«, albeit, the title was chosen at the end of the process as an attempt to evoke a positive message to compensate for the horror that is presented in the exhibition scenes.<sup>33</sup> *H O P E* can also reflect the hopelessness that seems omnipresent in today's society, which as Barsch points out, in »extreme ways can manifest in a death wish hope that only total chaos and collapse can bring change and a better life«. <sup>34</sup> Almost ten years later the tension between hope and despair has become mainstream with a rise in books and workshops around self-help, mindfulness and meditation alongside survival courses and (governmentally advised) prepping guides to survive an apocalypse. Horror authors often argue how horror and hope are connected, and research has shown how horror gives hope and helps build resilience,<sup>35</sup> but what does it mean to wallow in horror or identify with the zombie? More specifically, and to stick with the topic of curating and worlding,

33 M. Welch: *Crisis and Infection*, n.p.

34 Ibid.

35 This notion builds on a long tradition, among others, from Friedrich Nietzsche, who wrote about creating a new tragic culture (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 1872), to the more re-

would it be possible within these manifestations to find new ways of curating? What would it mean to break away from Christianity's enduring legacy of compulsive hope, or in this case, ubiquitous institutional curatorial standards?

As mentioned, with *H O P E* the artists introduced an additional theme to their exhibition design, linking the exhibition spaces to a unifying concept of the zombie. While in Western culture the zombie is best known as a manifestation of the walking dead, the origin of the word is often acknowledged as coming from countries in West Africa: »West African Vodun holds that a dead human can be brought back to life by a priest with specific otherworldly power to commune with the gods. This priest, or *bokur*, then gains control of the zombified human, who has lost all free will«. <sup>36</sup> On the other hand, the astral zombie, one whose soul has been captured, derived from »nzambi« in Kikonko, one of the Butan languages, can in this reading also connote good luck and literally means God. <sup>37</sup> The enslaved people from West African countries brought both notions of the zombie to Haiti and the United States of America, where they gained popularity in literary and popular culture. However, in line with colonialist ideology, the Western notion of the zombie became best known for its portrayal of *otherness* – figures who had lost their ability to speak, lacked will or expression, and existed only to haunt the living. <sup>38</sup> Hence, and despite the wide range of zombie figures, genres, and myths from literature, films and television series, and social media doom scrolling, one thing they all have in common is their subdued and dominated sense of agency. Being under the spell of their conqueror, they live a sedated life.

Similarly constrained by the demands of the institute, and partly under the influence of a critical rethinking of the institutional, the 1990s saw the emergence of the independent curator detached from organisational affiliations (like museums and galleries), and able to operate transnationally. <sup>39</sup> Experimenting with alternative formats of display and engagement, their

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cent book by Olga Goriunova/Matthew Fuller (2019): *Bleak Joys*, Minneapolis/London: The University of Minnesota Press.

36 June Michelle Pulliam/Anthony J. Fonseca (eds.) (2014): *Encyclopedia of the Zombie: The Walking Dead in Popular Culture and Myth*, Greenwood: Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 2.

37 Ibid.

38 Edward P. Comentale (2017): »Zombie Race«, in: Sarah Juliet Lauro (ed.), *Zombie Theory: A Reader*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 189–211.

39 The independent curator also gained prominence due to the globalisation of the art world and the proliferation of biennials and large-scale exhibitions that required mo-

work highlighted power structures within the art world and questioned who gets to define artistic value and cultural narratives. Curator and researcher Paul O'Neill suggests that independent curating became a form of cultural production, creating new meanings and experiences rather than simply managing or preserving existing works. However, he also acknowledges that no curator is ever truly independent, as they often remain embedded in broader cultural, economic, and institutional frameworks.<sup>40</sup> In the early 2000s, the widespread and mainstream adaptation of the notion of curator also signaled how curatorial practices have become commodified. While the notion of the curatorial became accepted throughout various practices, it often reproduced the very hierarchies and market dependencies that independent curating initially sought to resist. Similar to the zombie legacy in photography that is haunting the understanding of contemporary images,<sup>41</sup> ›zombie curating‹ creates a state of curating where its established language, thinking, meanings, and values have become an obstacle to understanding its contemporary condition, functioning instead as an ›undead‹, or ›zombie‹, entity. Being part and parcel of the long afterlife of the museum as institution and the challenges faced by curatorial practices in evolving alongside new technologies and contexts, the independent curator may have been instrumental in shaping contemporary curatorial discourse and challenging institutional norms. With the turn towards the meta-curator in the early 2000s (those being self-referential, and reflexive of their practice), they were never entirely free from the structures they aimed to critique, and turned the curatorial practice into a closed, self-referential loop.

Although the practice of online curating is hardly reflected in the general discourse of the curatorial, in what ways do New Scenario's antagonistic attitude to exhibition spaces move beyond the zombie curator? In most scenes in *HOPE* zombies are part of the decoration; they are not sedated but have clearly wrecked the institution. Yet in others they could be seen to reflect the institutional, as happens in the library where an army of zombies stands on top of the tables. They all look the same, reflecting the homogeneity of the military (albeit these are blue-faced females).

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bile, flexible curatorial voices. For more information, see Paul O'Neill (2012): *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

40 Ibid.

41 A. Dewdney: *Forget Photography*.



fig. 4: *New Scenario: H O P E, Library, 2017*

While they seem to revolt against the system, their apathetic stares and repetitive gestures are nothing like the unruly mob in the opening scene. This is an army of the same zombie, serially produced to strike one pose. Remarkably, despite a few books thrown on the floor, little is disrupted in the institutional space of knowledge. Clicking on the books opens articles by members of the commissioning organisation analysing the notion of the zombie: for instance, its relation to perpetuating colonialism, or how the zombie can be seen as an »antithesis« in which the »subject position is nullified, not reinvigorated«. According to one of the authors, Tanja Prokić, the zombie can be read

»in terms of the pressure to innovate, the ever-shorter production cycles aimed at ever-higher profit margins that force pseudo-renewals and turn new to old at the speed of light. [...] That practically every human still alive is considered already infected and at death, however it occurs, will himself become a zombie, is the natural law of neoliberalism, by which the serial production of all products, visibly building one on the other, decide the status and relevance of their owners.«<sup>42</sup>

42 Tanja Prokić (2017): »Zombie Media. One Zombie Does Not An Apocalypse Make«, in: *H O P E*. Online: <http://newsscenario.net/hope/> (last access: 15.08.2025).

Here the political against the institutional is revealed through the notion of the zombie. In other situations this is less the case, and it could even be argued that in the presentation of the artworks – once found – world-building remains in the realm of the conventional curatorial approach and even its media usage. Beyond the disruption and despair of the zombie, essentially the spatial and even temporal condition of *H O P E* follows conventional approaches: showing pop-ups of artworks, thereby disconnecting them from their environment. The fear of becoming a zombie curator is what may have propelled New Scenario to present *H O P E*, but it is still ambiguous if the curator is freed from the institutional enclosure, or if it is only the artwork that breaks out and persists in another context. Perhaps, in this sense, and following Žizek's analysis of George Romero's film *The Night of the Living Dead*, the undead »are not portrayed as embodiments of pure evil, of a simple drive to kill or revenge, but as sufferers, pursuing their victims with an awkward persistence, colored by a kind of sadness«,<sup>43</sup> the curator is the one who suffers while trying to break out of the white walls, hoping to persuade the audience by constructing an extreme *mise-en-scene*.

It could be argued that, similar to the meta-curator, online curating reflects not only on *what* is shown but *how, when, and where* it is shown, embedding this reflection within the exhibition itself. As New Scenario demonstrates, this approach can empower radical experimentation and critical discourse; at the same time, the figure of the curator remains. Similarly, New Scenario does not practice networked co-curation,<sup>44</sup> nor do they use open-source methods and algorithmic systems following a post-human curatorial model.<sup>45</sup> Yet, they have a keen awareness of how technological environments mediate curatorial agency. Unlike conventional online exhibitions that merely replicate gallery logics in digital space, *H O P E* adopts a *site-specific* approach: produced not *in spite* of the internet, but *for* it. This mode acknowledges that exhibitions in technical, networked environments are shaped as much by infrastructures, software and platforms as they are by curatorial intention. Finally, the use

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43 Slavoj Žižek (1989): »The Real and Its Vicissitudes. Return of the Living Dead«, in: Newsletter of the Freudian Field 3/1-2, pp. 80–101, here: p. 82.

44 A. Dekker/G. Tedone: Networked Co-curation, n.p.

45 M. Tyžlik-Carver: Curator | Curating | the Curatorial.

of documentation by artists has a long tradition,<sup>46</sup> and its significance has been further amplified in the context of preservation.<sup>47</sup> However, within exhibitions, documentation is often regarded as secondary, a derivative of the original artwork that may no longer be accessible.<sup>48</sup> Challenging this perception, New Scenario's curatorial practice offers a new perspective on the role and value of documentation. Using documentation to create a space in which artworks are presented, some of which as documentation, turns documentation into a meta-practice: it is documentation of something that happened, it is a new exhibition format which contains documentation and it is a performance that can be potentially documented. As a form of enduring documentation, something that continually folds back, it is a method to create a space where the past remains dynamic that moves beyond preserving a static memory of an event by keeping its potential alive. Finally, by presenting their exhibition in an online environment rather than displaying artworks in unconventional physical contexts, they forge additional meaning, while also showing the relevance of providing distribution and access over experiencing the original artwork. In doing so, they challenge the prevailing notion that art must be experienced in person to be fully appreciated, as well as how the copy is just as, or even more, relevant than its original.

While traditional binaries dissolve (artist vs. curator, viewer vs. artwork, object vs. process) into a dynamic, mutable system, there is also a tension between New Scenario's bold formal experimentation and a relatively under-developed focus on the audience's experience or the deeper dependencies of curating on web-based infrastructure. In this sense, their online exhibitions operate both within and beyond *zombie curating*: indeed, it has become a living-dead hybrid of forms and functions that challenges traditional exhibitions but also doesn't detach completely. Rather it can be seen as zigzagging between these positions: taking sharp turns that are characterised by lateral shifts across different domains rather than forward progress within a single domain. In a sense, it is similar to the notion of zombie media, which is

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46 Annet Dekker (2023): »The Tension Between Static Documentation and Dynamic Digital Art«, in: Id./Gabriella Giannachi (eds.), *Documentation as Art: Expanded Digital Practices*, London: Routledge, Museum & Heritage Studies, pp. 16–26.

47 Annet Dekker/Gabriella Giannachi (eds.) (2023): *Documentation as Art: Expanded Digital Practices*, London: Routledge, Museum & Heritage Studies.

48 Barbara Clausen (2017): »Performing the Archive and Exhibiting the Ephemeral«, in: Gabriella Giannachi/Jonah Westerman (eds.), *Histories of Performance Documentation*, London: Routledge, pp. 93–114.

»concerned with media that is not only out of use, but resurrected to new uses, contexts and adaptations«,<sup>49</sup> and where minor changes can have major consequences. New Scenario also repurposes old formats for alternative uses, leading to a field of entangled positions and shifting agencies. Here, domains do not merely coexist nor do they oppose; they *shift into one another*, collapsing boundaries and inviting more layered, complex readings. *H O P E* looks like a film, a mashup of paintings by Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel, a baroque opera or a binaural beat, functions like a game, feels like an immersive experience or a lucid dream, and reads like a visual manifesto – all at once. By resisting singular classification, it dismantles the underlying assumptions that categories in art and curating are natural, fixed, or necessary. This is not merely an aesthetic gesture, but a strategic reconfiguration of how to build, interact with and comprehend exhibitions.

## The End

Through their exhibitions New Scenario rethinks how art can engage with the world. Rather than offering control, coherence, or clarity, their curated environments emphasise affective entanglement, and uncomfortable intimacy. For instance, in *Body Holes*, the artworks are placed inside mouths, ears, and other bodily orifices. It is grotesque, absurd and also relational. Artworks do not sit on pedestals, rather they inhabit, seep, and stir. The spaces are not neutral, they are fleshy, affective terrains. Nor does the viewer observe from a safe distance, they are drawn into co-presence with the world being built. *H O P E* connects to world-building in a literal sense, but the actions and methods also align closely with Haraway's insistence that worlding is always embedded in bodies, relations, and material specificity. Similar to Tsing's *matsutake* forests or Haraway's companions, New Scenario's exhibitions create spaces where meaning is emergent, dispersed, and entangled. Moreover, rather than simply building immersive environments, their practice is about imagining and inhabiting alternative ways of presenting and experiencing art, ways that are messy, unresolved, and full of potentiality. Their exhibitions also operate as narrative environments: each with its own aesthetic grammar, its own spatial and temporal rules. In an attempt to emphasise the constant negotiation between the researcher's judgement, the player's agency, the artists' visions, the curatorial

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49 G. Hertz/J. Parikka: *Zombie Media*, p. 429.

intentions, the audience's expectations, and the dynamic nature of the environment, the three characters in this story – Observer, Player, Art/Artists-Actors-Audience – serve to encourage the inhabiting of multiple viewpoints simultaneously. Their perspectives slowly evolve and unfold, much like an allegory presents different layers that become apparent when shifting position. The Observer, restricted by their neutral stance, is limited to following the flow of the world as it has been designed. They experience a fixed, symbolic world rather than actively creating or evolving it. The Player moves in and out of different worlds, the zombie horror and reflective artworks coalesce, and are simultaneously obstructions and clues to navigate and make sense of the game. The Art is divided and connected by three protagonists Artists-Actors-Audience, who each from their own perspective, together possess a pseudo-agency; due to their constraints, they engage with the world from a distance. Both immersed and stuck in their world, they do not have the power to shape or transform it in a meaningful way. The three main characters also allude to the notion of curatorial worlding, in which the Observer provides the conventional guidance and reflection. They may be disturbed by the environment but become invigorated by the un-abstruse presentation of the art; their subjectivity emerges slowly. The Player's stimulus is to get into the gore: driven by past experiences, they understand and play with the dualities. Their incentive is to become immersed, to quickly find and connect the dots that will provide the solution. The Art/Artists-Actors-Audience consists of those who fill the space and may give it a more layered meaning in the virtual/actual. Their pseudo-agency is integral to this process, as it suggests that while they are agents within these worlds, they are still part of a larger structure, one that may invite participation but also imposes limits on what can be done, thereby creating a tension that is fundamental to worlding.

By imagining impossible geographies and sensory logics that sit outside standardised norms, *New Scenario* disrupts traditional curatorial methods in favour of creating spaces where the boundaries between art, artists, actors, audience, and the context itself, become porous and shift constantly. The exhibitions are not merely spaces to be visited, but fluid, unstable, and transformative environments to be inhabited. In these spaces, meaning is not static or fixed; instead, it emerges from the ongoing dialogue between different ›worlds‹. Each interaction with the exhibition, whether through the eyes of the viewer or the curatorial decisions that shape it, participates in the continuous worlding of the exhibition. This process of worlding emphasises the multiplicity of perspectives and experiences that can emerge in response

to art, but also highlights that exhibitions (or artworks) are not solely defined by their visual representations or even their immediate aesthetic impact, but rather by the relational and contextual processes that unfold around or between them.

In this way, *New Scenario* resists the flattening of curatorial intent, and simultaneously questions authorship itself, thereby opening up the exhibition to a pluralistic, participatory process of meaning-making. Through this framework, exhibitions become more than passive displays, they become active sites of transformation where the artwork, the exhibition (including its technical, spatial and temporal qualities), and the viewer contribute to the creation of meaning in an ongoing, unpredictable interplay. Such an approach reshapes the notion of curatorial intent by recognising the dynamic, ever-transforming force of online exhibitions. Ultimately, in *New Scenario's* zombie landscape, nothing is dead and nothing is fully alive. These are exhibitions not to be visited, but inhabited: spaces where meaning is not delivered, but lived through, as an unstable and provocative experience. Still, the examples also emphasise a hybrid state of the curatorial. This tension is central to understanding the afterlife of curating and its zombie condition. On the one hand, it continues to reflect institutional practices through the premise of selecting and presenting art. On the other hand, it begs the question: if the curatorial role disappeared, would curating still be possible, would exhibitions be recognisable? In other words, in the end the curator is a recursively nested zombie: a self-referential condition that implies its own impossibility or contradiction – an aesthetic mode characteristic of online exhibitions.

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