

## PERFORMING THE FUTURE. EXPERIMENTAL FUTURES STUDIES

“CREATE THE FUTURE WHILE YOU LIVE IT!” – BUT HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE? HOUSE OF FUTURES IS EXPERIMENTING WITH HOW TO MAKE FUTURES STUDIES MORE SENSUOUS BY COMBINING IT WITH PERFORMANCE ART. IN THE PROJECT ‘IN-100YEARS’ OUR AIM HAS BEEN INTER-DISCIPLINARY CO-CREATION OF LONG-TERM PREFERRED FUTURES BASED ON A HOLISTIC APPROACH THAT INVOLVES NOT ONLY OUR MINDS, BUT ALSO OUR BODIES.

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FUTURES

Futures Studies is not about predicting the future, but all about anticipating it. Creating awareness about the future in the present and thereby of the alternatives to a present trajectory or strategy is fundamental to all Futures Studies. Usually we do this by working with plausible and possible scenarios or images of the future in different kinds of facilitated two-dimensional workshops and processes. But in the four seminars of ‘In100Years’ we have gone beyond this framework and made three dimensional images and scenario experiences part of the knowledge production design and seminar set-up.

The future is not something we can plan for rationally – especially not the long-term future. No experts can predict the future, but visionaries within all different kinds of fields and non-fields can create and co-create the future as we speak and move. We wish to inspire that awareness in people we meet and to trigger their lust for manifesting those actions of future importance with an equal amount of joy, reflectivity, sensuality and poetry. And we believe that Performance Art can be of great significance as a method for creating the future in the present.

We work with an understanding of performance art as something rooted in the tradition of rituals and theatre. And so we incorporate elements of both as an activist method to embody the future – starting now. Used as a method to portray the world, performance art becomes a way of emphasizing the presence and sensuous knowledge of all our minds, including the body, in the perception and the co-creation processes.

### HOLISTIC FUTURES STUDIES

Based on the pre-analysis to the scenario project and process ‘In100Years’, that has involved 150+ visionary participants within the broad field of sustainability during

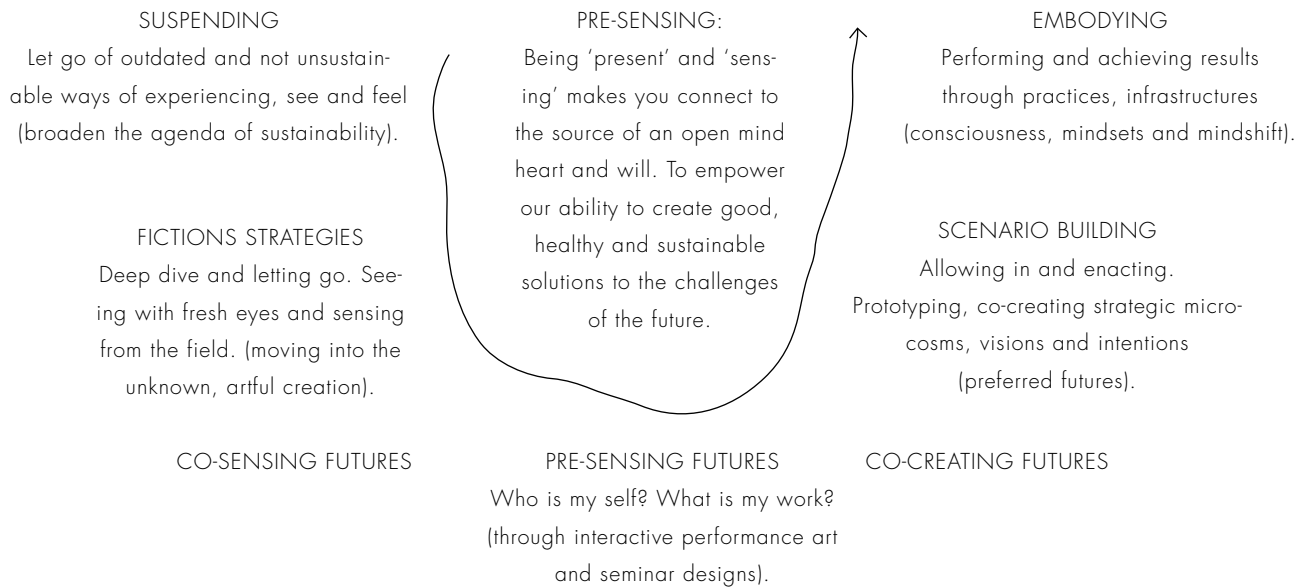
four seminars, we decided to work with the long run (100 years) and to focus on mind set scenarios. Futures Studies normally have a 10-25 year scope and to look 100 years into the future is unusual even for futurists. It is none the less necessary for encompassing the full extent of sustainability, environment, social change and mind shifting in the long run. In order to focus on mindsets and mindshift we wanted to engage people in an exploratory journey by not only drawing on their intellectual minds, but also their emotional, sensoric and bodily ‘minds’ and experiences.

Through an intersection of our different disciplines within House of Futures we created an experimental seminar environment for the participants to engage in and for them to begin co-creating our common future from a holistic perspective, and we did it by placing the body of the individual and the collective body of the group at the focal point of the knowledge produced. To us, this might be the beginning of a new generation of Futures Studies. At least we hope it is a contribution to the development of the field.

The five overall approaches to studying the future (see box on next page) have all been very important building blocks in the project ‘In100years’. Also the Integral Futures approach, which has played a more central role in the field of Futures Studies during the last decades, has been a great inspiration. Integral Futures includes not only the outer but also our inner environment as an important perspective or driver for change (read more about Integral Futures on p. 103). As shown in the illustration above, Theory U is an illustrative way to visualize and communicate how we are thinking and working.

Applying performance art in the process of the project ‘In100Years’ has, together with different kinds of Futures Studies methods, been our tools to dissolve the dualistic position between feeling and thinking or acting and reflecting. It has helped open peoples minds to the need for a broadened agenda of sustainability and growth than the one we see today, and we believe that many people are longing for a more holistic, spiritual or playful approach

### LIVING THE FUTURE NOW



LIVING THE FUTURE NOW. 'THEORY U' APPLIED TO THE PROJECT 'IN100YEARS' AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE COMBINATION OF FUTURES STUDIES AND PERFORMANCE ART. Otto Scharmer, 'Theory U – Leading from the Future as it Emerges', 2007.

#### OUR 5 APPROACHES TO STUDYING LONG-TERM FUTURES

**#1. Broad approach.** The future is shaped by technological change, but also by cultural, economic, political, psychological, artistic and social driving forces and changes. It results from the interplay of different angles – individual and psychological as well as collective and systemic. In the short term, an isolated tendency or economic cycle might make an impact, but in the long run these and many other parameters come together in a broader picture.

**#2. Interdisciplinary approach.** It follows from the above that there is a need to employ an interdisciplinary approach. Interdisciplinarity is always important in futures studies, and even more so when the subject carries the weight that 'In100Years' does. Many contributions are characterized by different disciplines offering separate predictions and foresights. As such, interdisciplinarity in the field of sustainability is a purpose in itself.

**#3. Deep Approach.** While most futures studies include many disciplines and perspectives there can be a tendency to overlook psychological or individual aspects and focus on outer and social matters. In the project 'In100Years' we explicitly involve both the personal, the physical and the psychological. Citing futurist Richard Slaughter we

work both with what is "out there" in the realm of systemic and structural change and what's "in here" of individual, personal and conscious change. Performance art, rituals and spiritual approaches have all played a significant role in the project.

**#4. Imaginative and historical approach.** Futures Studies deal with the possibility of that which has never occurred. Imagination, curiosity and creativity are essential elements in all futures studies. Tomorrow isn't like today, and with a continuous rate of change due to developments including technological progress and mindshifts, enormous change can be anticipated in the next 100 years. As history is the best available input to the future, it is, along with imagination, necessary to have a good understanding of the historic development of the system under investigation. A rule-of-thumb is to look at the subject twice as many years back in time, as we project the subject into the future.

**#5. Involving Approach.** The project 'In100Years' has spanned a year, and in that time frame more than 150 Danish and foreign researchers, visionary professionals and decision makers from different sectors have contributed to the development of the project and the scenarios. At the same time, we continuously work to involve even more partners through both online as well as through special events.

to the way we do business, politics and leadership. 'It was good to be able to meet as persons and not organizations', as one participant put it.

### PERFORM THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE

Let us take you back to the fourth and closing 'In100Y'-seminar about people and mindsets for a moment. The seminar was held on 18 January 2012 in Copenhagen at Carlsberg Academy. The 80 participants, all visionaries in different sustainability fields, had already listened to a lecture on the performance theories and motivations behind the rites of the fictional travel agency 'Future Mind Tours' (see presentation on p. 34 and read the article 'The impact of Future Mind Tours' on p. 120), and therefore they knew that moving down the halls and into the different rooms would involve participating in an interactive performance installation that would show the choreography and archetypes of potential new mind sets. In this setting, the participants were not locked into the traditional audience seats looking into a spectacle created before them.

On the first journeys of 'In100Years' the participants had taken part in different ways of working with how we imagine and embody the future. On the first seminar we had created encapsulated images in simple gestures presented on different institutional milestones along the canals of Copenhagen. On the second seminar they had entered into the installation 'The Two Sensed Futures', where they had been immersed and surrounded in the atmosphere of two sketches – or two possible outcomes – of the scenarios for sustainable societies 2112. At the third seminar they became part of the mystery of 'Acorn Falls', exploring the aesthetic, poetic and transformative moments in life. Now, on the final seminar, the participants themselves would start creating these kinds of art futures.

Walking down the hall the participants would feel the deep bass of the future tickling in the chessboard patterned marble floors. The sound came from DJ Hvd's Indian drone machines and other sound devices on a set placed in the room labelled the 'Conscious Construction Site'. In here, among ancient statues and movable pillars of black, white and red boxes, stood performers and participants experimenting together to transform the idea of a new mindset into sound, collages and movements.

This was just one of the artistic rooms and poetic settings to visit and explore mindsets and mindshifts at the fourth seminar. In another room, 'The Delivery', the Oracle of Delphi was placed in the middle together with a performance artist who guided the participants to ask any question regarding sustainability in a 100 year perspective (see page 164). All the rooms at this seminar and the dif-

ferent performance installations of the other three seminars have invited the participants to engage in artful creation by activating more personal, imaginary and intuitive dimensions than usual on our professional and industrial work scene. Also, we wanted to let the inner images of the participants become visible during the knowledge production at the seminars, making the invisible visible. Thus, one of our methodical questions guiding the action research of this project has been how to access the inner images that shape and direct our desire of preferred futures. As part of the action research we have interviewed a number of participants, and you can read about their experiences of the performance installations of 'In100Years' in the article 'Sensing the future' on p. 129.

### A SENSE OF FUTURES

When working with performance art and strategies of fiction, we are very conscious of the installations we create containing the possibility to suspend, challenge or play with the social norms in a given situation or place through the creation of a symbolic in-betweenness, thereby opening up for a potential transformation of the involved place or people. By employing performance strategies we immerse participants in an intimate environment, engaging the individuals' intuitive and poetic sense and allowing them to experience the visions of future tangibly in the present and create a space for the potential of a deep-rooted mindshift.

We believe the body is a set of possibilities for perception. Its appearance in this world is not predetermined by some manner of interior essence, but a continuous and incessant materializing of possibilities, a manner of doing. This ever-shaping reality is interesting to us as an extension of our focus on manifesting the future in the present. Because if you perform yourself, then your personality is created every minute by your gestures. By inspiring people to move in certain ways or visualize themselves in certain contexts, we thus believe that it is possible to embody the future in the present. To articulate it in another way, we believe that we can decide to perform change – perform the future. In this way, we synthesize the insight of Futures Studies with the expressiveness of Performance Art and this can take many forms – ritual, installation or intervention – but common to them is the opportunity to transcend habits and ingrown beliefs and attain deep-rooted change in the consciousness of the participants.

### IMAGES OF THE FUTURE

All strategies and plans for the future either explicitly or implicitly have a certain idea of what the future will be



Agents performing images of the future, the "Imaginary Tour", first seminar. [www.in100y.dk/videos/video-seminar-1/](http://www.in100y.dk/videos/video-seminar-1/)

like. If we have no images of the future, and therefore no sense of it, how can we know if our strategies and plans will create the future we really want?

Unfortunately, there is so much we don't know – much more than we know – when we are looking 100 years into the future, but this must not keep us from trying our best to create a future worth living. It is as if the general awareness of humankind's role in creating the future is moving to the forefront. During crises we tend to stick to the 'business as usual' as we think this is the only way we can survive. It might be in the short run, but never has been in the long run. We need to stretch as far as 100 years into ourselves and therefore we need to improve our ability to think long term. During the 'In100Years' seminar process we have asked people whether the long perspective would be more present in their everyday life, and the number of participants that answer 'yes' to this question has risen from 24 % at the first seminar to 74 % after the last seminar (from June 2011 to January 2012, and approximately 70 % of the participants at the last seminar had participated in either one or two of the previous seminars).

Long-term thinking is an opportunity to invite our poetry and imagination into the process of discussing and visualizing the future we actually want. The image and the imaginary have played a central role in the project 'In100Years'. Using performance strategies is not least intended to physically manifest and execute scenarios or possible images of the future. Our work thus includes an intersection of the anthropology of the image. Drawing on the theories suggesting a new anthropology of the image, 'image' is not understood merely as a painting on the canvas or the motif in photography; it is something that happens as a result of a complex, performative process, as a result of the interaction between body and medium. Image is thereby a phenomenon that comes into being in the moment, through an interaction between the image and the viewer – and so are the futures of 'In 100 Years starting now.'

In recent years, the terms *performance* and *performativity* have grown to be tremendously popular in a wide

range of traditions such as literature, anthropology, politics, art and the social sciences. As a term, performance transgresses boundaries and will not be pinned down. What is certain, though, is that performance only exists through action, interaction and in the relation between certain aspects. Performance is thus never found in something, but occurs in the meeting between different elements and in certain contexts. The idea that 'all the world's a stage' is not new, but considering everything a performance *is* new and increasingly relevant.

Futures Studies and scenarios are about making or anticipating future times and concrete images of probable, possible or preferred futures, but to us it is also becoming a matter of creating the future while we live it. Living the future now! And the future lives in us as an image, and if we become aware of this, we might be able to project and use this knowledge to shift into ways of creating and living preferred futures. This idea is also aligned to the Theory U when it comes to the co- and pre-sensing as part of a change and developmental process.

#### BREAKING NEW GROUNDS

Combining Futures Studies methods and Performance Art is an ongoing experiment in the House of Futures, and it is always challenging and exciting to break new grounds. From a Futures Studies' perspective, we believe that we are developing an approach that has an impact on how people see the long run, and we have also crossed the threshold into a space where we open up into the future inside of you – and thereby we can raise awareness about the future in the present.

After more than 20 years of practicing Futures Studies in cooperation with private as well as public companies and organizations, House of Futures thinks there is a need for further developing the methods to engage people in futures thinking and living. And with a thorough experience and action research activity in the use of performance strategies we continuously develop our methods and techniques, and in doing so, we allow ourselves to experiment with new ways of studying the future.