

TEATER
MUSEET

HOFTEATRET

A contemporary Theatre Museum in a historic Theatre

Using the Past to get to the Future

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The title of my lecturer, *A contemporary Theatre Museum in a historic Theatre*, indicates that it includes three equal categories:

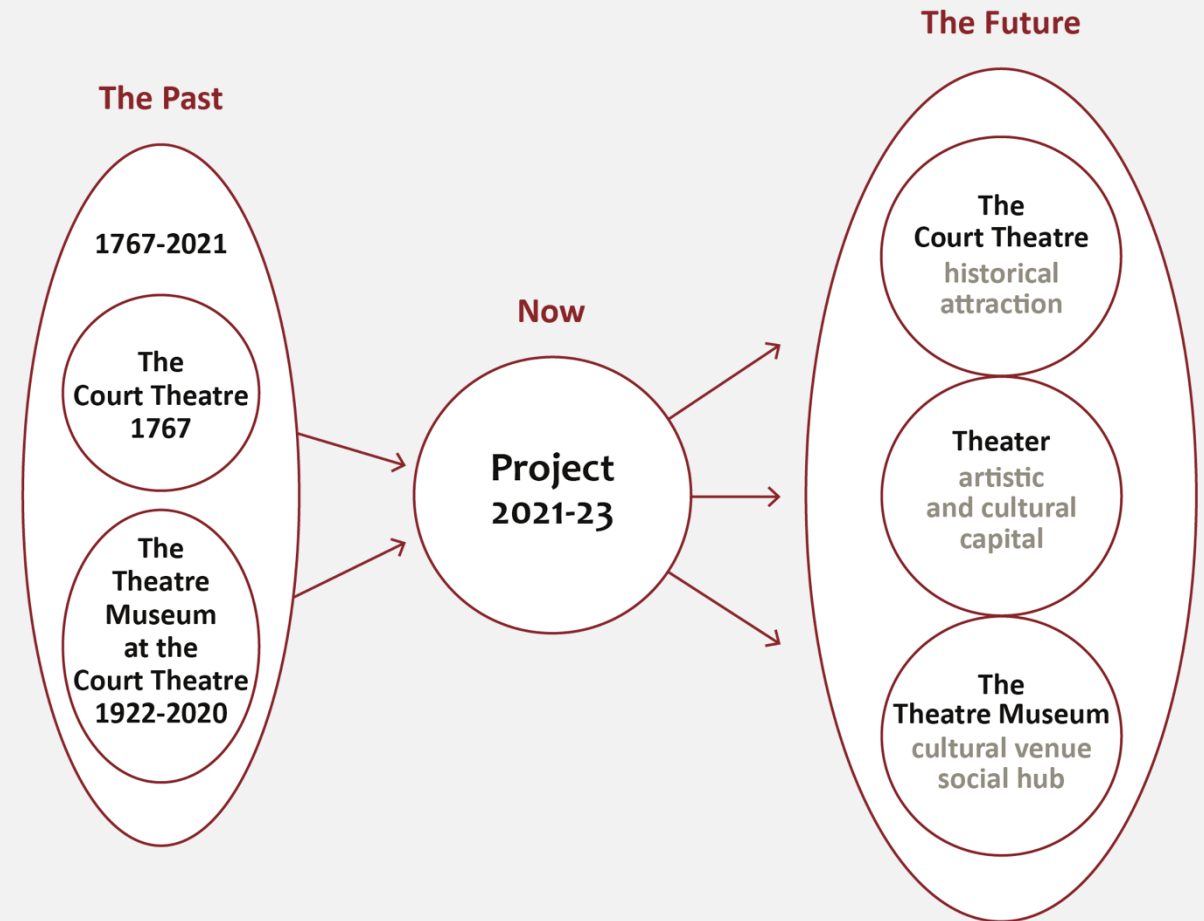
- The *building* as a site, a venue or simply a place, which in this case is a historical theatre, even in this case a Court Theatre.
- the *theatre* as an art form and as cultural history,
- the *museum* as a cultural and a social arena



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Perspective and main question

that can be asked to all three categories, namely the theatre, the museum and the site, the place as such:

How can history be brought up to date and how can the current theatre be given a historical perspective in a theatre museum placed in a historic theatre, making it relevant here and now and for the future?



A contemporary Theatre Museum in a historic Theatre

Key issues as posed by the organiser:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of locating a theatre museum in a theatre?
- How can the displays attract a wide audience from all educational backgrounds, and how can this potential be best exploited?
- How does a theatre museum function as a social arena?
- Museums and new ways of raising money
- The limits – and the potentials – of the use of digital technology



Theater as an *art form* here-and-now and as *cultural heritage*

The challenge and the convention are this:

- The **theatre** is the most fleeting of the classical arts: no two stagings of the same dramatic work are alike, no two performances of the same staging are exactly the same.
- The **museum** is the most culturally preserving of all cultural institutions. The theatre is here-and-now, the museum is historical distance. The theatre speaks to the senses, the museum to reason.



Or so we used to say >

Historic building – modern museum

The building itself is the biggest **barrier** but is also our most important **object** as a museum. How to handle this?

By modernizing our understanding of:

- the building as living and changing cultural heritage
- the place as a venue
- the museum as a museum and as a social arena
- the principles of hosting and communication
- the visitors and their actual experience as visitors



The historic theatre *as cultural heritage*

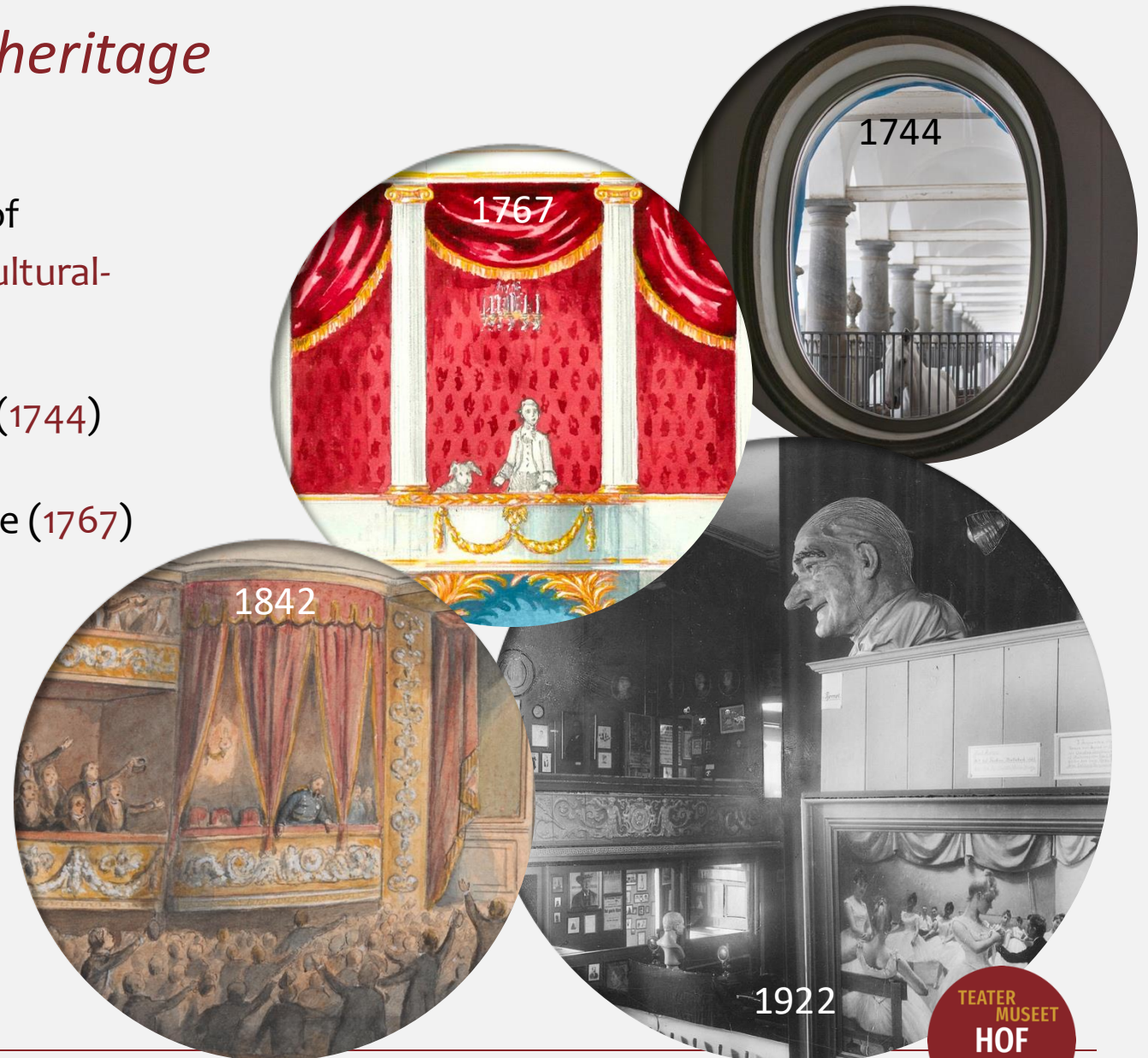
The historical interior is perceived as an object of communication itself – *traces of the different cultural-historical phases* emerge from the walls:

The preserved features of the original armoury (1744)

The preserved features of the first Court Theatre (1767)

The later interior design of the audience hall of the second Court Theatre (1842)

Interiors used exclusively as locations for exhibition hangings (1922-2021)

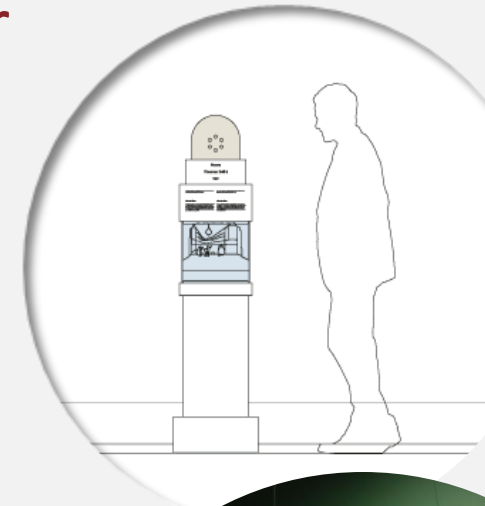


Modern theatre museum in a historic interior

An exhibition about *Theater at the time* - 300 years of Danish theater history carried out as 17 custom designed cabinets that take inspiration from 18th century design principles.

Each cabinet is unique and will be interpreted as an actor expressing the story that is hosted inside the cabinet.

The ambition is to challenge the traditional exhibition display, be contextual and contemporary – but also at the same time relate to the historical interiors they are to be adapted to as well as differ from.

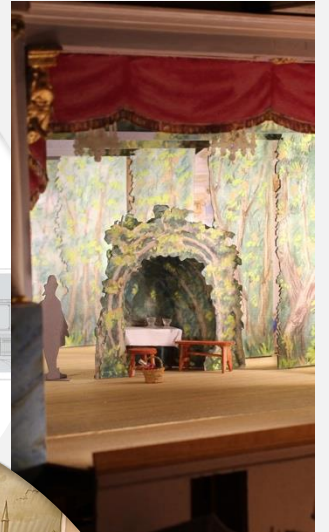


Modern theatre museum in a historic interior

A new **Baroque-like scenography** on the stage, where there has been none since 1881.

The scenography at the same time take **inspiration** from and draws on the Baroque effects – and also clearly states that it is **not** an authentic, historical object.

The scenographic **techniques** – scene changes and more – are shown on **digital** animated screens in the foyer alongside a detailed **physical** model of the original Court Theatre from 1767.



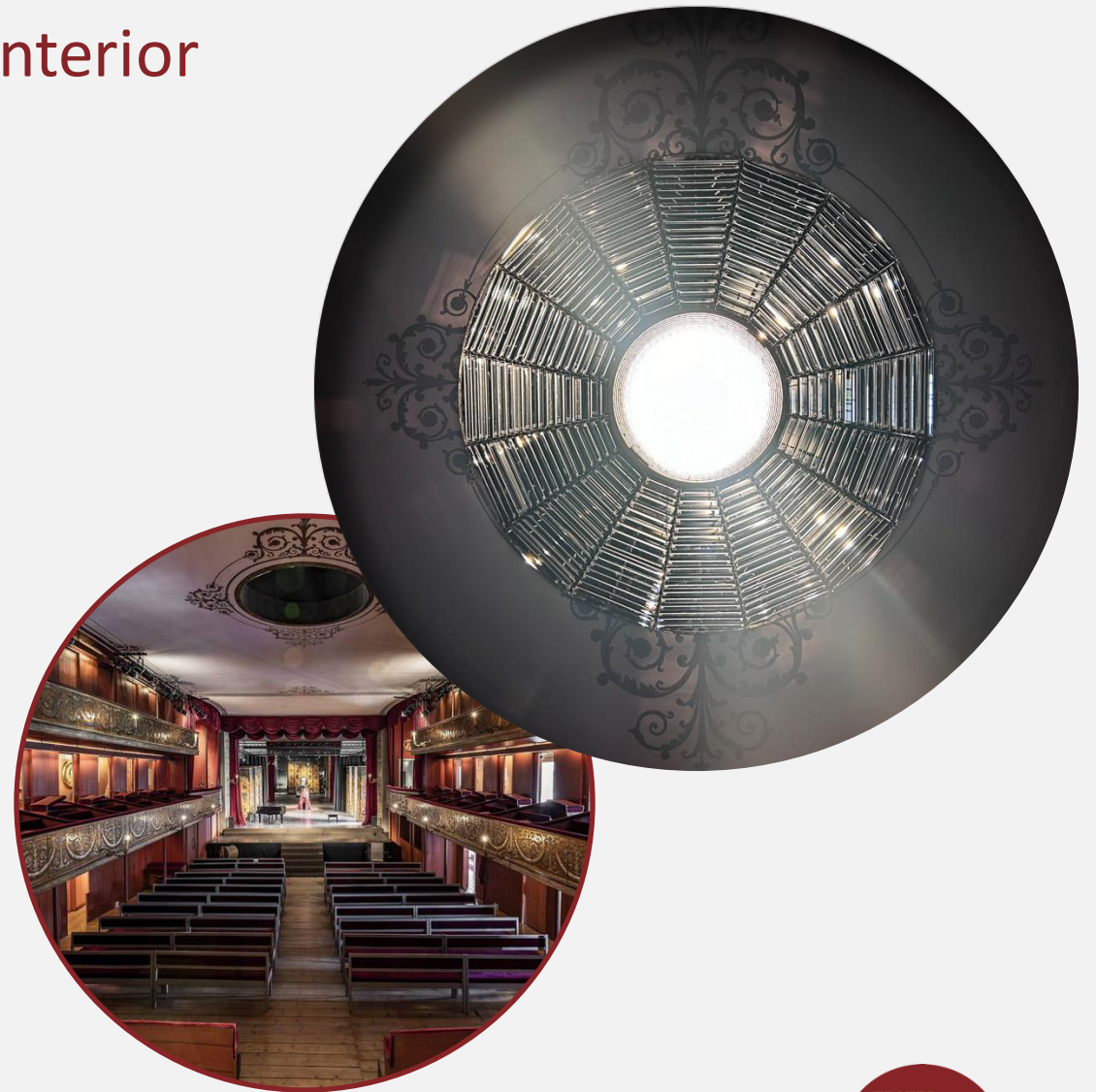
Modern theatre museum in a historic interior

A large **custom prism chandelier** in the audience hall, where there has been none since 1881.

It **supports** the **experience** of the historic interiors in the audience hall from 1842, and at the same time clearly **differs** in materials and functionality.

It adds general light and play of brilliance to the audience hall and to the stage if wanted.

It can be lower and raised digitally to reference the original movement of the historic chandelier.



Modern theatre museum in a historic interior

In the boxes, you can experience 3-dimensional – **binaural** – **audio stories** with unique people and episodes from the (theatre) history of The Court Theatre.

The recordings were made **in situ** in the Cort Theatre with a full orchestra, 18 actors and singers and with a live audience.

The visitor hears it **as if** she is present while it is happening in reality. To **hear** what you cannot **see** and to experience **without** having prior knowledge.

So the use of sound design also draws attention to **what is not sound**: the space around the listener, the history and the physical experience of the spirit of the place.



The Theatre Museum at The Court Theatre *as a venue*

The narrative about the **site-specific** building and cultural-historical significance of the Court Theatre shall be strengthened *in direct interaction with*

increased and actualized focus on the narrative about the cultural-historical **context** (part of Christiansborg Palace): The Court Theatre as a historical actor in the development from absolute monarchy to modern democracy

”The Theatre Museum at The Court Theatre is a completely central institution with unique qualities, whose activities, experiences, knowledge and functions are at the same time not visible in the immediate area and to passers-by – despite the fact that the institution is located right in the middle of the passages and axes of movement identified in the analysis.” *Gehl Architects' Urban Analysis (2016)*



The Theatre Museum at The Court Theatre *as a cultural and social arena*

The museum shall be strengthened as a single, site-specific arena for **balanced front activities** such as

drama workshops, artistic and cultural-political conversations about the theatre's past, present and future, and as a **safe and calm** meeting place for social activities, learning spaces and artistic cross overs – adapted to the unique historical interiors of the Cort Theatre

”In an increasingly fragmented society, social spaces that encourage interaction, cooperation, and strengthen bonds between people are more important than ever. People need help and incentives to interact, increase understanding and acceptance, and to form relationships that transcend generations, social backgrounds, and cultural upbringings. As institutions with a tradition of connecting people, museums can meet these societal demands.” *Gustav Wollentz et.al. (2022)*



Visitors and the visitor experiences – *why?*

Regardless of who the visitor is and her personal experiences and interests, this cause-and-effect chain applies:

Creating curiosity leads to knowledge leads to understanding leads to reflection or action.

It is an important strategy in communicating theatre as an art form and cultural heritage in a historic theatre, which in itself is and contains theatre- and cultural history.

“We know that the meaningfulness of museum experiences differs between users [..]. Each visitor's reality is only loosely tethered to the actual, fixed realities of the museum's space, exhibitions, and/or events. [..] This is why for some the meanings they seek and find during their museum experience are intellectual, while for others it is social, and for still others spiritual or experiential.” *John H. Falk (2022)*



Visitors and the visitor experiences – *who?*

Regardless of the visitors' background, the focus and awareness must be on **differentiation and diversity** both in terms of **existing**, traditional but mutually different target groups and **new** target and user groups and the **types** of activities, events and exhibitions that are accessible to them – and the way they are **launched**. New user groups that is:

School children and **young people** in education visit in groups for work shops etc.

Young adults aged 18-35 visit the Court Theatre to experience advertised events – fx lounges – and stage activities as well as special exhibitions at the museum

Active seniors visit the Court Theatre, primarily because it is a historical attraction. They come during normal opening hours as well as for stage activities

Cultural tourists – Danish and international – visit the Court Theatre as a historical attraction. They come during normal opening hours, typically in groups – and predominantly in the summer months of June-September. – Here, the strategic collaboration with **Christiansborg Palace**, **Copenhagen Cultural District** and **Wonderful Copenhagen** (i.e. Cities for Culture) is prioritized

“to attract more and more diverse visitors and new audiences with interesting, open-minded and humorous exhibitions, stage performances and other activities that are topical and relevant to contemporary visitors, people here and now.” *Nina Simon (2016)*

Visitors and the visitor experiences – *how?*

The **hosting**: A **friendly** hosting with a **human** face – empathetic, generous and courageous host to all visitors **regardless** of the occasion and their reason for visiting the Court Theatre

The **communication**: A **sharper**, more **cheerful** and more targeted communication

The **exhibitions**: More **angled** special exhibitions that are adapted and **special designed** for the restored interiors (front hall) and which may mirror stories inside the Court Theatre.

The **cooperation**: Increased use of **external** curators and partners (institutions, artists, designers, people of knowledge etc.)

The use of **materials**: Increased interaction between own collections and relevant and alternative **external** material



Visitors and the visitor experiences – *all in all*

The perspective – in house and in context:

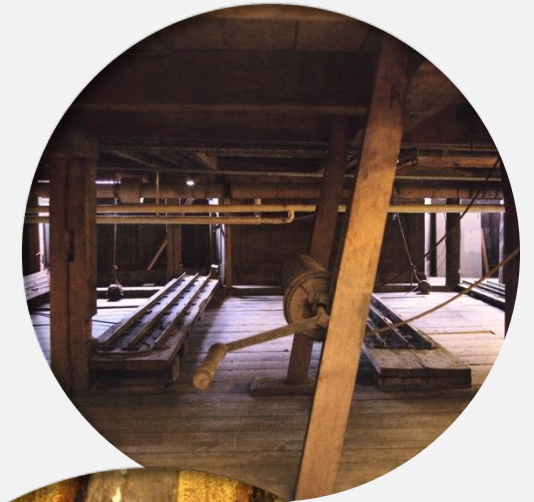
For what **reason**: Identity and legitimacy

For **whom**: Insiders and outsiders

In **what way**: From matter of **fact** to matter of **concern** (tendency in Fine Art)

Less is more: Fewer objects > more stories > more users

Creating meaningfulness, mindfulness (presence d'esprit), wellbeing, joyful learning



The digital theatre museum?

The use of digital technology – *limits and potentials*

Our digital strategy is two-tracked:

Digital resources designed for **online** presentations (and marketing) – and digital technology implemented in the **physical** presentations, displays and exhibitions in the Theatre Museum at the Court Theatre.

Online resources and presentations

The digital resources and mediations we have online are always designed specifically for online **platforms** and online **use**.

They can serve as **new entrances** (for new users) to the museum and **actual visits** to the Court Theatre (but new Danish research shows that this is rarely the case).

Physical presentations, displays and exhibitions

The use of digital technology **discreetly supports** – but never replaces – the **physical experience** of the historic interiors, of the site, as well of the modern designs of exhibitions etc.



NB. The most important in a (theatre) museum?

What I don't have time to talk about is the two maybe most important issues. Namely the biggest: **the spirit of the place** and the smallest: **the objects, the artefacts, and their meaning:**

The objects themselves are merely **reminiscences** of the contexts and larger stories they were part of and are an expression of.

A prop or, for example, a costume is merely a material reminiscence of the **living and fleeting theatre performance** it was part of and is an expression of.

The moment the object, the prop, is **taken out of its context**, such as a performance, and placed in an **exhibition** whose context and theme is something other than the performance the prop was part of, **its meaning changes.**

New context: Either the **interior itself** or the **costum designed cabinets**



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