

Visualizing the object within its surroundings

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In a cultural history museum exhibition, the object on show can be looked at from various points of view. A standpoint is made based on the background knowledge of the viewer, in other words, the viewer has a possibility to interpret the object from his/hers own point of view. Therefore, a museum object can be viewed as beautiful or ugly from aesthetic perspective, as well as for example from technical perspective. The viewpoint is not totally conscious either, but affected by memories and feelings. For example in a cultural history museum, the objects are closely connected to the observer's memories, since the objects are mostly from another time or culture. That is to say, the objects are not in a vacuum, neither is the object never bare or neutral in an exhibition, but always affected by its surroundings.

This leaves the makers of the exhibition into great challenge on how to visualize the surroundings of the objects. The object is greatly affected by its surroundings as they create the atmosphere on how the object is interpreted in. From which follows that the exhibition makers are using authority to select the object on view and further, selecting also how it is viewed, through which perspective. Usually the object needs to fill in with the story of the exhibition design. This story created by the exhibition makers together with the viewers own interpretation, demands the viewer to take an active role in the process of producing meanings from the object within its surroundings.

The meanings, which are created around the exhibited object, are produced visually with exhibition techniques such as lighting, colours, texts, vitrines and different constructions. In recent years, meanings are often linked with various narratives, as stories are being built around the objects in cultural history museums. This same strategy is also usable in presenting other objects, such as designed products, which are presented in expositions, exhibitions or even in pictures in catalogues. The surrounding elements around the object create the stories and therefore, affect the meanings which are created from the object. As active viewers, we look and experience the environment that affects the object. The object is connected in the frame of visual references it is placed in.

From the visual elements around the exhibited object a certain atmosphere is always created. This atmosphere is inevitably connected to the prevailing world views of the exhibition maker. In the history of the cultural history museums the world view has been directly affecting the atmosphere of the exhibition from princely closed cabinets of the curiosities (16th-18th centuries) to the public museums (19th-21st centuries). The museum exhibitions have also influenced other exhibitions, such as expositions, as for example the vitrine has developed in unison in the museum and the commerce.

In the presentation in Lyngby I will show some pictures of various atmospheres in museum exhibitions. Then I can more clearly demonstrate the differences and possibilities in visualizing the object within its surroundings. The visual elements are in a vital role when semiotic meanings are associated from the objects, as they often reflect the surrounding society and its values.