Abstract

Formal education in Museums

- A cultural analysis of learning in Danish Cultural Historical Museums

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In Denmark there is a longstanding tradition of school groups visiting cultural history museums for educational purposes. Many of the visiting classes make use of the structured teaching sessions suggested by museum institutions. The aim of this thesis is to investigate how these structured teaching programs are shaped at the cultural history museums. Taking cultural-analytical and didactic perspectives as a starting point, the thesis will examine the teaching and teaching practices that take place at cultural history museums. Amongst the topics of investigation will be what characterises the teaching at cultural history museums and to what extent it has changed over time. Another topic of enquiry in the thesis is to look at what intentions underlie the teaching, as well as to investigate what kind of knowledge the museums offer pupils.

At the very centre of the thesis lies the investigation into how and to what extent buildings, exhibitions and artefacts are involved in the teaching; into what the materiality of the museum can contribute to the educational experience; and into how and to what extent museums make use of this educational potential in their daily practice. In order to approach this subject, the thesis will both contribute to and draw inspiration from the recent research field surrounding materiality. In an effort to develop a specific approach to material objects and their role in museum education, the thesis undertakes a socio-material approach in studying education and materiality. Such an approach emphasises that material objects should not exclusively be regarded as something used by human agents, but that they have an agency of their own. With a socio-material approach, the focus is placed upon what material objects are capable of and what materiality does, just as the approach highlights that human aims and actions are mediated by the material objects we use and surround ourselves with, as well as by the space in which we find ourselves.

Besides including theoretical contributions from recent analyses of materiality and the significance of material objects, the thesis will draw theoretical inspiration from a range of other approaches and disciplines including museology, ethnology and pedagogy, as well as from perspectives within so-called ‘impure pedagogy’ and the anthropology of the senses. During a museum teaching session or a museum visit the body is, whether intentionally or unwittingly, omnipresent, and the senses seem to provide an important source of understanding as to how subject and object interact, as well as to the discussion of how pupils are able to gain from the knowledge or content that forms the very basis of the specific teaching scenario. Analytical inspiration in the thesis is also sought in a range of concepts including ‘affect’ and ‘presence’.