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## Notes

- 1 <https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/562304976116640244.html>. Baidu Zhidao (百度知道) is a Baidu-search-engine-based online interactive knowledge sharing platform.

# Performing Fairy Tales Possibilities of Practicing Difference in the Museum

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*Together with the exhibition design firm Event Communications Japanese stararchitect Kengo Kuma has won the bid to rebuild the existing Hans Christian Andersen Museum from the ground up – in doing so transforming the biographical museum into a 'house of fairy tales.' However, in an Andersenian world, objects, plants, animals and stories show signs of agency and struggle for self-determination. They are not willingly reduced to traditional static museum objects – nor should they be. This chapter discusses how the performative strategies of Andersen's fairy tales can inform and question key museological concepts and practice, thereby opening for new ways of experiencing difference through adapting and staging such strategies as a foundation for the phenomenological experience of visiting an exhibition. As such, the chapter highlights the democratic potential of both Andersen's fairy tales and the museum as communal sites, which not only includes difference thematically, but produces it through form.*

When Hans Christian Andersen published his first collection of fairy tales in 1835 critics were alarmed by the lack of formative qualities and moral lessons in the stories (Anonymous 1836, 13). Instead of handing down lessons, explicating the meaning of the story or the world for the reader, Andersen seemed to do quite the opposite in his fairy tales, playing on forms of textual doubleness that counteracted and frustrated any attempt to establish a final, meaningful mor-

al lesson when turning that last page. In this way, his fairy tales are performative – they both say *and* do something (Lübker and Bøggild, forthcoming) – and instead of providing answers the fairy tales provoke questions for the readers to ponder over themselves.

In this chapter the possibilities of using Andersen's fairy tales and the challenge of representing their performative aspects to shed new light on the nature of the museum and its democratic potential will be explored. By utilising ways in which the fairy tales both create and disrupt the meaning-making of the reader as a lens, key concepts of the museum exhibition – the exhibition space, museum text, and the role of objects – are revisited and analysed in dialogue with museological, educational and phenomenological positions. By doing this, the chapter argues that Andersen's fairy tales hold performative power, which, when adapted to the exhibition space, has the potential to create a unique democratic and communal experience, not just by embracing individual difference as an institution, but also by confronting the emancipated, powerful individual with difference, with otherness. To achieve this requires a new form of museology. Just as Andersen's fairy tales frustrate and counteract meaningfulness before it solidifies, the museum must do the same: Challenging the visitor to reflect upon and engage with the world anew by destabilising fixed notions, reading history against the grain, inciting new questions, creating wonder and inspiring utopian reimagination.

## The Emancipated Visitor

Looking at how ICOM, The International Council of Museums, presents and understands the communicative relationship between institution and visitor in their description of key museological concepts, the museum as an institution seems almost juxtaposed to the fairy tale world of questions and fantasy, stressing transmission and unilateral assimilation of knowledge (Desvallées and Mairesse 2018, 30). Such ideas about the relationship between subject and institution in which the subject is rendered completely passive have historically been challenged by, for example, the ecomuseums of the 1970s and the emergence of New Museology in the late 1980s (Vergo 1989). By embracing participatory practices and focusing on visitors' knowledge production, the idea has been to reform the museum into a democratic, communal institution, thereby empowering people (Vergo

1989, 3; Simon 2010, ii–iii). However, putting the visitor instead of the institution at the centre of things tends to merely reverse the hierarchy rather than to dissolve it altogether (Lübker 2016).

This hierarchical understanding of the relationship between institution and visitor seems to have been presupposed in both classical museology and New Museology, yet it is not without problems. Firstly, the communicative practice of exhibitions may historically have been hierarchical in one way or the other, but as a phenomenological space – as a meeting ground between visitor, material objects, and scenography – exhibitions challenge notions of hierarchy, explanation and mere assimilation regardless of the intent of the curator, the institution, or even the visitor. Secondly, the rendering of the visitor as someone who passively assimilates knowledge hardly holds true irrespective of the communication design. This is something philosopher Jacques Rancière has already pointed to in his writings on the juxtaposition between actor and spectator at the theatre:

The spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her. She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way [...]. (2011, 13)

Never someone to be emancipated by the doings of the institution, the visitor, the recipient, is powerful and free from the very beginning. Hans-Thies Lehman explores this as well in his seminal book *Post-dramatic Theatre* (2006), examining a new form of theatre, which has left behind the idea of the stage as a site in which actors and director try to transfer some original, hidden meaning from the manuscript to the audience passively watching. In such a theatre “the stage is the beginning and point of departure, not a site for transcription or copying.” (32). Stressing the immediacy of perception, aesthetic experience and performance over representation and meaning, this form of postdramatic theatre emphasises the shared experience of the here and now. As such it disregards any traditional dichotomy between actor and spectator, active and passive, acknowledging instead whatever happens as a shared creation. Something similar is happening in Andersen's fairy tale universe. Just as a play is bound to linear time, so is a story or a fairy tale. However, like postdramatic theatre, Andersen's

fairy tales do not necessarily lead us anywhere, but rather at the end leave us ever questioning the moral lesson or meaning or even the veracity of the tale. For example, "The Princess on the Pea" ("Prindsessen paa Ærten," 1835) ends by stating that "there, that's a true story," leaving it up to the reader to decide whether it was a *true* story or a *true story*. This way, Andersen's fairy tale universe is defined by ambiguity, doubleness and the flattening of hierarchy, leading Klaus P. Mortensen to describe it as "not static, centred, but constantly expanding, escaping all centredness" (2007, 288, my translation).

As a stage, as the meeting point between reader and text, Andersen's fairy tale universe is therefore not democratic because it embraces and includes the viewer. Contrarily, it is so because it actively rejects and works against both its own linearity, and the desire of the reader to reach an end, a finality of meaning. The fairy tales thrive on the tension between apparent opposed meanings of a tale which both incite interpretations and at the same time question the veracity of such interpretations and prompt the reader to consider them anew. By Andersen's frequent use of unreliable narration, romantic irony, play on words and so forth the fairy tales insist on a position of decentredness or in-betweenness at their very centre.

It is precisely this focus on the in-between which is also at play when museologist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett redescribes museums as a "force field between subject and object" defined by its gaps:

The disjointed world brought into the museum, its pieces arranged in space, is defined by gaps (gaps in the record, gaps in the collection, gaps in the narrative) and by leaps (intuitive leaps, poetic leaps, leaps of faith). The gaps, the air between things, are not simply voids. They are openings. (2004, 2)

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points to the fact that the representational mode of the museum is fundamentally underdetermined leaving plenty of gaps for the visitor's interpretation. This is something Lehmann has also described when it comes to the theatre image and literature. Unlike for example film or photographs the less dense reproduction of reality exhibits a lot of gaps, thereby allowing both intention and interpretation (Lehmann 2006, 116; Adorno 1974, 142). Arguably, the gaps are an even more definitive trait of the museum than of literature or theatre, since museum objects (at least in cultural history museums)

are exhibited as metonymical representations of an underlying totality. As such it is the very absence of that reality that is brought to fore by the object. Also, whereas literature and theatre bind the reader or spectator to a progressive linear experience, the visitor at a museum is free to create his or her own linearity, stressing the interpretation and imagination of the individual visitor. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett thus presents a completely different understanding of the communicative possibilities of the museum than the transmission model previously mentioned (Desvallées and Mairesse 2018, 30). Looking at the formal and phenomenological aspects of the exhibition space, the defining trait of the museum might not be understood by the passive assimilation of knowledge but by the mobility and activity of the visitor (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 4). Ultimately, the exhibition space is there at the disposal of the visitor to be navigated and interpreted. For Kirshenblatt-Gimblett however, this marks not merely a shift from an institutionally induced knowledge transmission to the knowledge production of the visitor, but also a shift from the real to the imaginative. It allows not only for the institution to *represent* utopia, but more importantly, the exhibition space becomes a site for the visitor actively "practising it as a way of imagining it" (1). Following this understanding of the exhibition site it seems as if the visitor is almost omnipotent in his or her shaping of meaning by filling gaps to recreate the world in his or her own individual utopian image.

However, whereas Kirshenblatt-Gimblett seems to almost revel in the utopian possibility of a site where everything can be undone and remade by the imagination of the God-like visitor, to properly represent the performative aspects of Andersen's fairy tales and unleash the democratic potential of the exhibition site something else is needed. By shattering the illusion of make-believe, clearly stressing the artificiality of the tales, by challenging the linear progression of a narrative's promise of meaning, Andersen keeps the reader in a state of openness – engaged in a dialogue with the world rather than roaming freely above it. Likewise, the exhibition site must combat synthesis – by striving to become a place of in-between where meaning is never entirely settled, always under negotiation, and therefore a place where the visitor is a subject in a continuous dialogue with the world around him or her. In the museum, he or she is just as susceptible to an undoing or reconfiguration of the 'I.' He or she too is not only shaping the world but is also being shaped by it.

## The Performativity of the Gaze

By focusing on key words like the journey, play, and transformation in the development of the new Hans Christian Andersen Museum has had the aim of creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which architecture and exhibition form a phenomenological experience of Andersen's fairy tale universe. Since this universe is more a performative doing rather than a passive being, this is also reflected in the spatialisation of content and architecture. Already when entering the garden surrounding the future museum the design constantly shifts between creating smaller spaces by using hedges as envelopments and opening up sight lines. For the visitor exploring the garden it is thus an experience of continually shifting relations between the visitor and his or her surroundings. Whereas the sight lines empower the visitor's understanding of space and thereby allow the visitor to be in control, the hedges of the smaller enveloped spaces do the opposite. They tower above the visitor to a height of up to 6 meters, cutting off the vision and making the visitor diminutive in comparison. The manipulation of the landscape plane creates a similar effect by blurring the line between below and above ground, questioning even what ground is. In this way, already before entering the exhibition or even the museum, there's a play going on in which opposites start to dissolve and spill over their own borders, intertwining to the point where categorical distinctions give way and present themselves as questions rather than answers.

The exhibition itself is devised into three main sections – the author, the fairy tales and legacy – forming an overarching narrative, which is meant to go from our rational and well-known reality into the unreality of the fairy tales and back to our world in the last part of the exhibition focusing on Andersen's birthplace as a memorial site. The overarching narrative thus forms a typical home-away-from-home structure. In this case the logic behind the progression through the exhibition is that the man gives birth to the fairy tales which create his legacy and thereby give birth to the museum visit. Following this, the journey through the exhibition also mimics such a form of empowering of the visitor: At the beginning of the exhibition it is clearly the voices of the institution that are given the most space, but as the journey progresses into the realm of fairy tales it becomes more of a dialogue between visitor and fairy tales, and when the journey ends at the actual birthplace the voice of the institution falls silent, giving way to the individual feelings and experience of each visitor.

However, the individual scenes of the journey consist of many more departures than homecomings and thus frustrate the meaning-making process of the visitor by challenging set notions, raising questions while providing few answers.

Upon entering the exhibition, the first part is dedicated to Andersen but instead of treating it as a traditional biographical exhibition presenting the facts of his life, the museum plays with the idea that Andersen is an author narrating his own life through his writings – among these his three different autobiographies – which tell quite different stories. Andersen does not present facts – he performs and presents himself in certain ways to make the recipient see him in a certain light. In this way the biographical realm is not so much about telling the story of a person as it is about elucidating the process of becoming a person through the act of storytelling, of narrating one's own life. On a slowly descending ramp Andersen presents the visitor with select and idealised scenes from his life in a linear chronology thereby forming a narrative. But such an idealised narrative is at the same time questioned and destabilised as the visitor goes along. Firstly, this is done architecturally by manipulating light in ways that make the experience of space unreal – for example by filtering daylight from outside through hedges and glass. Secondly, every now and then one side of the ramp expands into thematic sections, which question and contrasts with the idealised narrative of Andersen. By doing this the museum explores the narrative, the biographical, and also the complexity of Andersen, by opening up multiple perspectives on the same events. The thematic section about "Love" for example tells quite a different story than Andersen himself does. Whereas Andersen often told the story that the reason for his failures in love was his poor financial situation, the objects relating to his different love interests question this, instead revealing a story in which his failures at love are just as much lucky escapes as tragedies. Instead of just being a story of loneliness and failure, "Love" also becomes a story of lability – of a love that goes wherever it will, but never dares to settle down or truly manifest itself as a relation. In this way the museum is widening the gaps in an otherwise linear and idealised narrative, creating a spatial encounter between contrasting perspectives that not only force the visitor to navigate the space and construct his own narrative, but also challenge any attempt at synthesis and thereby highlight that such

narratives ultimately are constructions: Any narrative is created only by abandoning other perspectives that are just as valid.

The linear, chronological route down the ramp naturally comes to an end, with old age and fame, with death, but the promise of knowledge and wisdom implied in such a journey eludes both the visitor and Andersen. As Klaus P. Mortensen (2007) has noted, Andersen has an uncanny ability to present himself, to narrate himself, in ways that make himself visible to the other. But although the biographical realm shows how Andersen does this (as we all do), it also highlights the vulnerability of being exposed to the gaze of the other. We make ourselves and are made in the gaze of the other. This is never clearer than in this final section of the biographical descent, "Reflections," where Andersen is fragmented by the multiple perspectives of a communal murmur, constructing him both as a person and phenomenon, and thereby also deconstructing his own singular narrative. Stressing the relation between seeing and being seen, the gaze of the visitor is also returned since all the showcases are made of mirrors. As such the descent down the biographical realm does not add up to a meaningful whole or a final fixed narrative, and as the story reaches its end visitors are left with the double experience of both the creative power and vulnerability of being a subject – and with those final words of Andersen somehow marking a fitting end to his own fairy tale: "I know nothing at all." (1971–77, 10:482, my translation).

By challenging fixed notions and allowing for a multitude of voices and viewpoints a gap is opened which calls for continual self-reflection and interpretation. Arguably, this is a precise experience of both the radically contingent subject of modernity as well as of Hans Christian Andersen: As a "nowhere man" coming into being by the very positioning of himself to be seen and thus also to be defined by an exterior gaze (Mortensen 2007, 10). Philosopher Edmund Husserl has described such play between seeing and being seen as a form of exteriorisation in which the subject becomes self-conscious through seeing itself from the point of the other (1973, 175). Such an exteriorised subject, who is able to reflect upon his or her relation to the world, is fundamentally destabilised (Sartre 1956, 282), being caught in the in-between of positions, continually in a process of becoming, of the reformulation of self and its connection to its surroundings. The contrasting narratives, different ways of seeing the world, and the play between seeing and being seen are ways in which the museum

strengthens the experience of the other and thereby also the experience of difference.

## Spatialised Encounters

In the biographical realm the museum presents Andersen through existential rather than historical themes, thereby stressing the relevance of his story to visitors today. Likewise, the realm of fairy tales centres on twelve of the most iconic and well-known tales which are given scale so they form a world of their own that the visitor walks into and is immersed by. Unlike the linear progression of the biographical realm, here the visitor is free to roam and explore. The fairy tale realm thus empowers the visitor both by the mode through which it encourages visitors to experience the space and through its seemingly well-known fairy tale content. However, following Andersen's own strategies, the fairy tales do not always behave as expected.

One of the most important principles in developing the strategies for representing the fairy tales has been to stage the fundamental tensions and ambiguities of the fairy tales instead of providing an authoritative interpretation of them. As Andersen often highlights the fairy tales as constructions, thereby establishing a play between words as both content and material that challenge the stories as conveyers of meaning and truth, so we, as readers, immerse ourselves in the rich imagination of Andersen, only to be thrown back out of the fantasy whenever Andersen shatters the illusion. The fairy tales invite hermeneutic interpretation yet work against any final synthesis. By doing this, they are an act of opening up, a performative relation between text and reader, where the usual and well-known is made special and begs to be seen anew. To create this spatially means exploring the performative relationships as they appear in the fairy tales. The staging of the fairy tales has therefore been structured on contradictions and ambivalence, on emptying central signs of their content while giving weight to the understated, on making ambivalence and doubleness tangible to make visible the playfulness inherent in each of the fairy tales. One notable way of doing this is by striving for material authenticity at all times. This means that the museum wishes to represent Andersen in ways that do not give privilege to the content side, but rather establish a play between the material and what the material represents, thereby highlighting the world of Andersen as both realistic and constructed at the same time.

The staging of "The Little Mermaid" ("Den lille Havfrue," 1837) is an example of how architecture and scenography come together to create a spatial experience of the fairy tale. From the garden above you can see through a small pool of water into the fairy tale realm below. Likewise, from below you can see a cut-out of the sky through the pool of water. At the same time the pool of water acts as a filter: Combined with the light from above, the water creates a ripple effect on the walls which emphasises the experience of being submerged. As such the scenography always presents itself as a unique encounter between visitor and fairy tale. The story is never told in completely the same way – the meeting between visitor and fairy tale is always new since the light from outside changes during the day and the season. And because the pool is enveloped by a mirroring of the hedges above ground the eyes of the visitor are naturally drawn upwards, following the vertical axis from under water to ground to air. In the under water space, the little mermaid is absent and as such the space becomes an empty stage for the longing gaze of the visitor. By doing this it is no longer a representation of the story of the little mermaid but an architectural and scenographical performance which allows visitors to experience the longing and absence of the little mermaid spatially. Such a shift is supported by various readings of the fairy tale, stressing it as performative in the way that it engages and frustrates the meaning-making production of the reader (Bøggild 2012, 96–97), thereby becoming a form of "delayed death" in which longing and hope has not yet given in to that end all stories must come to (Møller 1995). Following this, the fairy tale spills over its borders in its postponement of its own end. Longing vibrates long after the last words have been read due to its open-ended conclusion pointing towards uncertainty which also is embodied in the original Danish text's final utterance: the em dash. In such a reading, the fairy tale is just as much a story of the reader's longing for meaning and closure as it is a story of the longing of the mermaid, and thereby, by keeping the longing alive beyond the borders of the text, the linear narrative with its promise of meaning and finality transforms into the spatial relation in which text and reader are dialectically entwined in the process of becoming.

"The Little Match Girl" ("Den lille Pige med Svovlstikkerne," 1848) is also concerned with endings and meaning. While many people regard it as a form of social realism showing Andersen's empathy for the poor, the fairy tale is, however, more about the reader or viewer

than it is about the plight of those who are down and out – and not in the simple moralistic sense that we should give more to beggars. Firstly, the description of the reality for the little match girl is presented as hyperbole, pointing almost to the text as a construction rather than realism. Secondly, the descriptions are systematic in their portrayal of her sorry life from top to bottom, outside to inside. Bareheaded and having lost her shoes (which were too big in the first place) she has nothing to shield herself from the cold. And while it is cold outside, going home would be even worse: At home the roof is no shield against the wind and she also gets beaten. Andersen thus strips her of everything and isolates her. Thirdly, there amidst ultimate despair, the otherwise empathetic narrator suddenly takes delight in the beauty of it all, performing the role of an almost sadistic voyeur:

Shivering with cold and hunger, she crept along, a picture of misery, poor little girl! The snowflakes fell on her long fair hair, which hung in pretty curls over her neck, *but certainly she did not think of such things*. In all the windows lights were shining, and there was a wonderful smell of roast goose, for it was New Year's Eve. Yes, she thought of that! (in italics: my translation of a sentence omitted by Hersholt)

Much more than being social realism "The Little Match Girl" points to the pleasures of seeing – in particular seeing someone or reading about someone worse off than yourself. It was exactly as one such pleasurable activity it became a popular tale to read out loud by the fireplace in the homes of the middle class in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lützen 1998, 120). Just as Andersen critically points to the fact that there is delight in the image of misery, the museum also wants to stress this aspect of the tale rather than its popularity as a tearjerker. In the museum's staging the visitor becomes the active part, since it is his or her desire for the narrative to continue which drives it onwards. By actively turning the pages, "lighting matches," the visitor triggers the story onwards to its end, thereby being complicit in the misery and untimely death of both story and the match girl.

Whereas the biographical realm was very much a deconstruction of linear narrative performed by the museum, the fairy tale realm is based on the immanent tensions of the fairy tales. Thereby, the museum withdraws somewhat in order to stage the complexity of the tales in an



adequate manner for the fairy tales to be performed. In the final area, "Legacy," which consists of buildings from the old museum, the memorial hall and birthplace, the museum withdraws even further in order to create a space of contemplation in which the previous experiences can be reflected upon. As sites of remembrance, both the memorial hall and the birthplace are ultimately empty. They are there to be filled by the feelings and reflections of the visitors. Following this, the birthplace is stripped back to its most authentic state presenting the actual room he was born in as nothing but a humble shell, thereby juxtaposing the humble beginnings with the richness of his life and work.

## Performance Text

The museum text is perhaps where the ideology of the museum's mode of communication is most clearly expressed through form. This is because the museum text is both a way to frame content and to direct the gaze of the visitor. Museum text is thus distancing because it is saying something about something other than itself. As a consequence, text places, the visitor on the outside of the scene or object it points to, severing the bodily connection between the visitor and object and the text directs the gaze of the visitor towards the object in a certain manner, thereby trying to control the relationship between the two. This leads not only to the museum as a learning environment based on transmission, but also to institutions perpetuating class structures in society rather than democratic community. By being told of objects, scenes, places, and life the visitor "learns" his or her place in society, as stressed by the definition of museal communication mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

This is something Jacques Rancière points to in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Just as he challenged the idea of the visitor or spectator as a passive recipient of institutionally transmitted messages, he also challenges the idea of transmission and explication. Explication, he says, is as a subtle and perverse form of oppression because to explain something to someone "is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself." (1991, 6). By explaining and interpreting the world for the visitor, a museum strips the visitors of their right to interpret their own reality. In such a structure the visitor remains forever less competent, less knowledgeable, since whatever knowledge the visitor attains has been granted through explication by another. Al-

though attempts have been made to challenge such a textual praxis allowing visitor imagination to come more into play (Ekary 1991), museum texts as a genre remains – even in their best versions – a generic, but effective, way to talk *about* and tell *of* something rather than it is a way to talk *as* something.

To avoid both explication and the distancing of text, the museum has explored new ways of communicating to create something Androsian rather than reproducing the voice of an authoritarian museum. By treating text as material objects, they become set pieces rather than something external to the different fairy tale scenes. For example, in staging "Clumsy Hans" ("Klods-Hans," 1855), text is presented in the form of a tabloid newspaper, in "The Snow Queen" ("Snedronningen," 1845) they are shattered words on the floor, and in "The Princess and the Pea" (Prindsessen paa Ærten," 1835) they are in the form of lengthy traditional museum text panels ironically claiming expert knowledge and truth when *explaining* how it is feasible that a princess really can feel a pea through twenty mattresses. Also, by employing new audio-technology it is possible to create a binaural experience in which voices are not an accompanying and distancing overlay to the spatial experience but embedded therein. By doing so it is also possible to emphasise the unique oral and tonal qualities of Andersen's writing and play through the different ways Andersen creates distance and intimacy, for example using humour and irony. Furthermore, it allows the museum to create a world in which a multitude of voices are present just as it is in Andersen's fairy tales. Objects come alive and speak offering often contrasting perspectives to the narrated voice of Andersen – each claiming truth. As such, the museum gives credence to the idea of polyphony rather than singular authoritarian communication. Thus, by offering conflicting perspectives, by being spatialised and embedded in the scenography on the same level as an object, a showcase or a set piece, text becomes something more than a vessel for content. It becomes a system of signs that is "more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information." (Lehmann 2006, 85). Therefore, the significance of text does not as much reside in the supposed meaning it conveys but in its performative aspects. The same, I would argue, is true in Andersen's fairy tales. In "Thumbelina" ("Tommelise," 1835) for example, the whole fairy tale and proposed meaningfulness stems from

a point of absence of meaning – from the incomprehensible “Chirp, chirp! Chirp, chirp!” of the once dead swallow. Following this, the fairy tale maintains a balance between representing something and being essentially ‘bird singing.’ An experience of the expressiveness and performence of something different than yourself but not something from which you can derive final meaning. In the same manner, it is through its act of making something visible, through the spatial distribution of unique voices, the call-response dialogue and deconstruction of these voices, the expressiveness and tonal qualities that text becomes a sensuous bodily experience in the museum.

## Beyond Objecthood

A museum is a strange place for an object. It is through the collections and objects put on display that the foundation of a museum is laid, yet the museum is never truly the object’s home. By placing objects in museums, they are severed from their social reality and thereby reduced to a mere semblance of an object. They become representations, metonymies, and the story of museums is therefore much more the story of man’s power to displace, to hoard objects into the treasure holds called museums than it is a story of the objects themselves. Museum practice thereby inscribes meaning in objects by depriving the objects of their own meaningfulness. The museum becomes a celebration of man’s ability to amass, manipulate, create and control objects and materials. Instead of widening perspectives, multiplying stories, displaying plurality, museums become the history of man presented as a form of inescapable fate in which the narrative of western society and the present as the pinnacle of civilisation is popularised (Witcomb 2007, 107).

The world view presented by Andersen in his fairy tales is, however, remarkably different. Having an eye for the stories of that which is overlooked, forgotten or disregarded, Andersen paints a world in which a plethora of voices intermingle – each with their own trajectory. Objects, plants, animals and stories all show signs of agency and struggle for self-determination. This struggle arises from the tension between their desire to escape objecthood while at the same time being defined by it. Defined by traits stemming from their biology, the material they are made of or the function they are given, their horizon seems limited and materially bound – for peas in a pod the whole

world is green. Following this they are caught up in their own trajectories, unable to change paths and free themselves from their materiality. Although they exist in relation to their surroundings, as objects they can see nothing else other than their own story and therefore often come across as both petty and narrowminded. In this sense the multivocal world of Andersen is not one of dialogue but of miscommunication: filled with radically different voices which ultimately fail to truly relate to each other. Consider for example “The Sweethearts” (“Kjærestefolkene,” 1844) who are so defined by their different respective natures that a relationship is impossible – the top can do nothing other than touch the ground since spinning is its primary function whereas the ball can do nothing but jump. One world is vertical and the other horizontal – but where their paths cross is the site of the fairy tale since this is the place where an irreconcilable difference emerges.

Such fairy tales have been likened to (Thomsen 2017, 57) what philosopher Jane Bennett has defined as assemblages: “[...] ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within.” (2010, 24–25). But where Bennett’s vital materialism sees such assemblages as a positive manifestation of “thing-power” and talks about them in terms of “a productive power on their own” (3), I remain more skeptical of their supposed quasi-agency. Andersen’s fairy tales may display an abundance of assemblages and may show plenty of objects resisting reduction to a mere product of human intentionality, but they are never truly able to escape their own objecthood and so present themselves as something in themselves.

Again “Thumbelina” is a notable example of this. Thumbelina is searching for a meaningful relation in which the other sees and recognises her as a person instead of just a function of the desire of others. She wishes to transcend her own objecthood. At the end of the fairy tale Thumbelina seems to transcend her dehumanising identity when she is named Maya, thus apparently escaping the confines of her own materiality as something that defines her. But such a happy ending is only achieved by transporting Thumbelina into a magical place beyond the known world, where rules of nature do not apply – it is from such a utopian world that the swallow has carried its story to the ear of the teller of fairy tales. The unreal quality of the happy ending thus reverses the notion of transcending objecthood into its opposite: it



becomes a story about the implausibility of freeing yourself from the material constraints you are determined and bound by.

In Andersen's world objects may strive for autonomy and claim to be something more than just objects, but they can only do so in a manner that objectifies them. The fairy tales are therefore characterised by a fundamental doubleness. On one hand, the fairy tales do not so much express thing-power as mourn their inability to truly achieve such a thing. On the other hand, they fail gloriously in a way that may not coalesce into a final meaningful whole, but that displays a semiotic abundance and take delight in performativity, creation, and playfulness as they fall apart. Following this, Bennett's ideas of object agency and thing-power has potential if it is seen as a form of play-pretend rather than ontological truth, allowing the museum to let the different voices of objects come to the fore, not merely as a form of mourning, but also as a playful celebration of difference and multivocality. Instead of focusing on their impossibility, a new materialist perspective allows the museum to play, recognise and not least stage human participation in a shared, vital materiality (2010, 14).

Therefore, in the new museum, objects are staged in a way where they are not willingly reduced to traditional static museum objects or employed as tools in a story by Andersen. On the contrary, they disrupt and defamiliarise, they protest and answer back. They do not merely want to be objects put on display for others and are no longer representations, metonymies, pointing to an underlying meaningful whole. Instead, focus shifts from what they represent to how they represent it – from being a vessel for content to displaying agency in themselves. They do this by highlighting the materiality they are bound by and offering contrasting perspectives. As such notions of hierarchy and meaning are destabilised since there is no privileged point of view, each perspective is isolated in its own limited vision and defined by its own materiality. Self-absorbed and petty, they are unable to see past their own noses. In this way, pen and inkstand keep quarreling even when on display in the museum. As a matter of fact, maybe they refuse to even share the same showcase, each making their own case for why they should be the centre of attention. One of Andersen's travelling passports may be out travelling, and is not there to be seen at all, while other objects can deem themselves too important to be shown to the visitor for more than five minutes in an hour (which is also a way of dealing with conservation issues for the

museum) while others may be completely self-absorbed like the flowers in the flower garden in "The Snow Queen." "I can see myself! I can see myself! Oh, how sweet is my own fragrance!" Others again dream of transforming themselves. The poem wants to be read aloud or sung to the sweetheart it was meant for instead of being put in a book. The papercuts want to be more than motions frozen in time. The museum stages those dreams, those voices.

### Visiting Unfamiliarity: Concluding Remarks

This chapter has examined how the museum exhibition as phenomenological space can work together with strategies of performativity in Andersen's fairy tales to inform new ways of thinking and unleashing the democratic potential of the museum. By developing a scenography inspired by the play between form and content in Andersen's fairy tales, the new Hans Christian Andersen Museum does not tell of things or explicate scenes or meanings. Instead, it becomes a series of situations in which the visitor is confronted with his or her own place and role in the world. When the visitor explores the familiar but is suddenly confronted with the unreality of what they thought they knew, the illusion is shattered and immersion disrupted. Meaning ascribed to the phenomenological experience is questioned, thereby creating an exteriorisation of the subject shifting focus from experiencing the world to reflecting on experiencing the world. As such, the process of exteriorisation through immersion and disruption is a form of destabilised "eccentric" (ex-centric) thinking which allows the dialectical relation between subject and other to emerge (Biesta 2016, 147), permitting visitors to "experience the disorientation that is necessary to understanding just how the world looks different to someone else." (Disch 1996, 157).

The new museum, as well as Andersen's fairy tales, is such a place of disorientation, calling the visitor or the reader into question, asking him or her to consider yet again what it means to be in a world full of others. In this sense, the true democratic potential of both Andersen's tales and the exhibition as a phenomenological experience resides in the ways they stage and perform an experience of that which is different to oneself. Concerned neither with maintaining the museum institution as authority nor with homogenising difference into sameness through inclusive and participatory practices, such a form of

museum is exploring the museum as a performative site of wonder and questions – as both a practicing and a production of difference.

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