



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES

(Re)framing national discourse –
an analysing perspective of the role of one object
in several (dis)plays

Author: Linnea Berg Björk
Supervisor: Mikela Lundahl
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School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
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Abstract

Exhibitions, as frames for displayed objects, mediate and talk about the past as if it had just happened. Stories are being told through arrangement and physical categorization of museum materials, which were collected in order to tell something about past times. One object, a *Tallerken* (a plate) has been classified, formed and placed in the two exhibitions *Gamle Norkse Varer* (1937) and *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem* (2009) at Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo, Norway, through different national discourses and mediating different national identities. By using comparative discourse analyse of the two exhibitions' spatial and contextual formation, this thesis investigates the different national rhetoric the *Tallerken* has been contextualised in through different periods. In the exhibition *Gamle Norskee Varer* the *Tallerken* was to be experienced as an aesthetic object, representing itself as something purely Norwegian. In *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem* on the other hand, the object plays the role as a supporting actor in a bigger contextualising narrative, and symbolises a more fluid interpretation of Norwegian culture. The thesis also deliberates theoretical discussions that could be adapted when creating alternative contextualisation of history and national identity concerning the *Tallerken*. The imagined community, and the national framing of cultural history objects, might be reinterpreted and re-defined in order to open up the understanding of what used to be interpreted as a national symbol, but actually might be of a more multi-cultural origin.

Keywords; Norsk Folkemuseum, museology, national representation, reframing history

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

When an object becomes a part of a museum collection, there is always an intention as to why this specific object has been collected. It might be an upcoming exhibition, a gap in the collection, a field of research interest that the object relates to, or as an aim from outside the museum like a donation. The intention becomes legitimate by different social structures; it might be political, cultural and societal, which the museum organisation is a part of. When the collected artefact physically enters the museum, it often follows a process of registration and documentation with the purpose of saving the data, or context that surrounds the collected object. Different eras in the museum's history have followed different principles on what form of data to save for the after-world, depending on the change of ideological structures and of the museums own organisation. Museums have followed different traditions in this process, depending on how the object has been valued, and this process has often dependent on a science history. As a consequence, what a museum could today value as important knowledge about an object, might not been the same as the original intention of the collection of the object, and parts of the information might at some point in history have got lost.

Hans Aall founded the Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo, Norway, in 1884.¹ From early on in the museum's collecting practice, objects were carefully documented and organised. The material was registered with varying context about the specific objects, marked with a museum's number, which provided each of the objects a unique place in the collection. NF1907-0065 is a museum catalogue number referring to a specific object in the collection; a *Tallerken* sold to the Norsk Folkemusuem, by a Peder J Skrudal in 1907. This tin-glazed faience pottery plate, with a white and cobalt-blue glaze is, according to the museum's database Primus, produced at the Hans Nicolai Brun's faience factory in Drammen, Norway in the 1780s. The database does not include more complete detailed information about the *Tallerken*, except for material, method of production and museum classification. But interestingly, the database refers to the object as *Probably a Norwegian*

¹ The museum's name in English is *The Norwegian Museum of Cultural History*, not to be confused with the university museum *Museum of Cultural History, Oslo*

work (In original: Ant. norsk arbeide) which could have been added to the object's registration data at a point when the origin of the object was not certain.

The *Tallerken* has been exhibited in *Gamle Norske Varer* (Old Norwegian Commodities) at Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo, Norway. The exhibition opened in 1937 in a house built exclusively for that purpose, and presented parts of the so-called *De systematiske samlinger* (the systematic collections). The building, which today is called *C-bygg* (the c-building), is still standing within the museum area, and the original space where *Gamle Norske Varer* was held, is still intact but stripped of for its previous content at an unknown point in the museum's history. The emphasis of the content presented in the exhibition was on goods produced in Norway during the previous centuries, and the spotlights were on different crafting guilds. The materials were organized into themes according to material and type of production.

Since 2009, the *Tallerken* is to be found in the exhibition *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem* (A journey through rooms of the past) that opened in the main exhibition hall at the same museum. The setting for the exhibition is built up around a dollhouse from the 1850s that arrived at the museum in 1930, where the fictive Siboni doll-family lives. Several dolls were to be found in the house, but the head of the family, Mr Siboni has been missing ever since the house came into the collection. This inspired the museum to create the exhibition around the question of "Where is Mr Siboni?" which also was the original title of the exhibition. The narrative is arranged around six items representing the six rooms in the dollhouse, which in its turn is connected to seven characters (dolls). The aim is to open up to a story about social life in noble homes and households in Norway during the 1700s and 1800s, and to reveal different social roles like the historical understanding of man and woman, children, parents and servants.² In the mediated narrative there is also a great emphasis on how outer and inner influences have formed the Norwegian culture, by trading and travelling, and how this affected Norwegian life. Large and informative text-panels give the visitors a historical and social context to the exhibited material, but do not handle each specific object.

² Ravne Scott, Erika, "Dukkestuer Historiske titteskap 1500–1900", in *Museumbulletinen*, nr. 61 3/2009, Oslo, Norsk Folkemuseums Venner, p. 4

1.2 Thesis and purpose

During my internship at Norsk Folkemuseum in 2011, I was conducting research about *Gamle Norske Varer*, and was fascinated by what this emptied place could tell about the past.³ One of the first things I observed when entering the closed exhibition, was the emptied shelves and showcases, the rooms varied in colouring and material, the lightning and lack of textual presentation. With a museological perspective I found it remarkable how the exhibited objects had been presented with a minimum of social and cultural context. In *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem* the contexts is on the other hand prominent in the communication with the public, where the objects form a materialised illustration of a bigger narrative that the museum aims to provide

The history presented in exhibitions, has been regarded as a result of an objective research and the knowledge is often regarded as truth. But our knowledge about the world is only accessible through processes of categorisation and selection, and is not an actual reflection of the world as "out there", but a product of how we sort out the world around us. Exhibitions have for the past centuries been understood as a form of media that is able to mirror the real world, but they can also be seen as the result of these categorisations, formed by socially constructed discourses. The way we understand the world and the knowledge we produce about history, and how we use it in contemporary knowledge production, is linked to these categorisations through social processes.⁴

Cultural history- and open-air museums such as Norsk Folkemuseum played an important role in the materializing of national romanticism in Northern Europe. The development and value of these museums has been an established research field for many years. This thesis will not attempt to repeat this, but instead widen the concept of national rhetoric and place in a specific context, in order to understand what influences these tendencies have had on the development on later exhibitions, and how a national perspective can be used in up-coming exhibitions.

³ Internship period at Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo, Norway, September 2012 to December 2012, in relation to Master's Programme in International Museum Studies School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

⁴ Winter Jørgensen, Marianne, Phillips J., Louise, *Diskursanalys som teori och metod*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, 2000, p. 11-12

Research questions to examine in this thesis are:

- Does the object *Tallerken*, through the two exhibitions, mediate different experiences about a Norwegian past, and how do these different spatial and textual contexts differ in the materialization of a national rhetoric? In what way has the national representation changed in collecting and exhibition practises at Norsk Folkemuseum?
- How and why are cultural history objects often linked to a framing context such as the national? And what happens when the nation is put in a more global perspective?
- What theoretical framework can Norsk Folkemuseum practise when further using the *Tallerken* as an object linked to history, not in order to generate a discourse which creates a delimiting national identity created for ethnic Norwegians, but rather as an object with multiple meanings in order to create an identity for all the people living in Norway? Are there other ways of stimulating the formation of national identity that are not bound to (geographical/linguistic/cultural) borders?

In order to answer these research questions, I will in chapter 2 handle concept such as nationalism, nationality and identity in order to understand how national identity is formed and understood in relation to exhibitions and museums. I will also argue for how the framing of cultural history and national heritage could be altered, in order to open up the understanding of national identities. Further on, in order to understand the Norsk Folkemuseum's historical and present position, I will in chapter 3 deliberate some important events of museum's history, and its relation to, and sympathy with the national identity. The Norsk Folkemuseum's historical position in relation to the national, cultural and museological development will also help to understand the exhibition *Gamle Norske Varer's* and *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem's* contextualisation of the *Tallerken*. In chapter 4, I will describe the physical content and presented context of the *Tallerken* in *Gamle Norske Varer* and *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem*. The surrounding exhibition space, design and lighting will be deliberated in order to understand the historical development of the aesthetics and pedagogical exhibition rhetoric. In chapter 5, there will be a discussion about what strategies the museum could

use, in order to create alternative discourses related to history and national identity providing a more multi-cultural and wider understanding of objects connected to a (national) cultural history. Finally, in chapter 6 there will be an end discussion with my main conclusions and findings.

Thorough the thesis I will review several levels of practical and theoretical museum work when describing and discussing the *Tallerkens* position in the exhibitions. The different levels, like the object-, exhibition-, discourse-, national- and contextual, will here blend in to each other, and not be discussed as strictly individual, because they are interacting and supporting each other in a way that makes them inseparable.

1.3 The exhibition media as discourse

In the analysis there will be applied a discourse analytical perspective in the interpretation of the national discourses that exist around the *Tallerken*. This will be performed in order to be able to argue how exhibitions can reflect self-images of national identity and create norms about what something Norwegian stands for, and to enable to question self-evident knowledge that exhibitions often are claimed to mediate.

The discourse concept can be used in different ways. Here, a discourse perspective will be borrowed from what Marianne Winter Jørgensen and Louise J Phillips's describe as discourse analysis in *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*.⁵ They relate a discourse to the idea that language is "structured according to different patterns that people's utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life".⁶ It is a form for collective discussion and determination about certain subjects, but this language, and how we use it, is not a reflection of the "real" world, but is an active mediator in the forming and in the changing interpretation of the world.⁷ The cultural and discursive way of acting is a form of social act, which contribute to develop and construct the social world and personal and collective identities. Its character is not governed from an outer and objective standpoint, neither established by people's inner essence.⁸

The museum can be understood as a language, where the museum speaks to the visitors. This is done by a communicating medium such as the exhibition, which together with the objects it holds, the texts and the form that surrounds it, creates this mediated

⁵ Winter Jørgensen, Marianne, Phillips J., Louise, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, London, SAGE Publications, 2002

⁶ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2002, p. 12

⁷ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2000, p. 7

⁸ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2000, p. 11–12

language that forms and is a part the discourse. The message in the exhibition is often translated in to an objective and neutral truth, but is rather an imagined perception, standing side by side by other truths. Its meaning shifts in the different discourses and also depending on who is interpreting the discourse.⁹ In the production of an exhibition that sets out to deliver a translation and an understanding of the Norwegian culture (and in an extension, create a Norwegian identity), there exists an agreement over what a Norwegian culture consists of, what values and traditions it holds. This is a constant fluid process, but in order to be able to mediate something meaningful in an exhibition, it seems to require that some lines are drawn.

I will also include Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's perspectives on discourse theory and hegemony as a social structure. This perspective will be used in order to argue for how a national perspective in the two exhibitions are due to, and governed by, outer and inner structures that are defined by the discourses which have an influence over how we use history.¹⁰ The author's benchmark is a post-structuralist take on how discourse creates the social world, and how its meaning cannot be fixed because of the language's inherent instability. No discourse is a closed unit, but is constantly remodelled in relation to other discourses.¹¹ The discursive struggle reaches for hegemony, and a stable structure of meaning and legitimacy in the social order.¹² Hegemony becomes a discursive power ascendancy, which gives museums a preferential right of interpretation over history. This creates a power that is exerted by hegemonic practices and identifies the limits of what the discourse is to include (and ergo exclude).

The neutralization of the meaning of the discursive struggle is partly made by a division between two opposite identities, two mutually exclusive ideas, for example now and then, them and us. The hegemony discourse mediates through this naturalization of these self-evident truths and ideals.¹³ I will here use the theory of hegemony as an analytical perspective to identify the discursive power in the political and cultural debated over what and how to symbolize something national, and what historical perspectives that should be put forward in order generate national identity in the Norwegian society.

⁹ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2000, p. 18

¹⁰ Laclau, Ernesto, Mouffe, Chantal, *Hegemonin och den socialistiska strategin*, Göteborg, Glänta, Stockholm, Vertigo, 2008

¹¹ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2000, p. 13

¹² Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2000, p. 22

¹³ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2002, p. 47-48

To put the material into a discussion about how museums and other institutions generate national identity discourses and create a national rhetoric, I will ground my thinking in Thomas Hylland Eriksen's discussions about ethnicity, history and nationalism, and Benedict Anderson's discussion about the "imagined community" together with a national discourse analysing perspective developed by Winther Jørgensen and Phillips.¹⁴ In order to discuss ownership of national property, a discussion over Kwame Anthony Appiah's questioning over "Whose culture is it, Anyway?" will also be applied.¹⁵ In the analysis I will use Donna Haraway's perspectives on scientific rhetoric and a critique of the concept of *objectivity*. Haraway's suggestions on how to use the term "situated knowledge" in order to use the personal experience in focus of creating knowledge and scientific will be useful in the analyse in order to discuss how identity, experience and knowledge is connected, and how it could be used in an exhibition production in order to avoid excluding categorisation.

1.4 New Museology – a way of thinking of museums

I see the museology field as an interdisciplinary study of the museum as a construction. It sets out to study the museum's methodological work, its history and its effect and involvement in society. This interdisciplinary theoretic position, together with my own practical experience in the field, will in this study benefit the reading of the *Tallerken* because its many positions in the museum. An object's value is defined by the context that has been ascribed to it; it might be a historical, artistic or aesthetic experience that forms this context. Without interpretation, and relation to a context, the object might be understood as meaningless if no discourse, or language is applied that acknowledges the object's existence. Or as Peter Vergo states

Whether we like it or not, every acquisition (and indeed disposal), every juxtaposition or arrangement of an object or work of art, together with other objects or work of art, within the context of temporary exhibition or museum display means placing a certain construction upon history¹⁶

The construction here becomes the important factor that gives the object (and history) meaning. In order to understand and interpret the museum's history and contextual

¹⁴ Hylland Eriksen, Tomas, *Historia, myt och identitet*, Stockholm, Bonnier Alba, 1996, Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London, Verso, 2006, Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2002

¹⁵ Appiah, Kwame Anthony, "Whose Culture is it, Anyway?" in Appiah, Kwame Anthony, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, New York, WW Norton and Company, 2006, p. 115–136

¹⁶ Vergo, Peter, "Introduction", Vergo, Peter (ed.), *The New Museology*, London, Reaktion, 1989, p. 2

development of the object *Tallerken*, the discourses will be placed in relation to the museum's history. Recent understandings about what a museum is, as a social and societal actor, will be interpreted in order to understand the museum institution as a mediator of national identity.

During museological history, there have been several ways of interpreting exhibited and collected material. This, and its outcome as changing practices at museums, can be related to several shifts of paradigms in the museum and academic understanding of the meaning and translation of materialized cultural heritage. One shift of paradigm in the museum world during the past couple of decades that have had a visible effect on exhibition and collection practices at contemporary museums could be represented by the term *new museology*. Peter Vergo refers to *new museology* (or just the term *museology*) as a way of thinking about museum work, not as a museum method, but more of the museum's purpose as a humanistic discipline.¹⁷ According to Max Ross, *new museology* can be interpreted as the introduction of "a climate of increasing reflexivity" into the museum sphere.¹⁸ He also states that this way of thinking is a

movement towards a more visitor-centred ethos [that] can be seen as entailing a corresponding shift in the identity of the museum professional, from "legislator" to "interpreter" of cultural meaning.¹⁹

For example, a museum's objects have been considered as "exclusive" and as an example of the best parts of a culture. But after this shift of paradigm, materiality became more understood as representative, and was now to be illustrating as an example of also the ordinary and informal parts of a culture.²⁰ Amundsen and Brenna states that the museum lost some of its traditional authority as defining institutions of what counts as important in history and culture. Therefore, museums have today become a place rather for discussions and for diversity.²¹ But museums still have the power over how and what is communicated, and uses the authority to tell different stories, not only focusing the cultural elite anymore (or, it is no longer only the cultural elite that produce them). This type of problematization of history is often done today, more directed towards what the

¹⁷ Vergo, 1989, p. 2

¹⁸ Ross, Max, Interpreting the New Museology, in *Museums and Society*, Jul 2 (2) 84–103, 2004, p. 84

¹⁹ Ross, Max, 2004, p. 84

²⁰ Eriksen, Anne, *Museum: en kulturhistorie*, Oslo, Pax, 2009, p. 132

²¹ Amundsen, Arne Bugge, Brenna, Brita, "Introduction", Amundsen, Arne Bugge, Rogan, Bjarne, Stang Margrethe C. (ed.), *Museer i fortid og nåtid essays i museumskunnskap*, Oslo, Novus forlag, 2003, p. 12

actual society looks like, and to include ethnical minority groups.²² The museums have today even more opportunities to be social actors. But if a museum's audience changes, whom a museum talks to, it must also affect the exhibitions. The acknowledgement of the museum as a social actor gives the museum an even more important role as a mediator of national identity. And for this forum, to be able to include and open up for discussions and diversity, the institution itself must have a self-confidence and a self-reflecting perspective in the knowledge they communicate. In order to understand how knowledge and the mediating of knowledge in a museum setting can be used in relation to diversity and how it can strengthen the museum.

1.5 To decode one empty and one occupied exhibition

Method for documentation of the exhibitions and the context of the *Tallerken* that will be used in the analyse is slightly diverse when it comes to *Gamle Norkse Varer* and *Historiske reiser i dannete gjem*. As *Gamle Norkse Varer* is no longer on display, I have been dependent on previous photographic documentation, and written materials from and about the exhibition. I have also visited the location where the exhibition was held, partly intact but almost completely emptied of its content. I see abandoned exhibitions as a physical manifestation of earlier materialized ideologies and understandings of a systematized world, a representation of museum ideals and interpretation. They bear witness to a perception of a reality that is "out there", and ideas that probably do not align with contemporary ones. The actual tangibility of the exhibited objects is what makes them authentic, as a material proof of former ideologies. It is not the actual exhibited objects that can reveal what context it has been put in, it is rather *how* it has been exhibited that can reveal its former contexts.

Historiske reiser i dannete hjem exists in the present, and this makes it easier to experience and interpret its contents. I have visited the exhibition, studied documents and the working progress of the exhibition, and conducted an interview with one of the curators. However, it is impossible to get a total understanding of the visitor experience of the two exhibitions. My starting point for the experience of the exhibition's physical and discursive space is however based on my own subjective experience of space and mediated national identity, which will form the reading of the exhibitions.

²² Eriksen, 2009, p. 194

As argued above, museums produce and mediate different forms of discourses, which are being interpreted in different ways by its visitors. But where were these discourses produced? An exhibition is a result of research and material collecting (internally and externally), which are being formed together in a space, aiming to give the visitors a learning experience (among other things). The producers, the museum (staff), have excogitated ideas of what meaning and content this learning experience should hold. The ideas are most recognisable in the related text panels and in the actual objects being exhibited, but also the space combining of object, the surrounding room, the other exhibitions, even the whole museum creates a symbiotic relationship between the object and the visitor, that affects how the visitor perceive the message the museum wants to mediate when presenting an object (thematically represented). Different time periods in the history of museums have presented exhibited material differently, from the curiosity cabinets, through the scientific classification and the modern white cube, towards a late/postmodern presentation, where a disneyfied total experience is favoured. The physical representation, and the type of context provided to the exhibited material have changed, even if the actual material in many cases has been the same (as in the case of the *Tallerken*, which will be presented later on). But does the actual form of the museum media, the exhibition space, the gallery, the plinths and design of the text-panels affects the outcome of the understanding of a material? How does the medium contribute to the experience of the objects on display?

Marshall McLuhan argues that the form of the medium in itself creates a message, and also is a message in it self.²³ He also states that even the form of the media can be more important than the actual content, and that this affects the psychical and social structures, and the collective understanding of reality. In the perspective of museums, the content is the exhibited material, and the understanding of reality is the understanding of Norwegian history. For example, McLuhan refers to how society is not only changing in relation to the technology (media) development (ex. of the light bulb and the railway), but is also changed by the actual technology in itself. These different forms of media are often taken for granted, and are perceived as self-evident. Any media can be effectively used to hide the content of other media (or the contents of a media), thereby distorting its meaning.²⁴ In order to understand and interpret a representation of cultural production, in this case the discourses the *Tallerken* takes part of, one must

²³ McLuhan, Marchall, *Media : människans utbyggnader*, Stockholm, Norstedt, 1999

²⁴ McLuhan, 1999, p. 34

recognize the medium as just message. The content of the media often makes us blinded, which creates difficulties in actually analysing the medium's importance.²⁵ But the technology of the medium, the museum and exhibition structure creates a grammar in which there is a system that the message relates to, which makes it important to include also the exhibition media in the analysis, since the medium also influence and is influenced by the discourse. To be able to recognize this grammar, it is not productive to only to look at its contents, but to analyse the actual media and its cultural significance.

By integrating these perspectives in the analyse's, an interpretation of the mediated ideology in the exhibition becomes dependent on the interpretation of the actual material context that surrounds the *Tallerken*. The aesthetics of the supplementary items in the exhibition, the decor, walls and windows and the text-panels affect the experience and the translation of the message being mediated. Consequently, it would not be possible to analyse the ideology and the aesthetics (the media) in the exhibition separately – they are combined and form together the perception of the exhibition.

If following McLuhan's argument in that architectural design, colour, lighting and passages are what forms a platform for the staged objects, it affects not only how visitors interact with space, but also how visitors actually interpret an exhibited object. The visitor is by visual signs led through the exhibition and directed to follow a given storyline. To be able to analyse the two exhibitions and the staging and contextualisation of the *Tallerken*, a discourse analytic method will be applied together with a methodology perspective from Mieke Bal's *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural*. In order to map out the processes where the signs of national rhetoric take place Bal links the exhibition space to a theoretical (theatre) stage and the exhibited objects to the role of an actor.²⁶ Bal's argumentation can be related to the discourse perspective and McLuhan's argument where the exhibition is seen as a combination of physical and non-physical elements, which together forms a communicating language, where the museum speaks to its visitors. The method of how to deconstruct an exhibition space by looking at the exhibition room as an isolator of the objects and narratives from the reality, but also a distance between the visitor and the objects, will also be used.²⁷ The emptiness in the abandoned exhibition *Gamle Norkse Varer* creates new experiences of the space left

²⁵ McLuhan, 1999, p. 20

²⁶ Bal, Mieke, *Double Exposures : the Subject of Cultural Analysis*, New York, Routledge, 1996

²⁷ Bal, Mieke, "Exhibition as Film", Ostow, Ed Robin, *(Re)Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2008, p. 15–47

behind, but at the same time emphasizes the objects that have been removed. The space could be interpreted as a stage or a scene, which the actors have left for another theatre production, and left behind is only a set piece that bears witness to a previous play. There will be no attempt at translating the exhibitions in to the different mediums of a theatre play, using instead Bal's model of conceptualising the staged object. To bring the analysis further towards an examination of space, and to complement the analysis of the *Tallerken* by relating the exhibitions to the aesthetic history of exhibition spaces, Charlotte Klonk's theory and methods in *Spaces of experience: art gallery interiors from 1800 to 2000* will be deliberated. Here Klonk puts the white cube in a historical perspective to investigate changing ideals and practices in gallery interiors, and analyses different methods of displaying such as colouring, lightning, furnishing, installation and organization of material to explain and refer to scientific and political changes in exhibition rhetoric. For example, she describes how the space defines how visitors move around in the exhibition, and how it affects the experience of the exhibited material. Instead of only defining different ways through which museums (re)create value, she uses this as a method to investigate how museums shape experiences, which in turn affects the subjectivity in the visitor experience. In the analyse of the two exhibitions *Gamle Norske Varer* and *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem*, I will use here an analysis's of the gallery space and the white cube in order to place the exhibitions in a historical aesthetic frame, and how this aesthetic form is linked to the conceptual and ideological framing of history. Klonk's main subject when talking about the development of the gallery space is the art gallery, but since Klonk uses the historical understanding of the experience of the museum as representative for the ideas of the public space, I see her ideas adaptable to cultural history museums.²⁸

1.6 Previous research

Many have presented studies on the history of exhibitions and collecting practices at Norsk Folkemuseum related to national discourse. Trond Bjorli has, in *Kultur, vitenskap og samfunn. Samling og ideologi på Norsk Folkemuseum 1894–1914*, for example several interesting perspectives on collecting practices and documentation work in the time

²⁸ Klonk, Charlotte, *Spaces of Experience: art gallery interiors from 1800 to 2000*, New Haven, London, Yale University Press, 2009, s. 3–4

period 1894–1914 which will be useful when mapping out the museum’s history.²⁹ This is linked to the museum as an institution, its visions and its national ideologies, which is a part of the museum’s own heritage that Norsk Folkemuseum has to relate to today.

Ingrid Steinsmo Grimsrud has made a study of the Norsks Folkemuseum’s development as a communicating institution in her thesis *Bykultur ved Norsk Folkemuseum*.³⁰ Grimsrud makes a comparative analysis between the exhibitions *Bysamlingen* from 1914 and a project plan for a planned upcoming exhibition *Tids Rom – Impulser fra den store verden 1600–1900*. This comparison is close to my aim with this thesis, but has several different perspectives. Instead of looking at how the development of museology has affected the presentation of a specific exhibited interior as Steinsmo Grimsrud does, in this thesis the *Tallerken* will be used as a actor in a play, which performs different roles in two different plays where the discourse of national identity has changed.

“Norge, et land for meg? Pakistanerne oppdager Norge” – en utstilling på Norsk Folkemuseum is an interesting study by Elisabeth Stavem, where she presents the exhibition *Norge, et land for meg? Pakistanerne oppdager Norge*, which was a presentation of the Pakistani immigration to Norway in the late 1960s and early 1970s.³¹ The exhibition was also connected to a documentation project, “Norsk i går, i dag, i morgen” (Norwegian yesterday, today, tomorrow, my translation). This project concerned the multicultural Norway, and involved a referent group with Pakistanis and Norwegian-Pakistanis.³² In her thesis, Stavem investigates how the “other” is presented in the exhibition, and in a national Norwegian and a Pakistani discourse. She states that urge of defining the “other”, is connected to the need of defining the self, and to be productive in the development of ways museums creates stereotypes. It is interesting to investigate how the definition of the “self” can be questioned. Stavems’ perspective will be discussed in the analysis, since the national discourse context concern both an “us” and the “other” perspectives.

²⁹ BJORLI, Trond, *Kultur, vitenskap og samfunn, Samling og ideologi på Norsk Folkemuseum 1894–1914*, Hovedfagsoppgave i etnologi, Seksjon for etnologi, Institutt for kulturstudier og kunsthistorie, Universitetet i Bergen, 2002

³⁰ Steinsmo Grimsrud, Ingrid, *Bykultur ved Norsk Folkemuseum*, Masteroppgave i kulturminneforvaltning, NTNU, Trondheim, 2011

³¹ My translation of the name of the study is “Norway, a country for me? The Pakistanis find Norway” – an exhibition at the Norwegian Folk Museum”

³² Stavem, Elisabeth, *“Norge, et land for meg? Pakistanerne oppdager Norge” – en utstilling på Norsk Folkemuseum*, Hovedoppgave i sosialantropologi, Sosialantropologisk institutt, Universitetet i Oslo, 2005, p. 2–4

1.7 Limitations

The journey that *Tallerken* has made through its 230 years is not limited to the two exhibitions analysed in this study. When produced, the intention was not that it should be locked up in an exhibition showcase, and bereft its prime function as tableware. One can suppose that many people have been involved in the life of the *Tallerken* in addition to the curators and visitors at Norsk Folkemuseum, and all of them have created different understandings and interpretations of this specific object. The discourses that surround the *Tallerken* have been many, and yet there are more to be developed. By using the *Tallerken* as an example of how one object can be used in different stories, this specific object can act as a link in a historical development in the search for the national discourses at Norsk Folkemusuem. I could have done a more extensive object biography research and documentation of the objects "life", and involve other exhibitions and contexts around the *Tallerken* than presented here. But in this thesis, I have chosen to use the *Tallerken* as an example of how national discourses are formed, since I believe that the contextualization made around this subject in the two exhibitions represents a good overview of the development of exhibition rhetoric at the museum that I wish to discuss.

I have chosen not to include a direct comparative analysis with other forms of exhibitions since I believe the Norsk Folkemuseum, and the *Tallerkens* place within it, is unique in the way the museum has been an important part of Norwegian museum development. However, I will search for inspiration in other exhibitions in order to find new paths in the museological way of representing and categorisation. I have also chosen not to include any pictures in this thesis because I base the analyse upon my own subjective experience of the object and the exhibitions, something a photographic picture can not replace.

An exhibition is produced for its public, and the museum visitors' understanding and experience of the exhibit material is also the goal of the exhibition production. In the study of how national discourse is produced and interpreted by the museum's audience, a visitor study could have been productive in this study. But since *Gamle Norske Varer* is no longer on display, this form of documentation is impossible in this study. A museum is not a place where objects walk in and exhibits themselves. It is an institution formed by the work of curators, conservators and other staff at a museum, together producing and

forming the outcome of research and museum work. But, except for some exceptions, I have here chosen not to focus on the specific individuals forming the exhibitions considered in this thesis, partly because there is no documentation on who formed the *Gamle Norske Varer*, but also because I see the total of the museum as the assembled sender of the message.

This thesis will not present a suggestion on how to exhibit the *Tallerken* further. I will rather use the upcoming exhibition TidsRom as a verification that the *Tallerkens* role as a museum object will not end, but rather change in relation to the change of (dis)play. I have instead chosen to focus on what theoretical discussion to perform when applying museological thinking on museum theoretical work. I have also chosen not to pursue a detailed development of the exhibition rhetoric at cultural history or open-air museums of which Norsk Folkemuseum is an example of. Rather, I will relate the two exhibitions physical expression to the ideological development of the (art)gallery and *Museums of decorative arts and design*, partly because they represent in a way the spatial development in the exhibitions depicted here.

I'm using the *Tallerken* and its different positions at Norsk Folkemuseum, in order to exemplify how post-national-romanticism museums have contextualized objects over time. The object is important in the comparative analysis, but it also works as a medium to discuss my main concern, the forming and contextualization of national identity at cultural history museums. At the same time, this is a unique exhibited object in a one-off museum, with its own history, collections and exhibitions, and the analyse will not be directly transferable to any other museum context.

2. Nationalism, museums and frames

Even if the focus and the directions have been different during the change of times, the concept of nationality and national identity, have been, and still are, strongly physical and rhetorically represented at Norsk Folkemuseum. In order to understand what nationalism is, how national identity is formed and how globalisation challenge the national idea, this chapter will deliberate some of these concepts together with an argumentation over how the framing of cultural history and national heritage could be challenged in order to open up the understanding of national identities. Also, alternative ways of framing cultural historical artefacts linked to the national and to globalisation will be deliberated.

2.1 The nation

The nation state could by discourse theory be interpreted as a cultural and social construct, and can therefore be subjected to reshaping and re-evaluating. The nation is not tied to a static interpretation; the ruling discourse is under constant challenge, and is open to revaluation and different content. But the idea of the nation as formed by discourses does not exclude the existence of the nations; they are real and have been shaped by institutions and practices through the language and actions have defined their existence.³³ In the work of anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, among other poststructuralist and postmodern scholars, the (national) identity can be understood as a fluid unit, and so are the aims for identity production and the materialization of history in museum practices.³⁴ And this is done because the (national/personal/collective) identity has to be reinforced and strengthened in a constant process in order to be maintained as significant and not to be succeeded by other forms of social organization. A constructivist way to conceive the concept of the nations is that it consists of different fields or spheres, such as language and religion. Benedict Anderson refers to the concept of the nation as a *imagined community* with a common notion of history. This imagined community is formed by people that do not necessarily know each other, but feel a belonging toward people inside the borders of the nation state territory. They also and feel a common difference towards people in other nations.³⁵ The national discourse defines the world through differences and dividing it into geographical areas, in order to

³³ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2000, p. 160–167

³⁴ Hylland Eriksen, 1996

³⁵ Anderson, 2006

strengthen the imagined community. Some of these spheres span over the entire nation, some reach across national borders, some exist only in smaller social units, and some have blurred boundaries. But those who frame a powerful nation can be recognised to have clearly defined geographic boundaries. These spheres are interpreted and used in different ways within a culture, and many of its elements are imported from places outside the nation.

However, there is a densification of these spheres. They get their unique expression and are involved in specific combinations, such as in museums, which helps to create a national distinctiveness. Also professor Sharon McDonald recognize the nation as legitimizing geographical places and borders, protecting the nation from the rest of the world. In the national discourse there exists an assumption of how nations are separated from each other in historical and cultural formations, and the national character and the identity is constructed partly by the contrast towards other nations.³⁶ This creates a distance between "us" and "them", and reinforces a disparity of history and origin. National identities have been constructed, by pointing out other nations and ethnicities (within the nation) with the aim to emphasize one specific identity.³⁷ The collective definition of what kinds of memories should be highlighted and put forward in the institutional identity forming process, like in history books or at museums, is not performed through an objective outlook of historical episodes. It is rather involved in processes of creating several subjective contemporary understandings, which is controlled by a hegemonic system.

A common way of defining what physically and conceptually forms a nation, in order to materialise this imagined community, can be to relate the content of a nation to common areas of expression such as language, a homogenous ethnic group, culture or religion. But it is easy to reveal that these regimes do not actual form the nation in itself. In a nation, such as Norway, there are several languages spoken, several ethnicities and cultures existing, side by side, but also in a constant fluid process in which there are no clear lines.³⁸ A national history based on the notion of that which unifies a nation, like language, race, religion, customs and shared history, always includes a rejection of

³⁶ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2000, p. 116

³⁷ MacDonald, Sharon, "Museums, national, postnational and transcultural identities", *Museums and society* 6:1, 2003, p. 2

³⁸ Winter Jørgensen, 2000, p. 158

something else.³⁹ Trading and economy have historically always crossed the borders of a nation, cultural minorities have never belonged only to one national unity, but these have been translated as an exception and have been ignored in the national discourse.⁴⁰ But within a traditional and strong national discourse, there exist hegemonic definitions in which a specific language, a specific culture, and a specific ethnicity is exclusively attributed a prefix, such as the Norwegian. Groups of people identifying themselves with other languages, ethnical or cultural groups that differ from the hegemonic structure and therefore not earning a national prefix, stands aside, and might challenge the national discourse, and are often defined as "the other".

Museums use the idea of a common history to reinforce the "imagined community" as a fixed unit, and it could be argued that someone who has no history has no cultural identity. And in order to obtain and grow an identity, it is required to have not only a personal history, but to have this history linked to a larger context, and thus create meaning for the individual's existence. This bigger context of history and culture is formed by a collective memory of a united past, and collective definition of the past. According to Hylland Eriksen, it is not the history in itself that creates identity; it is the collective memory of it.⁴¹ History, as a collective memory of the past is used in the formation of national identity.

2.2 The nation goes global

But what happens with this collective, geographically defined national culture when it takes a greater place and is involved in a globalized world? As the exhibition *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem* exemplifies, countries and cultures have (almost) never been developed isolated from other nation and cultures. But in an era where traveling and fast communication makes the identification with parts of other cultures more flexible and comfortable, the imaginary borders of a community might be blurred. In order to see how a museum could relate to this issue, a further discussion over some of the perspectives of the nation, and its inhabitants in a globalized world will be performed.

The definition of what unifies and defines a nation is being constantly challenged. This can be explained in many ways, for example in the way the experience of globalization with new forms of communication and movements of subject and object has been challenged forms of identity shaping connected to geographical areas. Anna

³⁹ Bohman, Stefan, *Historia, museer och nationalism*, Stockholm, Carlsson, 1997, p. 25–26

⁴⁰ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2000, p. 158

⁴¹ Hylland Eriksen, 1996, s. 12

Walette states, the striving for a strong identity is connected to a need for something unchangeable in a changeable and unstable world.⁴² This is not a new phenomenon, but can be recognized in the national romantic era during 1800s, which played an important role in the formation of Norsk Folkemuseum. The globalisation process during the strong industrialisation movement, which required a mobilization of workforces and the need for a homogenization of culture, affected the use of history in the process of creating national identities.⁴³ The museologist Stefan Bohman refers to Benedict Anderson, who argues that the industrialization demanded a greater geographical mobility, while people became part of the same economic system.⁴⁴ It was a need for a new ideology of the state as motherly and tying symbol, and Bohman argues that this led to a distinction of a cultural heritage, which became a separating tool, and not something that unified the cultures in Europe and in the rest of the world.⁴⁵

Winter Jørgensen and Phillips argue however, that there exist today several notions of what is happening with the national discourses and the materialization of it in the era of strong globalization. Does the increased opportunity for communication, transportation and consumption alter the perception of the imagined community of the nation-states, or will the national discourses be even more emphasized when the global discourse is becoming increasingly blurred? In Sharon Macdonald's perspective, issues about the global flow, challenge a traditional process of identity shaping, and she refers to Giddens and arguments how

identities are becoming "disembedded" from locality and from the traditional frameworks not just of nation and ethnicity but also of class and kinship.⁴⁶

One important part of the identity is connected to the national identity, which is constructed by the national discourse, and in relation to the globalisation discourse, identity is interpreted as more ambiguous and fluid. No matter how one interprets globalization, one can still argue that it influences and challenges traditional national discourses. In its way it wants to explain how values about the world are composed, and it will also affect the way we categorise and frame the national material heritage.⁴⁷

⁴² Walette, Anna, "Historiker och hedningar" i Aronsson, Peter (ed.), *Makten över minnet, historiekultur i förändring*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, 2000, p. 67

⁴³ Bohman, 1997, p. 27

⁴⁴ Bohman, 1997, p. 27

⁴⁵ Bohman, 1997, p. 135

⁴⁶ MacDonald, 2003, p. 5-6

⁴⁷ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2002, p. 183

Bohman argues however that a present increasing focus on a coherent Europe, creates a stronger focus on the national identity, here he refers to Sweden in 1997. Even if the international situation might have changed since 1997, we still stands in front of a paradox; the national discourses in European countries tend to be growing bigger and seems today to be an even a greater source for identification. The more integrated Europe becomes, and connected to a globalizing world, the notion of how an inherited cultural practice and tradition emerge, which increase the need for discussion, profiling and challenging of the national identity.⁴⁸ Macdonald claims that "the museum medium is well capable of articulating post-national, transcultural identities", and gives an example of how Transcultural Galleries at Cartwright Hall does this by downplaying a national (and other geographically specific) perspectives in the exhibitions (but still retain a local perspective in some themes such as related to artist).⁴⁹ However, she believes that this strategy may be more difficult when it comes to national and historical museums where this is expected by its visitors. But she believes that "museums are capable of being put to work in the expression of other kinds of identities than the national, homogeneous and bounded".⁵⁰

Kwame Anthony Appiah discusses what is required when new types of ideologies of identities are developed, when the previously defined geographical and cultural boundaries are challenged.⁵¹ Appiah discusses to the philosophical term *cosmopolitanism*, which refers to how all humans, no matter where they come from, come under the same moral standards, so that the before so distinct geographical and cultural boundaries, imagined or not, become irrelevant, and how this relates to a new understanding of the concept of national identity. Despite different life perceptions and understandings of values, there are more similarities than differences that bind people together in the world.⁵² Appiah further discuss how cultural institutions, especially national museums (art/cultural history/history) need to develop their way of thinking around their own positions in the identity making process when developing the big narratives and defining geographical borders. This must be performed in order to develop new strategies when contributing to the concept of (national/cultural) identity.

⁴⁸ Bohman, 1997, p. 132-135

⁴⁹ MacDonald, 2003, p. 10

⁵⁰ MacDonald, 2003, p. 10

⁵¹ Appiah, 2006, p. 115-136

⁵² Appiah, 2006, p. 115-136

In a global perspective, the definition of which part of the material culture that should represent a nation, has played an important role and been used as an ideological strategy to define "us", but also the "other", which has created stereotypes and exclusion from the collective identity building project. This might be most recognizable in the ethnographical museums Appiah refers to, but also in written culture history. In Norwegian cultural history for instance, native Norwegian population, like the Sami culture, where for a long time excluded.

Cultural remains, or cultural patrimony as Appiah would put it, that have been traditionally considered e.g. typical Norwegian, such as gold and ironworks from the Viking era, is regularly to be found in museums representing a Norwegian national identity. The material was produced in a historical era that took part before the existence of the modern idea of the Norwegian national State. The Vikings themselves did not identify themselves geographically as Norwegians (nor as Vikings), but rather according to "lineage and locality".⁵³ Many nations are actually younger than the material heritage ascribed to their cultural history, which in itself is a paradox. One could therefore argue that there is a need for a re-evaluation of what we call the national. The material heritage might not be limited to specific nations and their inner and outer borders, but is a heritage that belongs to us all, as humans, since history is a part of the development in the whole world.

2.3 Framing history

As referred to above, a national cultural heritage interpreted as materialized and/or immaterialized, is a result of an agreement over these specific values governing what is to be included in the (imagined) national discourse. The agreement constructs a definition over what should be brought forward as a symbol of a collective group. Therefore, it also generates collective national identity for the people recognizing this symbol as geographically bound to the nation. In exhibitions at national- and cultural-historical museums, objects are often used in order to illustrate national narratives that the museum wants to mediate to its visitors. A narrative is always connected to a vision, an ideology that is reinforced by a hegemonic structure, and therefore not always representative for the total culture. But, Bohman states that it has been shown that non-homogeneous national states, with contrarious forms of national identities have a need to manifest and justify a homogeneous nation, and that museums have in many different

⁵³ Appiah, 2006, p. 119

ways played an important role in this; by using different takes on the material presented.⁵⁴ The categorisation and framing of national cultural material could therefore be used to reinforce a collective identity.

To provide exhibited objects a meaning and content, so that visitors can create an understanding for their relevance, and in order to relate the object to the subject, museum curators and researchers organize the objects according to categories and themes. In the case of the exhibitions *Gamle Norske Varer* and *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem*, one major theme focused on is the national perspective. The national framing is also reinforced by the whole Norsk Folkemuseum; the name itself indicates that what is being presented here has been given the prefix Norwegian (or related to something Norwegian). As declared above, this process takes part in a system, which relates to hegemonic power and exclusion, and therefore not a neutral or objective process. To create a theme around objects and make national historical framings could be looked upon as excluding, or silencing, other parts of the culture (both the cultural history and the contemporary cultural representation) and might result in the act of creating stereotypes. But even for people that experienced a historical episode, it is difficult to retell the actual happening without excluding details. Bohman is however not critical to the formation of themes. He states that

even in theory it is impossible to grasp the whole story. One must always, in research, exhibitions, documentaries, etc. make a selection of the history. The interesting research aim from a museological perspective is that themes around history have been done, and also how and why this has been performed in a certain direction. [Sic]⁵⁵

This points towards the relevance of studying the thematic context that holds objects like *Tallerken* in the two exhibitions, and also values how the museum will ascribe new contexts for it in new exhibitions. The themes could be looked upon as built on a construction of history, which in turn refers to ideologies around the understanding of a specific culture, and in the case of the Norsk Folkemuseum, the understanding of the Norwegian cultural history. In that way, the formation of ideologies could be seen as

⁵⁴ Bohman, 1997, p. 16

⁵⁵ Bohman, 1997, p. 143 My translation, in original: "även i teorin är det omöjligt att överblicka hela historien. Man måste alltid i forskning, utställningar, dokumentationer m m välja ut delar av historien. Det intressanta forskningsmålet i ett museivetenskapligt perspektiv är att, hur och varför man tematiserat historien i en viss riktning [sic]".

linked to political and cultural aims, with a conscious or non-conscious specific goal. Bohman states that when studying different museums in relation to nationalism it

shows how different specific parts of history is highlighted in order to evoke the proper national sentiment [...] The choice of historical themes are then readily made visible as the only obvious choices of themes – as the objective, "natural" historiography.⁵⁶

This could also be translated into a historical context – where the understanding and presentation of nations proper history in a museum changes according to specific historical ideologies.

But why use objects to illustrate a past we know so little about? And why should objects anchor the burden of mediating history to people that want to learn something about past times? Objects related to cultural historically, that are today valued as a material heritage, bear witness to the people that have been involved in the creating if these objects, and is as a witness of the changing history of humans. As will be explained in the comparative analysis of the two exhibitions, the story of the *Tallerken* can be told in different ways by different thematic contextualisation, by staging an object in different ways and relating it to different values and interpretations of history. But objects often bear witness of more than one story, maybe even more than what could fit into a gallery space. So how can a museum, or its curators, choose what story to mediate, but at the same time avoid excluding parts of the history that might be important to the visitor's desire to create an understanding and feel an identity to the exhibited material? Since the exhibitions at Norsk Folkemuseum, according to the research plan, is produced for "people in Norway", and not longer for "the Norwegian people", a traditional framing of exhibited material could be challenged by including additional interpretation possibilities.⁵⁷ A museum's collection might be what makes a museum understood as a unique institution, since the collection gives a museum a somewhat unique possibility to mediate cultural history in contrast to other cultural institutions, such as libraries and historical archives. The artefacts own materiality links the present to the past, and give the visitors a sense of connection to history. The objects and collections are also often a

⁵⁶ Bohman, 1997, p. 142 My translation, in original: "framgår hur skilda delar av historien lyfts fram för att frammana den rätta nationalkänslan [...]. Valet av historieteman framställs sedan gärna som de enda självklara valen av teman – som den objektiva, "naturliga" historieskrivningen."

⁵⁷ Telste, Kari, *Forskningsplan, Norsk Folkemuseum 2006–2014*, 2006

reinforcement in a museum's own research. Meaningful exhibitions can be produced without any objects at all, and this might be a useful approach when dealing with subjects that objects in the collections do not necessarily relate to (such as many of the exhibitions at *Arbetets Museum* in Norrköping, Sweden, a contemporary historical museum about the history of work where many of the exhibitions are not based on objects but on archival material). One can even argue that objects and collections may limit the interpretation of history, when museums often create knowledge and exhibitions around an already existing collection. In the discussion about the museum's own heritage, senior curator Erica Ravne Scott at Norsk Folkemuseum states that this "heritage" provides a challenging situation, in which the museum has to relate to earlier collection practices when creating new exhibitions. But how can these collections be used in the mediating of the Norwegian history, even if they might have represented something else in former exhibitions, than the museum strives to communicate today?

2.4 Reframing history

As several anthropologists, cultural historian and post-colonial thinkers, such as James Clifford and Thomas Hylland Eriksen have argued, Knut Kjeldstadli also highlights the use of the concept *culture* as defined by a collective communicated pattern of meaning, with vague lines, are somewhat permanent but still changeable, that has some unity but also contradictions, that implicate an exertion of symbolic power but invite opposition.⁵⁸ Kjeldstadli also doubts whether one can even speak of a national culture, if the concept of culture is used as a description of a totality that is original and always constant, well defined and homogeneous, distinctive and clearly controls the acts of its people. But if the concept of culture stands for interactions between patterns of meaning, fluid but with some resistance, including both contradictions and contexts, one can define the nation as a cultural boundary.⁵⁹

During the last 50 years, a focus on multicultural history writing has emerged in order to emphasize a heterogenic description of culture, and to highlight the relations between nations. This might be an effect of the globalisation movement, together with a

⁵⁸ Clifford, James, *The Predicament of Culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art*, H2011b and Univ. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1988, Hylland Eriksen, 1996, Kjeldstadli, Knut, "En Norsk kultur? Ja. En Norsk kultur? Nei", in Engen, Thor Ola, Kulbrandstad, Lars Anders, Syversen Eva-Marie, *Monokultur og multikultur. Nasjonsbyggende diskurser 1905–2005*, Oplandske Bokforlag, 2006, p. 33

⁵⁹ Kjeldstadli, 2006, p. 33

stronger focus on rationality as an administrative and cultural specific area.⁶⁰ In the article "Nasjonale fellesskap – grenser og rammer", Thor Ola Engen, Lars Anders Kulbrandstad and Eva-Marie Syversen suggest a use of the concept pluralism when writing this form of multicultural history.⁶¹ While society on one hand is dependent on a culture consisting of some coherent element that could be adapted by the whole society, cultural variation also has to be stressed. Multi-cultural history writing, alongside an integrating museum perspective by e.g. including immigrant history into museums and reframing of the Norwegian material, would favour a process of building a multicultural nation. Its content would on the one hand break the idea of a cultural homogenised Norwegian culture and its tradition.⁶² To place a national history into a global historical context, and to avoid a delimitation of the national discourse to the borders of the geographical and to an imagined cultural homogeneous Norway might contribute to a widening of the national identity, and open up a broader interpretation of the geographical, cultural and individual identities. Also the objective grand-narrative perspective should be questioned, and by using strategies related to the traditional nation-building project, the task would be to collect and mediate a material cultural heritage, which still could be defined as Norwegian – but in a pluralistic and diverse perspective.⁶³

⁶⁰ Engen, Thor Ola, Kulbrandstad, Lars Anders, Syversen, Eva-Marie, "Nasjonale fellesskap – grenser og rammer : en opptakt til bokas problemstillinger", in Engen, Thor Ola, Kulbrandstad, Lars Anders, Syversen, Eva-Marie (ed.) *Monokultur og multikultur : nasjonsbyggende diskurser 1905–2005*, Vallset, Oplandske bokforlag, 2006, p. 5

⁶¹ Engen, Kulbrandstad , Syversen, 2006, p. 10

⁶² Engen, Kulbrandstad , Syversen, 2006, p. 10–11

⁶³ Engen, Kulbrandstad , Syversen, 2006, p. 10–11

3. National ideologies and museum practices in Norway and at Norsk Folkemuseum

In order to understand the Norsk Folkemuseum's historical and present position as one of the leading cultural history museum institution in Norway, this chapter will illuminate some important courses of events in the museum history, and its relation to a (Norwegian) national identity. The description over the Norsk Folkemuseum's history will also help to understand it's historical position, its relation to the national, cultural and museological development, and will help to relate the *Gamle Norske Varer* and *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem* to a museological framework. This background will also be important in order to argue for how the museum can further in its presentation of a more globalized and multicultural Norway.

3.1 Nationality, identity and museums

The shaping of the modern nation-states emerged in the 1800s, by a social, cultural and political elite. The French Revolution was an important event in history, which shaped ideas of the national state, and also the formation of the national museums all over Europe.⁶⁴ The European aristocracy was challenged, and replaced with a more democratic understanding of the collective. The private aristocracy became public in order to cultivate the larger community, bringing culture to the collective and create a national entity that would serve the nation.⁶⁵ This vision was well formed in the many upcoming national museums, and this model was "exported" to Europe and later worldwide.⁶⁶ The shaping of the modern nation-state included a constructivist reaction towards contemporary ideas about the role of science, and strove to make science more active in the creation of societal and cultural values.⁶⁷ This development took different forms in different contexts, and has been, and still is, dependent on local conditions. It can be recognized in different contemporary museums, evolving from curiosity cabinets into more scientific collections in the 1800s to the 1900s.

⁶⁴ MacDonald, 2003, p. 1

⁶⁵ MacDonald, 2003, p. 1

⁶⁶ MacDonald, 2003, p. 2

⁶⁷ Kjelstadli, 2006, p. 32

Between 1521 and 1814 Norway was under the administrative power of the Danish crown, and when declared independent, the newly formed nation entered a union with Sweden. However, the break-up and political separation from Denmark created an opportunity to strengthen the idea of a Norwegian national state and nationhood.⁶⁸ This was initiated through the building of a national project, which partly included a new mapping of an independent history and to a formulation of cultural traditions. The grand narrative of Norwegian history was re-written, in contrast to the former Danish one, in order to underline the cultural and national independence.⁶⁹ In this process it was stressed that the formation of the Norwegian culture, had been developed through a relatively autonomous progress.⁷⁰ A growing cultural and political elite searched for a nation specific cultural expression, and searched for material culture and historical remains, national narratives and ethnic origin.⁷¹ This re-written and re-defined history was made by a new generation of historians, who managed to draw attention to and strengthen the image of the romanticized Viking- and Middle age eras. The Lutheran reformation and the Scandinavian Kalmar Union also became considered important political phases in the history of an independent Norway.⁷²

Additional reasons for this national focus can be traced to the way Norway, in conformity with other countries in Europe, went through a societal change in the 1800s. It can be characterized by an increased population, a modernization of the agricultural sector and a strong urbanization, which in turn led to a change-in the interpretation of the (un)stabilized folk culture, which was feared to disappear quickly due to the process of modernization.⁷³ Together with a general interest in folk culture, the industrial change was interpreted as a threat towards the material and non-material traditions, which led to a desire amongst museums to form collections that could benefit research and science in order to protect and preserve the culture.⁷⁴ The search for a historically and culturally unified collective was focused on regional folk-culture, which was assumed to be less

⁶⁸Amundsen, Arne Bugge, "National museums in Norway", in Aronsson, Peter, Elgenius, Gabriella (ed.), *Building National Museums in Europe 1750–2010*. Conference proceedings from *EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Bologna 28–30 April 2011*. EuNaMus Report No 1., Linköping University Electronic Press, 2011a, p. 657 and Anderson, 2006

⁶⁹ Galaaen Schith, 2005, p. 20

⁷⁰ Amundsen, 2011a, p. 657

⁷¹ Amundsen, 2011a, p. 657

⁷² Amundsen, Arne Bugge, "Men of Vision, Hans Aall, Moltke Moe and the representations of the emerging nation-state at the Norsk Folkemuseum in Oslo", *ARV. Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* vol. 68, Uppsala, 2011b, p. 38

⁷³ Galaaen Schith, 2005, p. 19

⁷⁴ Galaaen Schith, 2005, p. 19

affected by the approaching modernisation of the Norwegian state. The independent and unrestricted farmers were perceived as carriers of the country's original culture and was attributed a role as key players in the process that led towards the independent Norway. Thus, peasant culture came to be a symbol for the nation's origin.⁷⁵ Strong development in industrialisation of the agricultural sector, together with changes in traditions and ways of living in rural and urban areas, led to the development of museums of cultural history. This started a modernisation process at the museums, which related to political and societal transformations. A shift in the attitude towards collection practises emerged, and Museums of cultural history came to represent both national and regional variations. By collecting objects from the peasant culture, together with documentation of the cultural traditions, the museums aimed to save them for later times.⁷⁶ To develop an experience of an organic and natural community, a national spirit and national identity that would strengthen the collective were in focus.⁷⁷ Research became directed towards an attempt to find the "pure Norwegian culture", which was understood as to be carried by the rural peasant culture – not infected by outer cultural influences such as the more urban areas or the coastal towns. This thematic focus of history is not only reflected in the exhibitions that were produced in an early stage at the museums, but also in the collection practices implemented in the museum work, and has in turn formed large parts of the museum's contemporary collections.

The power of nationalism and national romanticism in Norway contributed to a political development during the late 1800s, and led to a political peak that contributed to the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905.⁷⁸ For example, the Norsk Folkemuseum has been used as a tool to strengthen the nationalist movements, in order to strengthen the mobilization of the Norwegian opinion, also directed against Sweden. (But Galaaen Schith state that this agenda is not as clear in the museums own annual reports from the time, but instead the museum was directed more towards the Norwegian people.⁷⁹)

In contrast to the neighbouring countries Sweden and Denmark, there was no formal National museum established in Norway during the 1800s. Norway was at the time more decentralised and region-orientated. The collection focus at many museums in Norway was directed towards a more fragmented understanding of the cultural

⁷⁵ Eriksen, 2009, p. 80

⁷⁶ Eriksen, 2009, p. 24

⁷⁷ Eriksen, 2009, p. 78

⁷⁸ Amundsen, 2011a, p. 663

⁷⁹ Galaaen Schith, 2005, p. 74

material. Also, an emerging focus on the national regions contributed to a competition of the actual material and objects that were to be exhibited, together with the fact that several other forms of national-like collections emerged in the capital that reinforced a strong national ideology. This contributed to that there been consequently no particular institution at this point that could take on the responsibility of presenting the entire nation Norway.⁸⁰

However, many cultural institutions came to represent these new national ideologies, both in the form of national and regional expressions of identity and new “[...] Norwegian museums were established in order to show publicly the material remains of such a separate Norwegian past.”⁸¹ Anne Eriksen states that the development/existence of museums of cultural history and the focus on folk culture in the 1890s, was a radical invention, that was not only rapidly accepted but also taken for granted and were unquestioned in the nationalistic project where the function was not only to provide knowledge, but also identity.⁸²

3.2 Norsk Folkemuseum, history and ideology

As shown to above, the formation of the many museums, like several other forms of institutions in the late 1800s, were based on these national romantic ideals, and are a form of national institutionalisation that manifested and materialized the pursuit of nationalism. Norsk Folkemuseum was established as a foundation in 1884, first located in an apartment in the centre of Kristiania (or Christiania, today’s Oslo). In 1902 the museum moved to a new locality at Bygdøy, a small island just outside the city centre, which created an opportunity for the museum to expand its collections, and to include an open-air museum for its collections.⁸³ The collections came to include a history of both urban and rural cultural history, from the sixteenth-century. This was a period not covered by the university museums.⁸⁴ In the early stage of the museum’s history, it was intended that the museum would include material that covered the entire Norwegian culture (with clear land lines and cultural boundaries pointed out) and to present the material organized according to their regional origin.⁸⁵ In the exhibitions, the visitors

⁸⁰ Amundsen, 2011a, p. 658–659

⁸¹ Amundsen, 2011b, p. 39

⁸² Eriksen, 2009, p. 92

⁸³ Amundsen, 2011a, p. 663

⁸⁴ Amundsen, 2011b, p. 40

⁸⁵ Amundsen, 2011a, p. 662–663

were brought through a journey in a fictional landscape of the most important areas of rural and urban Norway.

The museum's original ideology was to exhibit everything that could illustrate Norwegian peoples' cultural life.⁸⁶ The objects in the collections were divided and classified into two main groups. The first represented national objects, which included items from the countryside and farming culture and were presenting regional origin. The exhibitions were to "be an arena and a medium to compensate for the accelerating oblivion or the logic of change."⁸⁷ The visitors could therefore be reminded of the origin of their own culture. The second division of the collection held items relating more to urban culture and to the culture of the classes. Furthermore, they related to something more non-national and a culture more effected by international influences. By dividing the Norwegian cultural history in separate exhibitions, it was possible to create a classifying system.⁸⁸

Some of the material was also presented according to a systematic structure, in the so-called "the systematic collection", where objects were ordered according to its meaning or function. This was a contrast to the urban department, where the material presentation followed a chronological development classification order.⁸⁹ After the transfer of the museum to Bygdøy, this classification pattern was slightly blurred, and the objects were divided rather according to their use or function.⁹⁰

Early in the museum's collection practice, there was an ambition to collect items from all over the country, but it has not been an exclusively nationalist project. The collection's value, in relation to the national project was based on a connection between a people's knowledge about their own history, and the understanding and conceptualisation of the nation, in a self-esteem building process.⁹¹ It also aimed for moving away from a representation of chosen parts of the culture (highlights), and towards a broader spectrum of the Norwegian culture was presented.⁹² Many questioned this kind of

⁸⁶ Fosmo Talleraas, Lise Emilie, *Et uregjerlig mangfold? Lokale og regionale museer som saksfelt i norsk kulturpolitikk 1900 – cirka 1970*, PAPERS IN MUSEOLOGY 7, Museology at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå Univeristy, 2009, p. 74

⁸⁷ Amundsen, 2011b, p. 48

⁸⁸ Amundsen, 2011b, p. 44

⁸⁹ Amundsen, 2011b, p. 44–45

⁹⁰ Galaaen Schith, *Kolleger og konkurrenter: forholdet mellom Nordiska museet/Skansen og Norsk Folkemuseum : en undersøkelse med hovedvekt på tidsrommet 1894 til 1907*, Hovedfagsoppgave i historie, Universitetet i Oslo, 2005, p. 54

⁹¹ Galaaen Schith, 2005, p. 64–65

⁹² Eriksen, 2009 p. 77

collecting practises and its presentation of the Norwegian culture. Art historian Lorentz Dietrichson stated that this form of collecting objects, with little or no aesthetic value, was worthless and valueless.⁹³ But Hans Aall claimed that to collect objects in relation to what was considered beautiful, and leave out the rest of the material and stories that could be connected to past times and everyday life in history, was not the right thing to do.⁹⁴ Beauty was not enough for Aall, but this is of course not an exclusive ideology for Norsk Folkemuseum in relation to other similar museums. Aall's interpretation, of which material would best suited to represent Norwegian culture, was "everything that had been used in Norway, even if it was directly or indirectly of foreign origin."⁹⁵ Fosmo Talleraas has also argued that Hans Aall in an early collecting stage collected many of the objects at antique dealers, and that it resulted in a rather fragmented collection. Aall himself questioned this as a scientific method in relation to the systematic collection he strived for, the goal of which was to create a broad representation of the Norwegian culture.⁹⁶

Except from the nation-building program connected to the rise of a public welfare, Aall had a scientific ambition for the museum project, which would include the entire geographical and cultural country.⁹⁷ After the end of the 1800s, these two commitments became more equal. The museum became more established as a research institution, and in 1906 it was determined that all the exhibitions would be based on research. Furthermore, it became important that also un-displayed parts of the collections would be underpinned by research.⁹⁸ Amundsen states that the ideology at the museum bridged several political and social borders, where both conservative and liberals supported the idea of presenting a unified nation.⁹⁹ There were several external actors involved in the formation of Norsk Folkemuseum's ideological program. One of them was the so-called *Lysakerkretsen*, which contributed to the strengthening of the cultural elite, and advocated a centralized nation-building project.¹⁰⁰ This was influenced by a liberal political ideology, which emphasized a national collection campaign. Even if the history of Norway was used in the *Lysakerkretsen* movement, the idea about what could be represented as something Norwegian was both shaped by the traditional and

⁹³ Amundsen, 2011a, p. 663

⁹⁴ Aall, Hans, *Norsk Folkemuseum 1894–1919. Trekk av dets historie*, Kristiania, 1920, p. 1

⁹⁵ Amundsen, 2011b, p. 43

⁹⁶ Fosmo Talleraas, 2009, p. 75

⁹⁷ Fosmo Talleraas, 2009, p. 70

⁹⁸ Galaaen Schith, 2005, p. 64–65

⁹⁹ Amundsen, 2011, p. 662

¹⁰⁰ Galaaen Schith, 2005, p. 60–61

the contemporary. The *Lysakerkretsen* strove to implement these ideologies in a public educational program, which strove for national integration ideology, which would progress the Norwegian national identity.¹⁰¹ The Norsk Folkemuseum has never been defined as an official National Museum, even if the collections covered a national representation of objects.¹⁰² The foundation of the Norsk Folkemuseum has been leading in the movement aiming towards national independency. This early nation-building project, and presentation of a national collection, came to form the foundation for the museum's further research and presentation of the Norwegian rural and urban national culture.¹⁰³ This process can be considered as a museum heritage governed by a former interpretation of materialised cultural heritage that the museum has to relate to in a physical way.

3.3 Later collecting practises and exhibition rhetoric

Collecting practices at museums are constantly under reformation, adapting and relating to changes in political and cultural ideologies. Focus on the national project is today different at Norsk Folkemuseum, and this change has gone through many stages. Because of an challenge for the museums with increased immigration and a growing international environment in Norway, the representation of nationality at Norsk Folkemuseum has been political and cultural challenged. Meeting these quests is not something unquestioned or self-evident. In addition to the change in methods used when contextualising objects and history in exhibition contexts, there has also been a shift in the way the museum evaluates each collected object. Although the museum had the function to represent the nation of Norway, many ethnic minorities were excluded from the representation of the history of Norway, both in collections and exhibitions. But in 1951 the *Etnografiska Samiska samlingen* (ethnographic Museum's Sámi Collection) were integrated with the Norsk Folkemuseum's collections, from the Universities collections in the Ethnographical Museum.¹⁰⁴ In 1975 Norsk Folkemuseum still had a focus on presenting the peasant and urban culture, but the collection practises and exhibition productions expanded, and came to involve studies of other parts of culture,

¹⁰¹ Fosmo Talleraas, 2009, p. 72

¹⁰² Amundsen, 2011a, p. 663

¹⁰³ Rudeng, Erik, Museer for det 21. århundre? Utfordringen, debatten, planleggingen : symposium på Norsk folkemuseum 28–29. November 1994, 2003, p. 7–8

¹⁰⁴ Amundsen, 2011a, p. 663

like industrial workers, the culture of the Sami and Kven people.¹⁰⁵ Integration of ethnical minorities into the national frame can be related to new ideological trends amongst scholars and museum workers in the 1970s, which affected the way museums operated with history and objects in museum collections and representation. Former viewpoints regarding the possibility to "save" a total representation of the cultural history was challenged. With new ideologies directed towards a broader understanding of collection practice, other groups in society were included and not only a traditional understanding of Norwegian peasant (and urban) culture. During the 1990s the representation of the uniform and idealising Norway were even more deeply questioned. The museum had been an important mediator of Norwegian culture, and an important actor in the process of the nation-building project. But an interpretation of the pure isolated nation is now understood to be an excluding process. It were identified that the culture of those who arrived to the country during the last 30–40 years, was absent in exhibitions and collections. Bysamlingen was now no longer able to represent a definite and proud nation's history, which only saw an isolated country. The museum has, through various programs, worked to transform this into something different.

Lise Camilla Ruud and Terje Planke exemplifies this by showing how the museum worked with the mediation of Rolstaloftet, and how the museum has chosen to downplay the national stories of the building and instead describe its architectural and technical characteristics.¹⁰⁶ Change in the understanding of what a materialised history is able to symbolize, has affected the physical outcome of exhibition rhetoric. Despite this, the physical and contextual representation in exhibitions of course still presents something *Norwegian*. And although it is not one of the museum's most dearly formulated objectives, the existing exhibitions should strive towards a strengthening of the Norwegian national identity.¹⁰⁷ During the past 10 years, in addition to new acquisitions and research towards the traditionally built collection, the focus has expanded to concern also the period of the 1900s. Arne Bugge Amundsen states that the museum has challenged traditional museum areas, by this focus on later urban and rural history, also relating to later Norwegian migration politics and multicultural ideology (but only

¹⁰⁵ Rudeng, 2003, p. 10

¹⁰⁶ Ruud, Lise Camilla, Planke, Terje, "Rolstadloftet, En vitenskapshistorisk biografi", Naguib, Rogan (ed.). *Materiell kultur og kulturens materialitet*, Oslo, Novus forlag, 2011, p. 51

¹⁰⁷ Telste, 2006

succeeded partially with this challenge).¹⁰⁸ A trace of this change in new approaches towards the forming of a cultural identity is a new focus on the material collection and research in the research plan the museum has followed since 2006. Here, it is stated that research must be innovative and creative and that it aims to put the Norwegian into the new historical and global context in order to be the main distributor of a national collective understanding of history.¹⁰⁹ The research is set as the main method in the ways of creating a foundation to mediate history, and that it can help to create new understandings and also develop new models for using the Norwegian cultural heritage in an identity project. The focus is no-longer on "the Norwegian People" but rather on "people in Norway".¹¹⁰ Since the museum was founded, (the nation and) the society in Norway has changed, and that this is a challenge. This has been something the museum has had to adapt to, on both the practical and theoretical levels, which can be seen in the research plan.¹¹¹ Here it becomes clear how one of the museum's motives with present exhibitions and programme production, is to present the material in relation to the motto *Norge i verden og verden i Norge* (Norway in the world and the world in Norway). By this, the museum wants to show how historical processes have shaped Norwegian culture, and how this has resulted in today's complex and multicultural society.¹¹²

According to the museum's research plan 2006–2014, this motive should help to "elucidate historical processes that have shaped Norwegian culture and society throughout history and to present cultural diversity and complexity in contemporary Norway".¹¹³ This can be recognized in many of the newer exhibits, field of research, and fields of collection at the museum. For example the exhibition *Obos-gården Wesselsgate 15* presents apartments where upper, middle and working class culture in Oslo from the later 1800s until present day is exhibited. The apartment that represents a segment of the Norwegian culture closest to the present time is *A Pakistani home in Norway – 2002*, which shows a home of a fictive Pakistani family. This part of the exhibition is produced in conjunction with a Pakistani family, together with interviews and fieldwork.¹¹⁴ This is

¹⁰⁸ Amundsen, 2011a

¹⁰⁹ Telste, 2006, p. 3

¹¹⁰ Telste, 2006, p. 15–16

¹¹¹ Telste, 2006, p. 7

¹¹² Telste, 2006, p. 16

¹¹³ Telste, 2006, p. 16, in original: "belyse historiske prosesser som har formet norsk kultur og samfunn gjennom tidene og vise kulturelt mangfold og kompleksitet i dagens Norge".

¹¹⁴ *A Pakistani home in Norway – 2012* <http://www.norskfolkemuseum.no/en/Exhibits/The-Apartment-Building/A-Pakistani-Home-in-Norway-2002/> 2012-04-03

an example of how the museum moved away from an understanding of themselves as exclusive carriers of knowledge, and that the knowledge and understanding of Norwegian history and culture identity is held by people (present and former) living in Norway. When analysing Norsk Folkemuseum's work with the exhibition *Norge, et land for meg? Pakistanerne oppdager Norge*, Elisabeth Stavem argues that Norsk Folkemuseum follows a structural functionalist model when working with integration projects in exhibition and documentation, where societies are understood as separated from each other.¹¹⁵ Stavem states that the museum mediates "their values" (the exhibited cultures values) as apart from "our values" (the Norwegian values) in the exhibitions representation of the exhibited material.¹¹⁶ She exemplifies how Pakistan in the exhibition is not identified as a differentiated country, but mediated as a coherent "other" country/culture. Stavem suggests a different focus in an exhibition that aims toward integration, where the museums should not be afraid of disagreements and conflicts, which is a natural part of society. If following this suggestion, museums can create a representation for and of immigrants and their ancestors, not as a homogeneous ethnic group, but as individuals. To avoid a stereotyping description of a group of people, but rather mediate how immigrants "are like us, in that they are not the same among themselves" is one of Stavem's strongest recommendation.¹¹⁷

During recent years, the museum also has had a self-reflecting perspective in shaping exhibitions and programs, where the history, cultural heritage and conservation processes have been seen as relevant in relation to the communication to the audience. The museum's own work (as a social actor) is considered important in the transmission of Norwegian cultural history.¹¹⁸ This can also be seen in a showcase in *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem* where the museum presents preservation processes and part of the plans of the new basic exhibition. This is related to an aim towards making the politicians understand the amount of treasures hidden in the previous and closed permanent exhibition, but which visitors do not have access to.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Stavem, 2005, p. 98

¹¹⁶ Stavem, 2005, p. 103

¹¹⁷ Stavem, 2005, p. 100, my translation, in original: "er helt like oss, på den måten at de ikke er like seg i mellom".

¹¹⁸ Ruud, Planke, 2011, p. 54

¹¹⁹ Ravne Scott, Erika, Senior Curator Norsk Folkemuseum, interview Norsk Folkemuseum 14-02-12

4. The exhibition's curatorial performance

As shown above, the formation of exhibitions take part in a curatorial and ideological development, connected to museological trends. Different approaches toward contextualisation, physical representation and exhibition design, influence the national message the museum mediates. This chapter will describe the *Gamle Norske Varer's* and *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem's* physical content and presented context, with an emphasis on the *Tallerken*. There will also be an investigation into the surrounding exhibition space, design and lighting, with the aim to explore the historical development of the aesthetics and pedagogical exhibition rhetoric. As we will see, the *Gamle Norske Varer's* gallery space is connected to the white cube, and therefore there will be an emphasis on the development of the art gallery space.

4.1 The staging of an object

The name of the exhibition *Gamle Norske Varer*, which opened at the Norsk Folkemuseum in 1937, tells something about the thematisation of the exhibition. The word *Gamle*, the *old*, can be interpreted as a reference to the historical relations the exhibited objects held. Even if handicraft traditions might have influenced the contemporary production of Norwegian craft, this was not an exhibition about present-day production of goods, but something long since ended. However, this seems to be an indication over how a national romantic idea was influencing the exhibition rhetoric, aiming to put forward traditional national craft that was to inspire a better contemporary design and production. The word *Norske*, the *Norwegian*, tells that the objects presented in this exhibition, belongs to Norwegian traditions and have been produced within the borders of this country, with less influence from other countries. The *Varer*, the *commodities*, indicated that these objects were trading objects, and were not interrelated or communicated as used and worn by the people.

The exhibition presented the *Tallerken* in a built-in and glass covered showcase that hold the object together with 11 other faience objects like plates, mugs, and a terrine in a room dedicated for *Norsk fajanse* (Norwegian Faience). The material presented in the exhibition was divided up between nine rooms of different shapes and sizes, following a thematic division. Norsk Folkemuseum's 50-years report, that covers the time period between 1894–1944, presents how the exhibition space for the *Gamle Norske Varer* was divided into many small rooms, and how the objects were placed in showcases of

different shapes, with the aim to create an exciting, and varied experience. This strategy is as well evident in the varying colours on the walls, and how they are covered with differing materials. Accordingly the forms of the showcases varied in order to give each object category the most suitable arrangement.¹²⁰

In the showcase, the *Tallerken* was placed in front of a textile in a beige colour, and a green wooden border was placed around the showcase in order to frame the objects, dividing and creating a distance from the surrounding wall, which was painted in a grey-beige colour on a smooth surface. The objects that accompanied the *Tallerken* in the showcase were placed at three levels, and the *Tallerken* at the lowest level with the painted side (the front-side), directed toward the viewer with its downside hidden from view. The purpose built exhibition space was formed in a H-shape, forcing the visitors to pass several parts of the exhibition more than once, and the *Norsk Fajanse* part in particular, since the room was located between the *Norsk Glass* (Norwegian Glass), and *Norsk Pottemakerarbeide* (Norwegian Pottery) at the very end of a corridor.

Other objects in the exhibition were placed in a similar manner, and according to the 50-years report's presentation, the colouring and the material of the interior design, differed for each space. The total of nine rooms presented objects categorised by Norwegian Goldsmiths, Norwegian Blacksmiths, Norwegian Ironworks, Norwegian Books and Norwegian Paper, Norwegian Instruments and Norwegian Glass paintings, Norwegian Tin / Norwegian Can Casting, Norwegian Glass, Norwegian Pottery (my translation of the original names of the rooms). All the materials, colouring and lightning seem to have been individually arranged for every material category. An example is how the walls surrounding the space dedicated for objects created by Norwegian goldsmiths were painted in yellow, a colour thought to emphasize the golden surfaces of the exhibited objects.

The lightning was arranged inside of the showcases behind a hidden panel. The showcase lightning, the general lightning, and the smooth daylight, made the objects clearly visible. It seems that the lightning was given extra attention when curating the space for the exhibited material. The exhibition was located on the second floor of the building, where the daylight came from windows placed just beneath the ceiling, which provided the exhibition with some sort of "top lightning". It is uncertain whether the exhibition space was designed in direct relation to the exhibition and its contents, but daylight appears to have been of secondary importance for the design, since electricity

¹²⁰ *Norsk Folkemuseums 50-årsberetning, 18 94–1944*, Norsk Folkemuseum, s. 137

was installed earlier. There was general lighting in each room, and several of the showcases had built-in lighting systems with hidden screens, or with underlying light, that created a backlighting of the objects. The backlighting was particularly prominent in the room exhibiting Norwegian glass. Here, the general lightning was dimmed, walls were painted in a darker colour, and a background lightning behind the built-in showcases provided the objects with a backlighting that emphasized the object-specific properties. The lightning is also mentioned in the 50-years report. The strategy was to adjust the lighting in relation to the individual characteristics of the objects.¹²¹ In an exhibition review in *Arbeiderbladet* from 1938, the lightning is described as something "close to perfection", but not contradicting to the harmony in the interiors.¹²² (The electrical lightning also gave the museum new possibilities to have the museum open after dark. Electrical lighting was mentioned in the same review, and described as a great opportunity for visitors to tour the museum at hours impossible prior to the its installation.) Klouk discusses lightning arrangement in relation to the pre-white-cube arrangement. She states that

a varied system of lightning in the museum would not only offer optimal viewing conditions for individual visitors but would also emphasize the individual character of the artwork, its period and the geographic region in which it had been produced.¹²³

This indicates how the *Tallerken* in Gamle Norske Varer were exhibited as an object representing an aesthetics idea of goods produced in a geographical defined area, Norway, and not primarily as a representative for a Norwegian culture.

There where no supporting labels or explicit signs in the exhibition space informing about context of the exhibited material. An exception, however, were the signs above each doorway, with the name of the specific room to inform about what type of categorisation the specific room was dedicated to. A booklet gave some information about what material the *Tallerken* was made of: European and Norwegian faience production, and what artists that were thought to have been involved in the production of the *Tallerken*. Except for this brief description, the museum provided the visitors with very little text-based information regarding the social and cultural environment possibly connected to the object's history.

¹²¹ *Norsk Folkemuseums 50 årsberetning*, 1894–1944, Norsk Folkemuseum, s. 137

¹²² *Arbeiderbladet*, 6 oktober, 1938

¹²³ Klouk, 2009, s. 37

When Norsk Folkemuseum selected the object the *Tallerken* to represent a part of Norwegian cultural history in 2009, 72 years after the opening of *Gamle Norske Varer*, the physical and contextual presentation of the object as in the *Gamle Norske Varer* was changed. The name, *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem*, suggest a context for the *Tallerken* which indicates that visitors are engaging with a metaphorical journey through time and space. In contrast to the *Gamle Norske Varer*, the name of the exhibition does not exclude that cultural history from outside the nation is presented.

The *Tallerken* is in this exhibition to be located in one of the modern wall-fixed showcases, together with objects like a *krydderoppsats* (a cruet-stand), a piece of silver cutlery, glasses, *karaffeler* (carafes), a *ølkrus* (beermugs), a *sukkerbøsse* (sugar caster), a *beger* (a cup), *pokaler* (goblets), a *sauseneb* (a gravy boat) and a *kremkopp med lokk* (a cream pitcher with lid). Together with a text-panel, this showcase illustrates the theme *Set Tables*, and deliberates how the dining room has been used in different context during the 1600–1700s. Historical changes in the social play around food and dining, alcohol consumption, uses of napkins, knives, and forks, give supplementary context to the *Tallerken*. An additional flanking showcase, presents a staged dining room with a set table in an environment, similar to the one found in the dollhouse. Two dressed manikins, a man and a woman, act as hosts for the evening. The surrounding walls are equipped with furniture, paintings and decorative objects to reinforce the reading of the space as a dining room. The attached text-panel discusses the *Practical and Symbolic*, such as the symbolic role of the dining room in a social environment. It also presents a historical context, and the roles that different pieces of furniture and objects have played in Norway during the 1700–1900s.

The space where the exhibition *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem* is presented, is located on the first floor of the Norsk folkemuseum's main indoor exhibition hall, placed at the centralised museum square. The building holds exhibitions featuring daily life and living conditions in Norway from the 1500s up to present time. Spatial signs and formation support a particular storyline. The context built up around *Tallerken* in *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem* is in a large perspective a fictive story, although it is based on research about the historic era that the exhibition presents. The objects' own histories or uniqueness are not presented explicitly, but placed in this fictive story about a family living in the dollhouse, representative for a historical Norwegian urban-life. Showcases holding some of the objects have slightly different forms and shape, some are in what we would consider a more "traditional" exhibition design with wooden frames, and some are

of a more “modern”¹²⁴ form, like wall fixed and glass covered cases. In some areas of the exhibition, a black fence is placed in front of objects. The space holds no windows, but a general lighting, with an emphasis on spots directed towards each exhibited object, which gives the space a dimmed lighting effect. The surrounding walls in the exhibition are painted white, and white draped curtains work as flexible room dividers to outline the given route of the storyline. The objects’ arrangement in the room, together with other visual signs, point out how to follow the story presented, but do not limit the visitor to move freely around the gallery. The story presented in the written context that accompanies the exhibited objects, is not dependent on a clearly developed line of thought, and gives the visitor the freedom to interact with the material in different ways.

4.2 The historical staging of objects

The spatial and contextual presentation in *Historiska reiser i dannede hjem* focuses upon a wide understanding of the Norwegian culture, relatively up-to-date with a contemporary focus on nationality at cultural history museums. But, as we will see, due to the great empathy of the *Gamle Norske Varer’s* aesthetic presentation of the *Tallerken*, can be related to a historical development of art-galleries.

During the late 1800s, a European trend developed for the establishment of the gallery space, together with an understanding of how an aesthetic formation of the room and the arrangement of objects affect the experience and the ability to learn when encountering the object. The thematisation and categorisation of the exhibited material that dominated the art galleries during the late 1800s and early 1900s was organizing the exhibited objects side by side, interpreted by schools and historical origin. The observer’s subjective experience of an art-piece or of the total exhibition was acknowledged as important in the arrangement. The expected experience was, however, predicted in a universal manner and was seen as something adaptable. The exhibited material was in other words, thought to be interpreted similarly by all spectators, and the idea was that the same visual and cultural factors would direct all individuals, periods and nations.¹²⁵

The development of the Louvre in the late 1700s, closely connected to the French revolution, played an important role in the democratisation of art, and the development

¹²⁴ “traditional” here refers to the early 1900s, while “modern” refers to a more contemporary design

¹²⁵ Klonk, 2009, s. 49

of the gallery space.¹²⁶ In the 1800s, further standardisation of the gallery room was developed especially in e.g. Germany, and Wilhelm von Bode's formation of what today is called Bode Museum in Berlin was developed to set a standard. Bode's idea was that rather than placing art in a total room-arrangement, or present art connected to historical development as it had been done before, the gallery should be arranged in order to emphasise each individual object's (art-piece's) unique expression in colour and formation, by introducing different colours and textures into the gallery interior.¹²⁷ Different colour schemes were used in relation to the gallery space, in order to understand the material's colour's specific influence of the experience and the expression of each exhibited object.¹²⁸ There was also an aim to transform the large public art gallery into more private rooms, which led to a reduction of the gallery space into smaller rooms, and the art was placed at eye-level so that the spectator could approach the object both physically and closely.¹²⁹

Following a museological trend in early 1900s (and is sometimes still used today), objects were put on display in order to "speak for themselves".¹³⁰ This does not mean that they were not placed in a discourse that is neither spatial, textual or object-based, but rather according to a more aesthetic presentation.¹³¹ In *Gamle Norske Varer's* aesthetic mediating of the *Tallerken*, it is also possible to recognize a trend in exhibition rhetoric that can be associated with an aesthetic expression identified in *Museums of decorative arts and design* in Europe. *Museums of decorative arts and design* were partly a development of the universal expositions and fairs, and were also connected to the national project. The targeted audience was mainly designers and craftsmen but the exhibitions were also open for a general public.¹³²

The displayed material at these types of museum was exhibited around style and/or standard collections, organized into different sections according to materials and techniques of production.¹³³ The objects were placed with little connection between them, and provided with a minimum of information regarding social or historical contexts. Here, one can identify a parallel of the type of exhibition rhetoric used in *Gamle*

¹²⁶ Cessole, Bruno de (ed.), *Louvre: portrait of a museum*, Stewart, Tabori & Chang, New York, 1998

¹²⁷ Klonk, 2009, s. 4

¹²⁸ Many ideas for colouring were inspired from Goethe theories about colour, e.g. Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, *Theory of Colours*, Charles Lock Eastlake, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982

¹²⁹ Klonk, 2009, s. 85

¹³⁰ Vergo, 1989, p. 49

¹³¹ This was however not a dominating trend at cultural history and open-air museums

¹³² Glambek, 2003, p. 229–231

¹³³ Glambek, 2003, p. 238

Norske Varer. This can also be identified in the *Arbeide og ordning i kulturhistoriske museer* (1925), where Hans Aall describes in what ways objects should be exhibited.¹³⁴ They all stress how walls and lightning should be ‘invisible’, or even imitate the original surroundings of the objects, a realistic aesthetical approach.¹³⁵ But even if the exhibition rhetoric in *Gamle Norkse Varer* is similar to these kinds of exhibitions, Aall also meant that the presentation and collecting practices at *Museum of decorative arts* were too narrow for the cultural history project, and that the preservation work did not match up with the visions laid out for the Norsk Folkemuseum. Instead, Aall wanted to collect more everyday objects, involve researchers and a broader audience: ergo, without a commercial aim.¹³⁶

The spatial curatorial tools used in the exhibition *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem* could be linked to the new gallery space that Charlotte Klouk refers to when describing German influences during the 1920s, that came to bring forth a new form of gallery space with an idea about how museums should be formed as empty holders and neutral containers. By using white and flexible walls as a neutral fond for the exhibited material, the objects were intended to be exhibited as unaffected by the outside world. The room’s flexibility was seen as important, in order to be adaptable to the material that was to be exhibited. The aim was also not to leave any part of the exhibition unplanned. This development was partly effected by new interior decorating fashion, especially from Walter Gropius’ Bauhaus buildings in Dresden.¹³⁷ Also Mies van der Rohe and other members of the Bauhaus group created an innovative bright and minimalistic interior style in 1920 and early 1930s, that affected the contemporary gallery space, and became standard in exhibition design in Europe in the 1930s. Later on in the US, the gallery MoMa in New York City came to be an important actor for further development of gallery space as the “the white cube.”¹³⁸ Earlier debates over which colours that best fitted to emphasise the arts own expression decreased, and the space became considered neutral and flexible.¹³⁹ What would come to be called “the white cube” was developed to put forth the expressionistic art that was intended to be approached closely, and with a lot of

¹³⁴ Aall, Hans, *Arbeide og ordning i kulturhistoriske museer: kort veiledning*, Oslo, Norske museers landsforbund, 1925

¹³⁵ Aall, 1925, p. 36

¹³⁶ Hegard, Tonte, *Hans Aall: mannen, visjonen og verket*, Oslo, Norsk Folkemuseum, 1994, p. 65

¹³⁷ Klouk, 2009, p. 88 – 89

¹³⁸ For further discussion about the development of the white cube in the US, see O’Doherty, Brian, *Inside the white cube: the ideology of the gallery space*, Expanded ed., Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1999

¹³⁹ Klouk, 2009, p. 124

free space in between the art-pieces, in order to affect the viewer's senses.¹⁴⁰ The aim was also to provide a intimate collective understanding and experience of the exhibited material, and the idea was to suggest to follow several presented lines of thoughts. The visitors were, however, still free to move around the space by their own free will. Also, ideas about a phenomenological experimental experience were dedicated to the gallery space, where the curator or the artist produced a total-experience for the spectator.¹⁴¹ This challenged earlier thoughts about the gallery space as a contemplative space, which was now instead to generate a collective public viewing experience, and affect the visitor's feelings.¹⁴²

4.3 The mediating of space and context

As a theatrical stage for the *Tallerken* in the exhibition from 1937, *Gamle Norske Varer*, a varying interior with design was shaped for the different grouping of objects. This way of exposing and exhibiting objects relates to the gallery space developed in late 1800s, where the aesthetic value of the objects were favoured and accentuated and the experience of the physical material was favoured. The main focus in the exhibition was to display the products as representative of traditional Norwegian crafting guilds, although the visitors were provided with a minimum of social context that might have been connected to the object. This scarcity of information might have interfered with the chance to create a deeper connection to the *Tallerken*, and to a personal experience with faience production and its role in different historical contexts.¹⁴³ But instead, the object was put on display and arranged in order to provide an experience of the object "Das Ding an Sich" – the thing in itself, not in relation to the object's own individual history or in relation with different understandings of what something Norwegian stands for.¹⁴⁴ What today might seem as important information in order to "understand" an object,

¹⁴⁰ Klonk, 2009, p. 105

¹⁴¹ Klonk, 2009, p. 108–109

¹⁴² Klonk, 2009, p. 120

¹⁴³ An analysis of an objects different roles and meanings in different historical contexts is performed by e.g. Camilla Mordhorsts in *Genstandsfortællinger. Fra Museum Wormianum til de moderne museer*. Museum Tusulanums Forlag, København, 2009. Here Mordhorsts follows objects to see how they through time has been interpreted and reinterpreted within the museum institutional framework, which provides an insight into how new meanings are formed, and how the knowledge about material is based on changes in the perception of science and knowledge in museums.

¹⁴⁴ The philosophical term *Das Ding an Sich*, is ascribed to Immanuel Kant, who argued that the only thing we can interpret of an object, is what we actually see it as, as a part of the reality as we experience it here and now. Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik av det rena förnuftet*. Stockholm: Thales, 2004

such as physical origin, previous owners, different significance it has been assigned in different periods, and how the object has taken part in a material and conceptual development of Norway seems to have been secondary in *Gamle Norske Varer*. The Norwegian history seems timeless and static, and the *Tallerken*, together with the other objects played the main character in the staging of Norwegian guild crafting history, in which the historical and social context is un-questioned.

In the stage set up for the *Tallerken* created in 2009, the object does no longer play the main character in the narrative.¹⁴⁵ In relation to Bal's argumentations, it is instead assigned the role of a supporting actor or illustrative object in a blueprint for the greater narrative of a Norwegian past. In *Gamle Norske Varer*, the *Tallerken* was turned into a representative of a romanticised idea of what can be interpreted as an every-day object, in order to transform Norwegian goods to pieces of art. The arrangement of the gallery interior was created in order to stage the object, and shows how the space design was formed to improve the aesthetic experience of the objects. *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem* stages the *Tallerken* in a less romanticised way, by placing the object in a different contextualised relation to other objects, so it can more directly simulate and relate to its previous function. The present role assigned to the object is more similar to its original role, at the same time that the object plays a more secondary role in relation to a larger communicated storyline, in which it is assigned to a wider context than its own aesthetic presence.

The spatial discourses that surround the *Tallerken* in *Gamle Norske Varer* and *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem* differ not only in a physical and contextual way, but in the diverse media technology supporting the presentation of the object. Here one must take into account the historical technological developments that have taken place between the two exhibitions, but it seems that *Gamle Norske Varer* was considered a much more modern in its technological performance. The example described above, how modern lightning (for that period) made it possible to visit the exhibition during extended periods, seems to have impressed many. One newspaper article indicates that *Gamle Norske Varer* was considered to be very modern, partly due to the new way of lighting objects with modern electric lighting.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Bal, 1996

¹⁴⁶ *Arbeiderbladet*, 6 oktober, 1938

Historiske reiser i dannete hjem however, does not seem particularly modern in its technological production. The exhibition was produced in a short period, intended as a pre-exhibition for a possible future major permanent exhibition.¹⁴⁷ This has affected the exhibition's technical and physical performance, and makes it not seem as up-to-date as the other exhibitions at the Norwegian Folk Museum. According to McLuhan, technology mediates a message that follows the experience and interpretation of the exhibited material.¹⁴⁸ This shows how the different takes on technologies in the two exhibitions affect the interpretation and experience of the mediated narrative. In *Gamle Norske Varer*, perhaps the visitors became even “blinded” by the new medium of electric lighting, and the historical context became secondary.

This also stresses the different aesthetic focus the two exhibitions have been provided with. While in *Gamle Norske Varer* it was the individual and subjective aesthetic experience that was to be related to an imagined Norwegian historical past that was emphasised in *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem* as the (collective) understanding of Norwegian history. In *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem*, the *Tallerken* and the surrounding space is not presented primarily to give the visitor an aesthetic experience of what might have been considered as Norway's “beautiful past”, but to illustrate a narrative about international influences on Norwegian cultural history and how Norway has developed in relation to, and depending on these influences, through travel and exchange. Here, the emphasis on how Norway has been influenced by other cultures, has been put forward in the mediating of the *Tallerken's* context which transforms the object into a symbol of how both historical and contemporary Norway is a non-fixed cultural unit, and how it can hold different relations to the national identity project. Norway is presented not as one unified country, but dependant on the rest of the world, connected and shaped by a larger context.

This makes it more possible for people not referring to themselves as “Norwegians”, to be able to identify with the context being presented, since it acknowledge how the Norwegian society is built up around many cultures and histories. It also gives a possibility to read the *Tallerken* from different viewpoints, since the fictive story opens up for connection to other (fictional or non-fictional) stories around an object, and therefore other cultures. The story, and the identity shaping process being created in the

¹⁴⁷ Ravne Scott, Erika, Senior Curator Norsk Folkemuseum, interview Norsk Folkemuseum 14-02-12

¹⁴⁸ McLuhan, 1999

exhibition, is fluid and adaptable in a greater way than in *Gamle Norske Varer*. The *Tallerken's* secondary role in the staging of this narrative that the object plays a part in, is more transformable since the story being told in one way is imaginary, and also includes other perspectives, which open up the possibility of accommodating a plurality of national identities. The object in itself is not the important issue; it is the different possibilities for interpreting it.

As described in chapter three, the manifestation of something Norwegian was stressed at the museum during the national romantic era, which has also influenced later exhibition and collecting practises at Norsk Folkemuseum. The urbanisation and modernisation process at the time was understood as a threat to traditional handicraft. In a striving towards a unifying actor, putting forward a traditional Norwegian crafts history, *Gamle Norske Varer* can be interpreted as a reaction towards this threatening development. The uses of historical material references were turned into a representation for something "purely Norwegian". In *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem*, the *Tallerken* is still a materialized representation over a Norwegian past, but the understanding of what something Norwegian stands for has changed. Today, the national discourse has been changed, and follows a contemporary political and cultural understanding of what forms national identity and the nation of Norway. The hegemonic structure has been challenged, as manifested through the spatial language the museum uses to speak to its visitors when presenting the *Tallerken*.

The contextual and spatial discourse created for the *Tallerken* in *Gamle Norske Varer* followed this national romantic tradition in which the object seems to have been interpreted as a Norwegian piece of goods, with strong connections with traditional Norwegian culture. What something Norwegian stands for is not questioned or deliberated, but the exhibition seems rather to take for granted a collective understanding about what Anderson would refer to as the *imagined community* where Norway, as the objects in the exhibition, stands geographically and culturally isolated.¹⁴⁹ The exhibition reinforced an understanding of Norway as a coherent and unified geographical country, only by talking of Norwegian production as something that goes for the whole country (even if some varieties are mentioned in the booklet). By not emphasising international influences and regional differences within the exhibited material, the exhibition creates a hegemonic definition over what is to represent the

¹⁴⁹ Anderson, 2006

history of Norwegian craft. In *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem* the nation is still imagined, but more open towards re-imagination since it in a wider perspective, accepting the different social and cultural layers.

In both of the exhibitions, the *Tallerken* is placed behind a glass coverage that functions as a physical element which reinforces a distance between the visitor and the exhibited object. Only one side of the object is to be displayed, and although the *Tallerken* is exhibited together with other objects and text-based information, the object is perceived as rather solitary, which increases the space creating a distance between the viewer and the objects that are to connect the visitor to a historical past. Mieke Bal stresses this action when discussing the scene-perspective, and considers how exhibitions often place objects in isolation from their surroundings.¹⁵⁰ This isolation of objects can be recognized in the ideas of the white cube, as described above. The white cube can be seen as functioning as an isolator, not just creating a distance between the exhibited material and the outside world, but also between the spectators' experience and the possibility to relate the experiences to something outside the museum.¹⁵¹ The white cube has been questioned and artists and other actors have through institutional critique challenged and questioned the understanding of gallery space as a neutral space. Klonk even argues that the complete white cube never existed, at least not in the purpose to create the enclosed space of a cube. Klonk claims that the gallery space could not be interpreted as "a hermetically sealed space separated from everyday concerns"¹⁵² The exhibited material always relates to something outside the museum. Also of the gallery itself is "throughout history [...] shaped by contemporary aesthetic beliefs, political debates and market forces".¹⁵³ And the objects exhibited in *Gamle Norske Varer*, where not produced in order to be exhibited at a museum. Instead they were created in order to be used, worn and experienced physically by its owners. Klonk suggests that the gallery space should be further developed in order to create a fluent and flexible room, where the spectators could be active in the mediating.

¹⁵⁰ Bal, 1996

¹⁵¹ Klonk, 2009, p. 217

¹⁵² Klonk, 2009, p. 217

¹⁵³ Klonk, 2009, p. 217-218

4.4 The “aesthetic” and the “contextual” exhibition

As shown above, the two exhibitions have two different takes on the way they represent the *Tallerken*. While *Gamle Norske Varer* might resemble something that could be defined as “pre-white cube” with a focus on the aesthetic (national) experience of the *Tallerken*, *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem* resembles more of a “post-white cube” with a focus on the (national) history and narration. When referring to *New Museology*, Vergo proclaims how he interprets exhibitions related to a spectrum, where in one end of the scale there is the “aesthetic” exhibition, where the exhibited object is the most important part of the mediating. An “understanding” of the object is considered to be essential for the interpretation and the experience in the exhibition, at that this practice is a private act, shared between the object and its spectator. Objects exhibited in these forms of exhibitions are less provided with text- or verbal support. The museum objects were supposed to be “experience’, but there is no clear definition over *what* is to be experienced. Vergo also states that these exhibitions are “arrogant and uncompromising’, and that they presuppose a high degree of knowledge in each spectator, and that the exhibitions do not take in consideration visitors not matching a specific (and narrow) target-group, and that all visitors have a coherent way of perception over an object’s aesthetics. On the other side of this scale of presenting objects in exhibitions, Vergo describes what he refers to as “contextual” exhibitions. Here, the object in itself is of a minor importance in the bigger narrative. The object is more “regarded purely as an object of contemplation”¹⁵⁴ and manifests something larger than its own physical presence. The object stands as a supporting symbol in a larger perspective. In these forms for exhibitions, conventionally aiming for education, there is a lot of textual information together with other forms of informative media (computers, guided tours, etc.). Vergo also states how the aesthetics and spatial formation of the gallery space can be as important, or as meaningful for the mediating and learning outcome, as the actual exhibited objects.¹⁵⁵

Vergo is equally dissatisfied by this form for exhibitions as with the “aesthetic” exhibition, because they tend to over-contextualise the exhibited objects, and a clutter of texts and signs erases all form of private meditation and personal interpretation. The object is placed in the dark, and might even be interpreted as

¹⁵⁴ Vergo, 1989, p. 51

¹⁵⁵ Vergo, 1989, p. 54

meaningless. Vergo even asks if the object is necessary at all.¹⁵⁶ The object that *Historiske reiser o dannede hjem* is built up around, the doll Mr. Siboni, has never existed in the context of this exhibition. The whole context is built up in order to tell the story about a Norwegian past, and is represented by an object that has been missing as long as anyone can remember. The context created around the missing object is supported by other exhibited objects, textual- and verbal information. But, as I see it, this is not just another way of rhetorically putting objects in the dark. It is rather a way for the museum to not chain the history to one set of objects.

¹⁵⁶ Vergo, 1989, p. 49–53

5. The *Tallerken* reframed

The new permanent basic exhibition, with the working title *TidsRom*, is at a planning stage at Norsk Folkemuseum, with the aim to fill the gap in the representation of history that was created when the exhibition *Bysamlingen* closed. As described earlier, *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem* is a form of pre-project for *TidsRom*, and follows the same thematic concepts, and was intended to represent Norwegian urban life between the 1600s and 1800s. One of the aims with the *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem* as a pre-project, was to demonstrate to the general public and politicians, the kinds of historically interesting objects and stories that were hidden in the closed exhibition *Bysamlingen*. Another goal of the pre-project was to gather information regarding what parts of history that were generally lacking in the common knowledge of the actual visitors. An existing need for economical support in order to get the new exhibition on display was also discovered.¹⁵⁷ The planning of *TidsRom* appears similar to *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem*, with its aims to present different parts of (higher) society, urban and rural life, and how impulses from the outer world shaped and formed Norwegian culture.¹⁵⁸ Since the *Tallerken* likely will be placed in this new exhibition, I will in this chapter discuss theoretical strategies to create alternative discourses related to history and national identity, when placing an object in an exhibition in order to provide a wider understanding of a culture's history. I will use examples from art museums and art exhibitions, as I believe that these forums in a good way, by institutional critique, challenge hegemonic structures and embedded ideas about what and how something should be presented at museums.

5.1 Reframing

Although *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem* and *TidsRom* are established out of similar contextualizing ideas, *TidsRom* will bring forth a new staging of the *Tallerken*. The museum will provide new meanings and new discourses to the object when creating a new spatial and contextual mediating platform. The language that will be used when representing the object will mediate something different, and it will affect the understanding of the object as connected to Norwegian history, and visitors' ideas of personal national identity. The aims are to correspond well with different visitors' and other actors' expectations of the museum.

¹⁵⁷ Ravne Scott, Erika, Senior Curator Norsk Folkemuseum, interview Norsk Folkemuseum 14-02-12

¹⁵⁸ Steinsmo Grimsrud, 2011, p.36

But, how can a museum utilize art and objects in an exhibition with the aims to tell diverse stories and avoid an absolute and excluding “truth”? As with all exhibitions, and as seen above, the exhibitions *Gamle Norske Varer* and *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem*, both follow a museological spatial rhetorical trend, which has been developed in relation to contemporary ideas and ideals, and both the exhibitions could be related to the aesthetics of the white cube. The classical categorisation over cultural historical material and art and the practice of the white cube as isolated neutral cube, has been challenged during the late 1900s. While traditional classifications of collections and exhibited material, such as time-lines and materials divisions, have been challenged by new forms of schematization and contextualization, new forms for rhetoric representation of exhibited material has been developed, especially in art museums. As an example, Klonk describes how Tate Modern London has created a thematic arrangement wherein categories do not follow one coherent thematic line, but several. The gallery space naturally divides the collection into several parts, and sub-parts, where themes like artists, a specific year of origin, type of expression or style is represented side by side. By mixing the themes and permitting different types of (dis)plays to take part, Klonk argues that Tate Modern achieves two main goals. Firstly, the different approaches provide an understanding of that there are several ways to interpret an (art) object and that an object may be contextualised differently. Secondly, Klonk argues that an (art) object’s value and importance differ, depending of what context and meaning it has been ascribed.¹⁵⁹ Klonk also refers to *Documenta 12*, the big art exhibition in Kassel in 2007, where the curators aimed to create a link between the exhibited materials to other discourses outside of the museum. The aim was to “trace several levels of reflection, taking the artists work as a starting point”.¹⁶⁰ The gallery space presented the exhibited material divided by time periods, but each room was also painted and decorated according to contemporary interpretations of the the gallery space. The goal was to provide an understanding of how space affects the experience of art. Klonk however, criticizes this, as she believes that they did not succeed. Various discussion boards were engaged in the set up of the exhibition, to “replace individual contemplation with collective forms of reception.”¹⁶¹ This declaration may be understood as a striving for a release of the gallery space from the static white cube, and towards a more dynamic and inclusive gallery space.

¹⁵⁹ Klonk, 2009, p. 200

¹⁶⁰ Klonk, 2009, p. 218

¹⁶¹ Klonk, 2009, p. 220

So what strategies can a museum like Norsk Folkemuseum; based on a national romantic idea of a united Norway, further include parts of the culture that does not correspond to the idea of a homogeneous country? Curator and social anthropologist Thomas Michael Walle at the Norwegian Folkemuseum, raises the question of what museums should be to fill the gap that has been created in the museums' collections where the stories of immigrants have been ignored. And which perspectives do museums wish to communicate when implementing these "multi-cultural objects" in collections and exhibitions?¹⁶²

Walle recognizes doubtfulness in a multi-cultural collection strategy. He states that a focus on the object itself could get lost because of its specific historical uniqueness, and its context reduced to only one specific potentially "exotic" story. There is a risk that these objects, because of this "uniqueness", are placed outside, and not integrated in the museum's original (national) collection. In order to expand opportunity for visitors to develop ownership and identity of material heritage museums may reframe history in order to open up a understanding of material objects by finding a way to place them in more categories than just one. In his argumentation about "multi-cultural objects" Walle argues that the story, or the context ascribed to an object, is just as meaningful for the object as the actual materiality and its own existence. Walle exemplifies this with a jar bought in Pakistan, brought to Norway and introduced into the large collection alongside many other jars, and how it also carries a story about German porcelain industrial history, German assistance in the 1960s and labour immigration to Norway in the 1970s. Walle suggests that museums should stress cultural meetings and the history of individual immigration stories by illuminating objects from several perspectives. This relates to perspective I have shown in *Histoiske reiser i dannete hjem*, as well as in the plans for *TidsRom*. Even objects placed in an existing collection carry narratives that can tell us something about immigration history, which can put the objects into a more multi-cultural context. The *Historiske reiser in dannete hjem* highlights perspectives of Norway as a country influenced by international travel and influences. And even if *Tallerken* in itself, is a Norwegian piece of work the objects were produced and used under the influences of other cultures. By using Kjelstadlis idea of "re-framing" history, and present a different, or additional presentation of an object history, the museum has the opportunity to open the door for a more inclusive interpretation of this collection.

¹⁶² Walle, Thomas Michael, *Flerkulturell (inn)samling*,
<http://www.norskfolkemuseum.no/no/Forskning/Museumsstemmer/Thomas-mener/Flerkulturell-innsamling/> 04.04.12

5.2 Framing situated knowledge

The *Gamle Norske Varer* and *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem* both shows contextual similarities to the white cubes aesthetic framing of the exhibits objects. To challenge the white cubes static and aesthetic presentation of history, the object and it's own context must play the main character in the story about Norwegian history. In Documenta 12, it is the context alone that is given this task, but when it comes to cultural heritage, there might be a risk of loosing the connection to history. Objects are at the core of museum work, but the ways of understanding and translating the material could be expanded. For the visitor to understand the networks of stories that surround objects, and the possibility of placing the object in question in several historical and social contexts, the museum has to be aware of, and at the same time communicate the way they have chosen to exhibit and categorize objects. The two exhibitions briefly described here, points towards the use of what Donna Haraway would define as *situated knowledge*, and self-reflection, as museological perspectives in the curating process.

According to Haraway, knowledge and experiences of history are socially and culturally constructed and are therefore also in constant transformation and change.¹⁶³ The understanding of a universal truth is a subjective construction, and so is the representation of it in a museum context. Haraway warns against a traditional objective and a "true" epistemological understanding of history. At the same time she warns against an interpretation of the world by a postmodernist and relativistic understanding that promises equally good knowledge from all points of views. But, in order to get as close to something that could retrieve *objectivity*, and as close to "trueness", Haraway aims to create alternative conceptions of knowledge, by using what she describes as situated knowledge. Situated knowledge is adaptable in the contextualisation of objects and history. History is always relative, and interpreted by subjective individuals, and through personal preferences. Like anthropology, cultural historians and cultural history will always carry a luggage with their own interpretations of reality. Then, how to achieve the most honest approach to art history possible? One cannot merely acknowledge the lack representatives within the arts, and then dig into the history and display the fragments that remain. This methodological example of creating knowledge, or translating knowledge into a learning arena, is grounded in the notion that all

¹⁶³ Haraway, 1988, p. 575–599

knowledge is based on embodied, personal and individual experience.¹⁶⁴ The feminist philosopher Nancy Hartsock also suggests that we should bring historical, political and theoretical processes in to the shaping process of ourselves (identity) as subjects as well as objects in history, when a univocal understanding of the subjects is not possible.¹⁶⁵

To use this perspective in exhibition productions, both in relation to the textual and spatial contextualisation, would strengthen the museum's way to understand and interpret knowledge — both from the museum's and the curators' own (cultural/geographical/gender/ethnicity location) position. At the same time, it would recall the museum to declare how they have chosen to use this knowledge in the exhibition. For a museum to better situate the knowledge of the written and (spatial) mediated history, and to acknowledge that the museum cannot reflect a true history or reality, would make the mediated stories more transparent. The museum's front display should not aim for an acceptance as something natural and self-evident, but must contain elements of self-criticism and argumentations.

Haraway also states that knowledge must be born out of dialogue, and that it should always be based on a (physical or non-physical) context, which can be related to how both an individual and a collective identity is created.¹⁶⁶ This could be related to how Klouk describes how one of the advantages with the museum gallery space over more traditional learning-spaces (like classrooms), is the gallery's spatial and communicative possibility, where visitors, in contrast to the one way communication of classrooms, themselves, may choose the order and the amount of attention to pay to different parts of the presented material.¹⁶⁷ Visitors that attend an exhibition presenting Norwegian cultural history, accept a story about peoples' lives and cultures in Norway, but to evaluate what *type* of Norwegian history, and in what order, what is more important than the other, should be up to each visitor. As the thoughts of new-museology refers to, a self-reflective perspective in the mediation of history is important in order to situate Norsk Folkemuseum in the picturing of Norwegian culture history.¹⁶⁸ This is important since the museum's history, as a knowledge-producing arena in Norway, has

¹⁶⁴ Haraway, Donna, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the privilege of partial perspective", *Feminist Studies* 14, no 3, Fall 1988, p. 575–599

¹⁶⁵ Hartsock, Nancy, Ch 10, Postmodernism and Social Change, Hartsock, Nancy, *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays*, Boulder, Colo, Westview Press, 1998, p. 221

¹⁶⁶ Haraway, 1988, p. 575–599

¹⁶⁷ Klouk, 2009, p. 219

¹⁶⁸ Vergo, 1989

been significant in the formation of national identity in Norway. And by using a collection such as the dollhouse in *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem*, and acknowledge the assemblage of one object is a way for the museum to use the collections own actual presence and make it in to a strength in the mediating of a history. The acknowledgement of the missing object in a collection becomes a self-reflective orientation over collection history.

5.3 The Cosmopolitan framework

Exhibition displays and design, with a help from the actual objects, works as signs in a "system", functioning in the realm between the visual and the verbal, between information and persuasion, as it effect the viewer's understanding and interpretation of the exhibition in total.¹⁶⁹ The spatiality regularly provides the spectator a given storyline in order to provide the visitors with an easily accessible set scenario. But in order to open up for a multitude of perceptions of the national cultural history, and to include the museum's own situated knowledge, the spatial discourse should not isolate the object, neither from the outside world, from the visitors, or from the other objects, or favour certain (national) discourses in order to make the storyline less complicated. Of course, as Kjeldstadli argues, categorization is unavoidable, but as long as the framing of history is transparent and situated, the discourses will not exclude challenging and understandings of history. The gallery space's spatial formation should support a communication between the objects, the different and personal ideas of cultural history, the museum and its visitors, in order to generate and allow a flexible and variable national identity formation.

Norsk Folkemuseum has collected objects from all over the country, and represented them within a national context in the capital of Norway. This is interesting in relation to Appiah's idea of how the fate of every important object should be put in the care of a "public ownership".¹⁷⁰ Appiah claims that while there nearly exists a human right to experience well known and famous art-works and other types of well-accepted cultural heritage objects, there barely exists any reflection of what culture or nation these objects belong to, which would define who has access to them. There is another paradox in this matter, the fact that people are denied the access to experience the parts of their cultural

¹⁶⁹ Bal, Mieke, "Telling, showing, showing off", in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No3, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 561

¹⁷⁰ Appiah, 2006, p. 127

heritage that are not defined as "good" and "representative", and therefore not exhibited, for example, the large amount of non-exhibited cultural historical related objects *not* exhibited at the Norsk Folkemuseum. One could question *who* should choose *what* to exhibit and not, and who is to decide how it should be done? Of course, the museum curators have to perform this task, but with more knowledge about with what aims it should be carried out, which would legitimate the selection.

A museological challenge of traditional exhibition practices, like the rise of *New Museology*, depend on changes in political and cultural understandings over what symbols the national material heritage should be represented by. Also, when shaping a national framework in relation to the new exhibition *TidsRom*, the curators must reply to new demands from visitor categories differing from what the traditional ethnic Norwegian may represent.

The museum's target audience has changed and expanded slightly since *Bysamlingen* was closed. Today, the museum has a large group of non-European tourists visiting the museum each year, something that has to be considered when staging the Norwegian culture history. In the project description for *TidsRom* from 2010 there is a clear focus of how objects and interiors should be contextualized into more of an international setting that presents the cultural interchange that has influenced and shaped Norwegian society.¹⁷¹ Steinsmo Grimsrud makes a point out of that in contrast to *Bysamlingen*, in the plans of the new exhibition *TidsRom*, the museum opens up the context around the exhibited objects, wherein it is no longer the object's physical shape and year of production that is important, but rather the context it represents.¹⁷² Contexts that will be shaped in order to provide the objects with a significant discourse must be formed in the view of the subject's dissimilarity and the personal (and unique) relation to a fluid national identity shaping process.

Since the shaping of national identity is connected to the formation of the subject and the shaping of identity, the subject is created through discourses, not in an autonomous form, but rather decentralised and shaped in the fluidity of the language.¹⁷³ The idea of the subject as formed by discourses, is linked to Althusser's idea about how subject and ideology is closely interconnected, and how the ideological subject is created

¹⁷¹ Scott, Erika Ravne, Telste, Kari, *Ny utstilling i Bybygg 2014. Impulser fra den store verden*. Projektbeskrivelse, Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo, 2010, p.2

¹⁷² Steinsmo Grimsrud, 2011, p.46

¹⁷³ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2000, p. 21

when the discourse appeal to the individual, just as a subject. An ideology is for Althusser related to a system of representations, which bring people together through an imagined relation between people.¹⁷⁴ In contrast to the idea of a hegemonic structure, that implies a political power, ideology is here translated not as a devious representation of something, but as something that represents the imagined relations among individuals, to the actual world. This is done in order to create a system wherein the subject/object can recognise itself, and the system is materialized in the physical society.¹⁷⁵

These representations of ideologies are also shaped and controlled by the physical representation of the society in an exhibition, which regulate how museum visitors receive the content. Even if we as humans are bound to social structures in the identity building process like ideology and hegemonic discourses, we are capable of create our own identities in a reflexive way. Macdonald suggests that instead of thinking of identity as being shaped by these ideologies and hegemonic structures, we should think of identity as "endlessly in the process of creation – as defined [...] as traveling."¹⁷⁶ Further, to relate this perspective to a museum context, it acknowledges the exhibition content, the text and the objects, not as representative for a total and complete meaning, but as fluid and non-fixed. In relation to Macdonald's suggestion to think of identities as an endless process of creation, museums should instead of referring to geographical areas (such as the nation), present and express flexibility in cultural defined areas and identities.¹⁷⁷ Also objects have these flexible identities, which could "highlight the plural nature of the identity".¹⁷⁸ Individual identities are thus created in this cultural and undefined chaos, something that is also recognizable in the museums when the ideas of what something Norwegian stands for is under constant definition. Contemporary Norway is no longer defined as a small and culturally isolated country, but as part of a larger international and global network, which has also been recognized and reflected on in *Historiske Reiser i dannete hjem*.

It might be up to each visitor how to personally approach the presentation of national discourses in an exhibition, and to what degree it should affect the personal experience of taking part in a larger collective identity project. At the same time, because of existing

¹⁷⁴ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2000, p. 22

¹⁷⁵ Winter Jørgensen, Phillips J., 2000, p. 21–22

¹⁷⁶ MacDonald, 2003, p. 6 MacDonald here also refers to the perspective of the Derridean "difference"

¹⁷⁷ MacDonald, 2003, p. 7

¹⁷⁸ MacDonald, Sharon, 2003, p. 8

ideologies and traditional hegemonic systems, it might be difficult to look beyond these, and stereotype representation of us” and “they” may easily be reproduced. Therefore, the museum must encourage taking a critical standpoint towards not only the exhibition, but also of him/herself as object and subject in the formation of cultural history, and as an active actor in the shaping of collective (national) identities.

There are also other ways of thinking about (place-bound) identity, and of how to avoid geographical limitations. As referred to earlier, Appiah suggest the term *Cosmopolite* in his argumentations about place-bound identity connected to ownership of cultural heritage. The *Cosmopolite* reminds us of that there are other connections to identity than the national.¹⁷⁹ In an existing museological context, however, the use of these ideas seems to be dependent on what form of material that is being exhibited. When it comes to exhibiting art, it is often highlighted how an artist participates in an international context where the influence is not bound to a specific geographical area. Rather, the artistic (often international) influences are highlighted in order to define the artist’s specific inspiration. When it comes to historical objects like *Tallerken*, however, the recognition of it’s origin, where influences come from (like the innovation of faience – Egypt, Italy, China, Japan, England and France, the style of the glaze) are slightly neglected and transformed to fit in to a national perspective. The *Tallerken* might have been produced in Norway during the 1700s, but the reason for choice of material and aesthetic expression is not documented or mediated in the *Gamle Norske Varer* exhibition, and is only in some terms contextualized in *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem*. By exploring these perspectives further, together with the idea of the (non)national citizens as *Cosmopolites*, the museum could challenge the representation of Norway.

Appiah’s almost utopian suggestion of how to use a material cultural heritage in order to develop a more democratic mediation of history, is that instead of treating each other like enemies, the members of the world community have to learn to conceive of the global society as a single family, a society which is spiritually beautiful and materially affluent. Translated to the context of Norsk Folkemuseum, the *Tallerken* as connected to “a Norwegian work” (as referred to in the *Gamle Norske Varer* booklet) could be expanded and/or evaluated, in order to ascribe different identities (as it already carries, but has been hidden/forgotten). These links to other actors could be strengthened and thus open up a possibility to shape identities not connected to the nation, but better adapted to Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism*.

¹⁷⁹ Appiah, 2006, p. 135

6. End discussion

As the world around us is changing, so does the representation of it in museums. By looking through the museological perspective presented in this thesis, it could be argued that these two exhibitions *Gamle norske varer* and *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem* were produced in two rather different ideological periods, lay out two different takes on Norwegian history, and strive towards to mediate two different identities. The textual and spatial contexts that have been created for the exhibited object forms two discourses the *Tallerken* have been placed in, in order to act an illustrating role in a bigger narrative. These are not necessarily conflicting, but they demonstrate a past with both physical and thematically different national rhetoric. The aestheticized presentation of the *Tallerken* in *Gamle Norske Varer* pictures a national rhetoric, in which the *Tallerken* has strong connections to Norwegian ancestors. In *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem* on the other hand, the *Tallerken* is provided with a different context, which talks about Norway as a shaped through a culturally diverse history, and as a more non-fixed and fluid unit.

But as the two examples of national discourses that the *Tallerken* has been placed in shows, there is a possibility to tell different stories about a single object. This should be used when creating new exhibitions, but instead of providing the object with one defined story, the museum should open up for several possibilities of understandings of the object, in order to avoid hegemonic narratives, and instead challenge a stereotyping presentation of nationality and ethnicity. For museums to adapt to a diverse societal and cultural change, the narratives created must be flexible and fluid, and permit individual identification with history. The history must be shaped for different individuals and collectives, and give room for several interpretations and understandings. But a museum cannot present all the perspectives that an object possible could have, because there are so many, and in order to open up for a diverse understanding, there must be more than one perspectives presented, and open up the understanding of the national to something fluid and flexible. To use a fictive story as in *Historiske reiser i dannete hjem*, and to situate a perspective in the mediating, might open up for these differentiated interpretations of the object.

To situate the knowledge presented in exhibitions, to underline the voice of the curator and the museum, is also a way to acknowledge the notion of history as evident and solid. This would also reinforce a self-reflective method for museums to be able to tell about

the museums own history and how it relates to present exhibition production. For example, the national romantic heritage, in forms of collections, is in many cultural history museums built upon a notion of the nation as rather isolated from the rest of the world. This is something the museum has to relate to in present day when using collections in exhibitions, and could therefore be problematized in a self-reflective way when museums use collections in exhibition production.¹⁸⁰ For museum to perform comparative analyses of former and present exhibitions can be a helpful self-reflective way for museums to understand how former exhibition and collection practices effect contemporary mediating of history and the generation of (national) identity. A museological reflective understanding over the museum's own history can further help museums to position themselves in the way they form the construction and definition of what come to represent a national past.

But one might question: why even attempt to interpret history by using objects, if the number of interpretations is unlimited? Museum objects and collections can be looked upon as what make museums unique in relation to other institutions that mediate history. But as shown to above, the values given to the objects own individuality has varied through the museum history. However, it is not the history in itself that creates identity; it is the collective memory of it. This gives the possibility, in a greater sense than traditionally accepted, to actively form fundamental values and moral principles in the formation of a collective memory. But even if the interpretation of history is constructed, a museum object, like the *Tallerken*, always establishes a physical connection to a historical sequence of events in the conference with its spectator, which could be seen as a strength in relation to the mediation of objects. Thus, we should perhaps let them play a clearer lead role in the story wished to convey, while consideration should be given the ambiguity and multiple interpretations of the subject so as not to separate and isolate the creation of (national / cultural / social / gender) identity.

Walle talks about the difficulty in simply adding multicultural objects into an existing collection, when there might danger in that these objects will be placed outside the national – as something exotic. But to re-frame already existing objects in a collection, opening up to other(s) stories, and link them to the contemporary multi-cultural

¹⁸⁰ The object in it self does not necessarily carry a national symbol, but the collection, how objects have been categorised and put in relation to each other might.

Norwegian society, would open up for the integration of a multi-cultural understanding of cultural history. To re-frame the *Tallerken* and put forward the many stories that might be connected to it, and re-interpret the meaning as symbol of the National would help to avoid re-creation of hegemonic discourses. The physical arrangement of the museum gallery room and in what way objects are placed to relate to one and another is at least as important for the understanding of history as the textual information of the historical and social context. In what way a spectator experience the objects, and what possibilities is made to relate the object to the outside world, could according to Klonk not be limited to the four walls of the museum. Rather, possibilities of how objects can point towards other parts of the society (than here and now inside the museum), and where the spectator can take part in this process, through active participation in the (re)interpretation of the exhibited material could be put forward. As Klonk argues above, the museum is a unique arena in the way the museum holds a to ways for communication, in contrast to the classroom. Museums can today function in a more productive way, as meeting places. And to avoid the confusion with other culture or community centres, the objects are what make the museum a link to a (common) history.¹⁸¹

The nation, or the “imagined community”, might never be “un-imagined. But it might be “re-imagined” when the imagination it self is to be altered and questioned in order to widen up the hegemonic definition of what is national. The national identity becomes even more important in a globalised world. The *Cosmopolitanism* opens up for a understanding of a collective identity that allows ambiguity, equivocality and difference, and even not depend on excluding prefixes such as language and geography. The *Tallerken* has historical and material connections that cross these borders, which the *Historiske reiser i dannede hjem*, in contrast to the exhibition *Gamle Norske Varer*, exemplifies and manage to communicate through the textual and spatial context it is placed in. But the discourse surrounding the object is here still bound to the interpretation of the museum and its institutional traditions, and is still to a certain extent excluding the perspectives the curators did not come upon in the research.

¹⁸¹ See further discussion of the museum as meeting place in Simon, Nina, *The participatory museum, Museum 2.0*, Santa Cruz, CA., 2010

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