

Between Inhabited Interiors and Interiors on Display: Exploring Spatial Boundaries at Rosenborg Castle

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Abstract

When visiting museums, we meet various types of physical barriers, such as glass vitrines, railings, and extended ropes, which have been put there to protect the objects on display. Such barriers are often accused of creating an unfavourable distance to museum objects but can also be thought of in more positive terms, as this article will seek to demonstrate. Based on analyses of museum display boundaries at Rosenborg Castle in Copenhagen, where visitors can experience objects from The Royal Danish Collection within historic interiors, the article looks into the effects of such boundaries on the museum experience. The article explores the particular threshold experiences that take place at Rosenborg where you constantly fluctuate between, on the one side, looking at objects and interiors that have been put on display in front of you, and, on the other, being inside the historic interiors. It argues that this spatial ambiguity opens up productive, albeit obscure, in-between spaces for the museum visitor to inhabit and points to the importance of truly attending to the design of display boundaries when creating museum exhibitions.

Keywords: museum display, threshold, Rosenborg Castle, historic house museum, period room

Introduction

In the city centre of Copenhagen lies Rosenborg Castle (Figure 1). Back in 1606, when the castle was erected, it was located outside the city boundaries and originally functioned as a royal summer residence. In 1838 Rosenborg Castle was turned into a public museum that, to this day, displays objects from The Royal Danish Collection while also being an important 'museum object' in itself. At first glance, Rosenborg might be perceived as a historic house museum. Due to its limited residential use since the early 18th century (when a new summer palace was built), many of its interiors are, indeed, very well kept. However, the museum does not only represent the period and reign of the four generations of kings who resided there but offers a chronological presentation spanning from Christian IV, who had the castle built, and to Frederik VII, who was the reigning king until 1863 (the chronological display was extended in the 1860s). Thus, Rosenborg falls into the category of cultural-historical museums, and even if today it engulfs us in the atmosphere of past times, the museum can, in fact, be considered a forerunner of modern museum display traditions due to its extensive use of chronological display and re-created interiors, which, at the time of inception, were uncommon (Bencard, 1984).



Figure 1
Rosenborg Castle,
built by Christian IV
between 1606–1634
in Dutch Renaissance
style (Photograph
by The Royal
Danish Collection,
Rosenborg Castle)

Whenever I visit Rosenborg Castle, I am always taken by the ambiguity of the place: how it places the museum visitor *inside* historical, domestic interiors, while at the same time setting up various museum display barriers that position the museum visitor *outside* looking in.

This type of ambiguity is not uncommon in museums, especially in historic houses and in cultural-historical and design museums that re-create past interiors. However, at Rosenberg it is pervasive and inbuilt in a particular sense. This is partly due to the long history of the museum and the fact that some of the museum vitrines blend rather seamlessly into the original interior, but also because Rosenberg actually began its collection storage and display functions even before the castle was turned into a museum. As its residential function diminished in the early 18th century, the castle was used to store royal belongings and object collections, such as paintings, weapons, furniture, costumes, and other heirlooms. Such use has led former museum director Mogens Bencard (2001) to describe the castle as a “royal storehouse” (p. 186). Furthermore, some of the interiors were used specifically for display purposes, which is exemplified, for instance, by the Glass Cabinet (Figure 2), in which the royal collection of glassware is put on display.



Figure 2
The Glass Cabinet
at Rosenberg Castle
(Photograph by
author)

In general, being a royal palace, Rosenberg would, of course, be used for representative purposes, meaning that interiors were not only designed to meet the needs of residents but also to impress visitors. Although the castle was originally quite small and mainly intended for private use, it was extended several times and began to be used for more official activities. However, despite its extensions, Rosenberg Castle is by no means a large palace. Architectural historian Joakim

Skovgaard (1973) has noted about the castle that “as a result of its modest size and small-scale detailing it has a certain doll’s-house character” (p. 67). Rosenborg surely has a very intimate and private feel to it compared to other royal palace museums. Along with its function as a ‘royal storehouse’ and its long museum history, it does seem to constitute a particular case in terms of mixing private interiors and public display.

This article seeks to explore the distinctive sense of being both inside a museum object—that is, inside interiors inhabited by people long gone—while also being *outside looking in* at these interiors and contemplating their display. This will be achieved, firstly, by investigating aspects of furnishing, focusing on the mix between furniture that reveals past inhabitation and museum display furniture (vitrines), and then by including the more explicit physical barriers (railings, extended ropes, glass walls) that separate the museum visitor from the interiors on display. Thus, the first part of the article will work toward an understanding of the overall tension between inhabited interiors and interiors on display that permeates the rooms at Rosenborg Castle. In the second part of the article, the concept of *threshold* is introduced to grasp further the particular way in which museum visitors at Rosenborg are constantly stepping back and forth between inside and outside experiences. Drawing on architectural conceptualisations of thresholds, the analysis will focus partly on the physical traversing of doorways—i.e., the more obvious threshold transitions—but will also attend to the transitions between different interior experiences, for which the physical boundaries of ropes, railings, and glass walls, can be seen to function as threshold markers. In the third and final part of the article, the productive potential of the spatial boundaries at Rosenborg is emphasised. Based on an analysis of a particular cabinet (the Glass Cabinet), it is argued that the physical display barriers at the museum do not merely separate; they also create in-between spaces that both complicate and enrich the museum experience. Thus, rather than considering museum display barriers as a mere necessary evil—necessary for protecting interiors and objects, but otherwise unimportant—the article wishes to highlight their generative capacities—their ability to destabilise and, thereby, heighten the museum visitors’ sense of being positioned within the museum interior. In so doing, I wish to contribute with knowledge about the spatial effects of museum display design and, not least, point to the potential in truly attending to the design of museum display boundaries. However, before embarking on this, a further introduction to the case in question—the interiors of Rosenborg Castle—is needed.

Inhabited Interiors and Interiors on Display

Rosenborg Castle presents a combination of interiors that are largely original—that is, dating from before the castle was turned into a museum—and interiors created for the sake of the museum. Thus, whereas the ground floor and second floor have a significant historic house air to them, many of the interiors on the first floor might be characterised more as period rooms—that is, (re-)created interiors as we know them from cultural-historical and design museums. However, according to Bencard (1984), these interiors

were re-created so successfully that the difference between these and the original interiors was not apparent to the general public. The whole building was given the effect, which it still has, of intimacy and of the feeling that the King had just left. (p. 228)

Some level of re-creation has, of course, taken place within the 'original' interiors as well. For instance, when the furnishing of a latter resident has been replaced in order for the room to represent a former king. Indeed, these interiors can be understood as period rooms *in situ* (Aynsley, 2006). Ultimately, if one were to insist on the historic house character of the place, it might be argued that it is not, in fact, the royal castle that is the historic house. Rather, it is the museum with its long history and traditional display techniques, many of which are still in use. It should, however, be noted that the museum is by no means in a fossilised state. Objects are continuously re-arranged, and vitrines and other museum display devices are modernised and occasionally replaced. All the same, when visiting Rosenborg, it is not merely the history of a royal residence, but also the history of a museum interior that one experiences. Thus, Rosenborg combines two different histories: the history it presents and the history of its presentation, which, of course, can be seen as a fundamental condition in any history-making (Keeble, 2006). This brings us back to the intrinsic convolutions of residential interiors and public museum display that the place embodies. The following analysis will look into how these convolutions manifest themselves in relation to the mix of domestic versus museum display furniture.

One of the interior elements that most strongly evokes the sense that 'the King has just left' is the chair. In some of the smaller chambers, chairs have been placed in a manner as if the occupant had just stood up and left the chair pushed away from the table (Figure 3). This, as highlighted by Bencard (1984), is a curatorial practice dating back to the 19th century that is intended to strengthen the sense of (past) inhabitation. In the bigger rooms (although, except for the Knights'

Hall on the second floor, all of the rooms at the castle are relatively small), most chairs have been placed against the walls, which somehow retracts them from imagined use (Figure 4). Of course, this sort of furniture arrangement was common back when the castle was used as a residence. However, to the contemporary museum visitor, it is probably experienced as more akin to a museum display.



Figure 3
View into Christian
IV's Writing Room,
Rosenborg Castle
(Photograph
by author)



Figure 4
Furniture placed
against the wall in
Christian V's Hall,
Rosenborg Castle
(Photograph
by author)

Interior design historian Peter Thornton (1984) has noted how, when it comes to interior decoration, "each period of history has its own way of seeing things—its own 'period eye'" (p. 8), and of course, this principle is very much at stake here. Whereas inhabitants at

the time when the castle was used as a residence would consider chairs standing against walls a typical furniture arrangement, today perhaps, we see something different. We see the chairs placed neatly in rows and at a certain distance from the viewer, blending in with the wall decoration—as being on display. The chairs are somehow ‘flattened’: they are turned into something that we look *at*, rather than something we imagine past people—if not ourselves—living in. On the other hand, back in the 17th century, the chairs would be considered objects on display as well. According to Thornton (1984), chair-backs grew taller from the 1680s onwards, thereby constituting an “eye-catching feature of the decoration” (p. 52), which is a reminder of how furniture, along with other interior elements, has been (and still is) used as a way of displaying wealth and cultural capital. Although this is a different kind of display than the display of historical objects in museums, it adds to the overall ambiguity of the place that is produced by the distinctive entwinements of domestic/representative decoration and royal/museum display. The fact that several Danish modern chairs (Arne Jacobsen’s series 7), intended for the visitors to sit on, have also been placed against the walls, only adds to this peculiar mix.

The specific furniture arrangement also reflects the fact that any physical contact between museum visitors and furniture should be avoided. Many of the rooms at Rosenborg are rather sparsely furnished, more so than when the museum first opened. During the years, furniture has been removed in order to make room for the increasing number of museum visitors. Thus, looking at old copper engravings and photos of the museum interiors, one realises that the rooms were once more densely filled with tables, chairs, cabinets, etc., and furthermore, that the items of furniture, to a larger extent, were placed out on the floor. Today, to prevent people from bumping into the furniture and accommodate guided tours of larger amounts of people, a more sparsely filled room decoration is necessary. On the other hand, what has been added are several vitrines and other types of museum display barriers. Thus, while through the years furniture for past inhabitation has been removed, museum display furniture, along with other museum hardware and technology, has been added.

The vitrines at Rosenborg relate to the castle interiors in different ways. Some of them stand out, thereby accentuating themselves as museum display cases. Others are more integrated into the interior decoration, making the museum visitor uncertain as to whether they were introduced after the castle had been turned into a museum or whether they are part of the castle’s pre-museum interior. For

instance, the woodwork of one vitrine, fitted into the corner of a room, is painted with a similar marbling effect as the woodwork of the adjacent window niche and other wooden surfaces in the room. This results in a somewhat seamless adaptation into the overall interior. Another display case appears as a highly decorative item of furniture in the room, although it is not part of the original interior but was presumably made for the museum, thereby making the integration between interior decoration and museum display complete (Figure 5). Many of the vitrines strike a middle note, meaning that they adopt the materiality and decorative particularities of the surrounding interior while at the same time being present in the room as separate objects (Figure 6). Others, especially two contemporary vitrines with interior lighting in the Marble Chamber, clearly depart from the surrounding surfaces and tectonics. Although they are dimensioned to fit between two column decorations in the wall and have slim frames that make them fairly transparent, they sit rather uncomfortably against the scagliola marbled walls (Figure 7). Most of the contemporary display cases are constructed using slim steel frames or with no frames at all, and because of their relatively simple design and transparent appearance, they clearly depart from the lush interior settings.

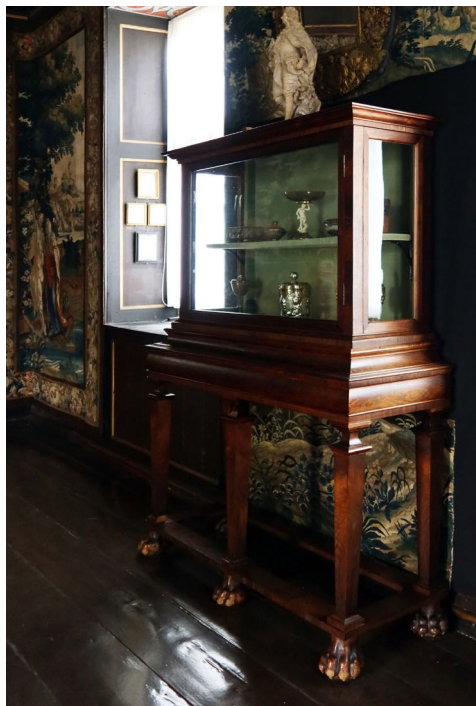


Figure 5
Vitrine furniture in
Frederik IV's Hall,
Rosenborg Castle
(Photograph
by author)



Figure 6
Christian IV's
Bedroom, Rosenberg
Castle: The vitrine
frame imitates the
wall ornamentation
(Photograph
by author)

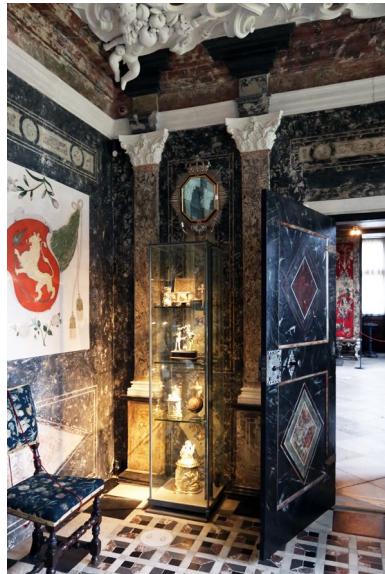


Figure 7
Contemporary
vitrine in the Marble
Chamber, Rosenberg
Castle (Photograph
by author)

The various ways in which the vitrines at Rosenberg integrate with or separate from the surrounding interiors produce a constant alternation between situations where things are put on display in front of the viewer (when it is obvious that the vitrine is museum display furniture that has been added to the room) and situations where object display is more seamlessly integrated into the interior surrounding the viewer. This sense of ambiguity is strengthened by

the fact that not all objects are placed safely behind glass. Generally, it is the smaller and most delicate objects that are encased. In contrast, furniture, paintings, and mirrors are largely unprotected—although, for instance, many of the tables have a glass plate on their top, and chairs have ropes extended between the seat and back in order to prevent people from sitting down. Of course, these larger objects are also highly sensitive to touch, climate, and dust exposure. However, it has been a strategy for the museum to limit the use of glass and other physical barriers. According to Bencard (1984) (who was museum director at Rosenberg from 1980 to 1998), museum display techniques, such as “glass or perspex protective covers, have the disadvantage of progressively destroying the atmosphere, the more you put in” (p. 233). Thus, protective measures are kept to a minimum.



Figure 8
View into the Glass
Cabinet, Rosenberg
Castle: A large glass
enclosure with curved
walls encapsulates
the museum visitor
(Photograph
by author)

This strategy, in my opinion, is highly appreciable, not least because it supports the particular sense of not merely looking at historic interiors but also being inside them. At the same time, though, one might argue that the experience of wandering through interiors, which can be considered museum objects in themselves, is actually emphasised by the occasional barriers because it reminds us of the importance and rarity of these particular rooms and their objects. From that perspective, glass and other protective devices might not merely have a negative effect on the museum experience, as Bencard seems to suggest. In any case, it is my proposition that the peculiar tension between looking at objects that have been put on display in front of you, while also inhabiting a historic interior that

surrounds you, plays a great part in creating the productive spatial ambiguity of the place.

This tension between *looking at* and *being inside* is even more apparent when it comes to the physical barriers set by ropes, railings, and glass walls. In a very literal sense, they separate the viewer from some of the interiors at the museum. For instance, when you enter the small cabinets located in the castle towers, you are either met by a railing or rope that prevents you from going in more than a meter or two (Figure 3), or you walk into a large glass enclosure that, in some instances, allows you to position yourself in the centre of the room (Figure 8). In some of the smaller enfilade rooms on the first floor, where most of the doors are placed towards the outer wall, thereby creating a pathway *besides* the interiors, the spatial boundaries take the form of ropes and, in two of the rooms, added flooring, which has the advantage of also protecting the original floor underneath (Figure 9). In some rooms, added flooring and railings have been designed with great concern for the particular interior, for instance in the Mirror Cabinet, where the added floor and railing shapes follow the circular floor mirror and imitate the pattern in the original flooring (Figure 10). These display barriers contribute to the distinct experience of alternating between looking into interiors and being inside them—and sometimes, even, of being both places at once—that the museum display at Rosenborg produces. In the following, we shall approach this matter through the concept of threshold and see how it relates to the architecture of the place.



Figure 9
Frederik IV's Cabinet,
Rosenborg Castle:
Some of the interiors
on the first floor
are viewed from a
'pathway' marked by
added flooring and
ropes (Photograph
by author)

Figure 10
The Mirror Cabinet,
Rosenborg Castle:
The railing and
added floor imitate
shapes in the original
flooring (Photograph
by author)



Traversing Thresholds

Within architectural theory, the term threshold is used in relation to both concrete spatial elements, such as doorways, windows, stairways, porches, etc., and as a way of capturing more abstract qualities of spatial configurations, such as experiences of transition and passage (Boettger, 2014). The term has also been taken up within museum research. Scholars, for instance, have adopted the threshold concept in relation to notions of liminality and have interpreted the museum experience as a transition to another place, another reality, different from everyday life, and for which the museum building can be seen as a physical manifestation (Schall, 2015; Sfinteş, 2012). Furthermore, the concept has been utilised in relation to museum entrances (Parry et al., 2018), and not least the difficulties—the *threshold fear*—that the uninitiated might have about *crossing* these entrances (Gurian, 2005).

Rosenborg, however, does not have a typical museum entrance. Rather than ascending a grand staircase and being met with a large, impressive foyer, you enter the castle estate from the street through a rather humble gate. From there, you need to traverse another gate building before reaching the actual castle building, which is entered by a quite inconspicuous staircase (originally the entrance to the castle's private quarters and the remaining part of a larger double staircase that used to be attached to the central facade tower). This experience of traversing one threshold after the other continues after you have entered the castle. Most of the rooms are enfilade and are

circulated predominantly in a linear way, except the occasional tower rooms and the Knights' Hall. Thus, the museum can be characterised as one long sequence of thresholds. You continuously cross a threshold, and then another, and then another, and at intervals step back and forth through one when entering and exiting one of the tower rooms.

On the other hand, this might be characteristic of most museums—especially art museums with their numerous enfilade galleries, and other types of museums where you continuously transition from one room or exhibition 'episode' to the next. However, compared to many other museums—and royal palaces as well—the doorways at Rosenborg Castle are relatively small and dense. Even though they are held open, which might be seen to lessen the threshold effect compared to when you actually have to open a door, they are, due to their dimensions, decoration, and depth (the doorways leading to the tower cabinets span the depth of the castle's outer walls), highly present (Figure 8). These rooms were originally intended for inhabitation, and, indeed, their doorways present themselves more as domestic ones than as typical museum door openings. Perhaps this makes us even more aware of passing through a sequence of thresholds. It surely creates an intimate experience of traversing rooms on a bodily scale. From this focus on gates, staircases, and doorways—that is, the rather apparent thresholds at Rosenborg Castle—let us now move on to the more obscure and ambiguous ones produced by museum display barriers.

According to architectural scholar Till Boettger (2014), thresholds are inherently ambivalent since they are both part of the boundaries between spaces and punctuate these boundaries, open up spaces, and allow for transition. The purpose of the display barriers at Rosenborg is, of course, to prevent transition in a physical sense. However, they do not necessarily prevent the museum visitor from experiencing a transition. Boettger (2014) hints at this when he argues how transparent barriers, such as display windows, "organize space and can be understood as thresholds even if they do not provide for spatial transitions" (p. 47). Furthermore, architectural scholars Paramita Atmodiwirjo and Yandi Andri Yatmo (2019) have noted how "the experience of threshold needs to be interpreted beyond the physical transition from one part of space to another. Being at the threshold actually involves the subjective construct of the transitional experience, or moving between various spatial qualities" (p. 108). These perspectives suggest that the experience of transitioning between the space in which the museum visitor is physically positioned and the interior on display is, indeed, possible without an actual physical transition. Museum researchers also point

to this when they describe museum displays as sites for imagined bodily encounters (Feldman, 2006; Petrov, 2011) and emphasise the interpretive potential of museum visitors comparing the interiors of historic houses to their own homes (Young, 2007). Thus, when standing in front of the large glass panes, ropes, and railings that have been placed between you and the interiors on display, you might imagine the movements and activities of the kings and queens who once dwelled there. Or, indeed, you might imagine yourself inhabiting these rooms. Hence, several occupancies of the interiors can be established: both the ones that take place beyond the physical barriers and which are revealed by objects and traces of inhabitation (sometimes staged by the museum, for instance when a chair has been moved away from the table), the ones created by museum visitors who imagine themselves inhabiting the interiors beyond the boundaries, and the ones that take place in the space in which the museum visitor is physically located. Threshold moments occur when a sense of occupancy changes.

However, the thresholds involved in these shifts are not only the (imagined) transitions from *looking into* and *being inside*, but also the actual doorways by which, for instance, you enter and exit the cabinets. Or rather, it is the combination of barrier thresholds (ropes, railings, glass, added flooring) and doorway thresholds. Experiencing the barrier in the cabinet means that the doorway you cross when exiting into the larger adjacent room accentuates the experience of having returned to a state of being physically *inside* the interior again. Conversely, accessing the cabinets through these doorways makes you experience the barriers within them even more strongly since the doorways initiate a determined forward motion which is then brought to a halt in very abrupt ways. The fact that you traverse these distinct doorways thus seems to enhance the experience of stepping from one state of looking/inhabiting to another.

Compared to the enfilade rooms on the first floor, where you follow a pathway marked by ropes and added flooring *besides* the interiors on display—that is, without stepping back and forth through doorways, as you do when experiencing the tower rooms—it becomes clear that the interaction between barriers and cabinet doorways indeed adds to the intensity of the ambiguous viewing situation. The pathway on the first floor resembles a more typical museum experience where objects are placed on one side of the barrier and museum visitors on the other, and where objects inhabit particular display interiors (whether small, such as the interiors of vitrines, or larger, as the interiors of, for instance, period rooms), while the museum visitors inhabit the pathways that lie between/beside

these interiors. Museum exhibitions, it can be argued, tend to create exteriors, from which museum visitors look into the interiors of object display, and the boundary between these spaces can be more or less straightforward. As the above analyses have shown, the boundaries at Rosenberg are immensely blurred and continuously crossed. The castle presents itself as one big complex of thresholds that take you back and forth and which all add something to each other and to the general ambiguity of the place. On that note, it is possible to understand our encounters with vitrines and furniture, as analysed in the previous section, as threshold experiences as well. They also add to the constant oscillation between looking at/into interiors and being inside them. Thus, wandering the rooms at Rosenberg Castle, you persistently find yourself at the threshold.

Occupying Thresholds

Another threshold conceptualisation which is useful for the analysis of spatial ambiguity at Rosenberg is proposed by architectural scholar George Teyssot (2008), who uses Walter Benjamin's (1982/1999) threshold thinking in order to formulate how threshold lines, "imaginary and tectonic, do not create boundaries but an in-between, a space in the middle. The form of the threshold, as a temporal and spatial figure, is that of the 'between-the-two', of the medium that opens between two things" (p. 8). And, as if including museum display barriers in this thinking, Teyssot continues:

Walls, fences and rivers,..., do not create a nowhere but a somewhere: that is, places that mediate. Borders, frontiers and thresholds are not abstract lines drawn on a map, or dotted markings on the floor, or strings pegged out between two points. Rather, any limit or border has a mediating role that permits communication and allows for mutual passage. (p. 12)

This conceptualisation, I believe, can help us grasp the generative potential of the threshold experiences at Rosenberg.

An immediate response to museum display barriers such as the ones at Rosenberg—be it ropes, railings, vitrines, or other kinds of glass encasings—might be to simply consider them a necessary evil. First and foremost, they are there to protect interiors and objects, and undeniably create a physical distance to the objects on display. If they were not there (not necessary, that is) and museum visitors were allowed to experience the interiors by sitting on chairs, opening cabinets, and picking up things, it would, of course, create a very different and, in some ways, richer experience of the rooms and their objects, as museum researchers that advocate touch in the

museum have emphasised (Brown, 2018; Candlin, 2006; Classen & Howes, 2006; Pye, 2007). Thus, the negative effects of these physical barriers are easy to point out. However, they can still have something positive to contribute, not just because they emphasise the rarity and significance of the objects on display but also due to their spatial generosity (Pilegaard 2017). Rather than being neutral markings (what Teyssot points to as *nowhere*), museum display barriers can be considered as *somewhere*; a place where the museum experience is mediated and transformed.

A particularly conspicuous example of the productive outcome of museum display barriers at Rosenborg can be found in the Glass Cabinet, in which a large glass enclosure that completely separates you from the objects on display has been placed. The Glass Cabinet, originally decorated in 1714 (the room was renovated and brought back to its original design in the 1980s), is quite remarkable. Not just because it is the only (known) one of its kind (unlike porcelain cabinets, which are relatively common in European royal palaces), but also due to its sheer abundance of glass items (957 in total), arranged symmetrically on lush, gilded consoles and covering approximately half the room from floor to ceiling (Figure 2). The steel and glass enclosure placed in the centre of the room has curved walls, thereby adopting the sinuous geometry of the baroque interior while also creating more space for the viewers (Figure 8). When standing inside this glass enclosure, you might get a sense of being cared for in a similar manner as museum vitrines generally elevate and care for the objects they contain. You might even get the feeling of being on display yourself (Pilegaard, 2020). However, the glass enclosure can also be quite an unpleasant space to be in, depending on how many people are there at the same time. It can quickly change from being a very private and solemn place to being experienced as a limiting space, where you have to stand closer to other people than you might like to (which might feel even more disquieting in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic).

In any case, rather than marking a simple spatial separation, the glass enclosure unfurls a somewhat obscure, at times, perhaps, unpleasant, but also very rich experience of contemplating the Glass Cabinet while occupying an interior *within* it—an interior that is more than simply a place from where you watch objects on display. This interior is intense. It emphasises the viewing conditions by drawing attention to your own body within the big glass enclosure. It puts you in a position where you not only watch and experience the interior that belongs to the objects on display (which are now placed in the exterior of the glass enclosure interior), but also

occupy an interior of your own. The glass enclosure, understood as a threshold, opens up a space—indeed, a place—for the museum visitor to inhabit, and the same might be said about the other thresholds at Rosenborg. They all create ambiguous in-between spaces that open themselves to the occupancy of museum visitors.

The glass enclosure in the Glass Cabinet is a good example of the importance of attending to the design of museum display boundaries. In contrast to the glass enclosures in some of the other tower rooms at the castle, which have more simple, cubic designs and were presumably created this way to be as transparent and neutral as possible, the glass enclosure in the Glass Cabinet, with its lavishly curved glass walls, inbuilt lighting, and graphic dark steel frame, is an object of importance. It is not trying to hide itself but, instead, produces a distinct interior in its own right that only adds to the experience of the room. Furthermore, it must be emphasised how this glass enclosure and the experiences it produces strongly correlate with the interior architecture of the castle. Not only due to its sinuous geometry that imitates the baroque interior, but also by virtue of the particularly deep doorway that, as mentioned in the previous section, adds to the experience of encountering while also crossing boundaries.

Conclusion

On an overall note, the perplexing spatial ambiguity that a visit to Rosenborg Castle entails (at least for this museum visitor) can be traced back to the general experience of being inside a museum object (the castle) that envelops other museum objects (interiors), that, again, envelop museum objects (furniture and smaller items)—almost like a set of Chinese boxes. I guess most museums function as a set of boxes. Inside the museum architecture box is an exhibition design box, and within this box (which can contain smaller vitrine boxes) are the objects on display. However, whereas in other museums these boxes are typically separated, and museum visitors are guided to the demarcated spaces between them, at Rosenborg you find yourself both inside and outside the various compartments all at once. A perpetual shifting back and forth—a double exposure, even—of inside and outside experiences is produced, and you are constantly kept on your toes at the thresholds between them.

The study presented in this article has arisen from a fundamental curiosity about this particular spatial effect at Rosenborg. Drawing on threshold conceptualisations, the analyses have tentatively suggested that physical barriers in museums, instead of being considered as having a mere negative distancing effect, can also entail productive

spatial qualities. However, the study also leaves some loose ends. First of all, it is based solely on my own experiences of the place and thus falls short in making more generalised claims about the spatial effects of museum display barriers. After all, my background as an exhibition designer has undeniably sensitised me in particular ways when it comes to experiencing the effects of museum display. Furthermore, the strong focus on experiencing spatial transitions has meant that matters of particular object experiences have only been hinted at. Further studies into how museum display boundaries, such as the ones at Rosenborg Castle, might affect our experience of specific objects on display would, indeed, be an interesting trajectory to follow.

For the present, I believe that the ambiguous spatial qualities of the interiors at Rosenborg Castle, which one might find similar examples of in other museums (especially, perhaps, in historic houses), demonstrate how museum display boundaries can destabilise the act of viewing and evoke in museum visitors a particular sense of occupying the museum interiors. Rather than merely setting up clearly defined spaces for museum visitors and museum objects to inhabit respectively, museum display boundaries can allow for potentially rich spatial experiences to unfold—experiences that might create a deeper engagement with the museum display. This points to the importance of truly attending to these boundaries when designing exhibitions and, not least, to the potential in making them correlate with the museum architecture. At Rosenborg Castle there is a particularly productive connection between architectural thresholds and display barrier thresholds. We might learn from such connection when designing the necessary—although not necessarily evil—boundaries between objects and museum visitors.

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