

Design

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Coffee

& Time is the Coffee Maker

Time Doesn't Flow, It Percolates

Introduction

Percolation is the process of a liquid slowly passing or straining through a filter. It is how coffee is often made. This essay argues the case that time percolates instead of it flowing using our lack of attention towards everyday objects and our surroundings in London as an example. The essay then investigates the role the V&A museum plays in influencing its representation of objects. Lastly the essay will discuss the tensions that exist between personal and institutional access to touch objects within a museum.

Time percolates because we naturally filter out what we need to spend energy on understanding, and we ignore the rest as we go through time. In London the main two reasons this is the case are 1.) because we are less attentive towards public objects and our surroundings due to their repetitive nature and 2.) the use of technology is decreasing our overall attention spans (Wright and Zolfagharifard, 2019).

I choose this topic because a moment I recently had made me realise that I rarely question the function of objects in the city. It was when I noticed a small blue box on top of the streetlamp outside my house. Out of curiosity, I went to investigate what it was on google. I discovered it was called a "Photocell" which is a device that detects and measures light. This led me to thinking that London's landscape is defined by the functioning objects and structures of our past, but yet they go unnoticed.



Objects

in London go unnoticed because we are so used to seeing the same everyday objects that we don't have to consciously make an effort to learn how they work. One reason for this is that a newly discovered objects will probably be like an object that we already recognise. In the form of a replication of an already known object or entangled from it. For example, we can understand how a bench works with little effort if we discovered it tomorrow. This is because it is likely we have seen a chair before and we can immediately see that a bench is similar. However, newly discovered objects will capture our attention when you know it is completely new and not a replication of something else (Chua, 2009).

In addition to objects, our surroundings are repeating themselves. Repeated urban environments continuously fail to capture our attention as we already hold a coherence understanding of such environments, in contrast to attention being captured by abrupt changes in environments (Jonides and Yantis, 1988). Our attention is based on a system that both influences and is influenced by interactions between an individual and their environment (Ristic and Enns, 2015). Dana Arnold in her book 'Re-presenting the Metropolis' refers to London as "juxtapositions" of space and history (Howell, 2002). London contains a series of architectural, social, and cultural commentaries which have a build-up of multiple identities within the same space. Cloned streets are prevalent on a large scale (Carmona, 2015) and suburban areas are comparable as they imitate themselves through architecture, topography and efficiencies of space (Vaughan, 2015).



(DailyMail, Clone Street in Richmond 2020)



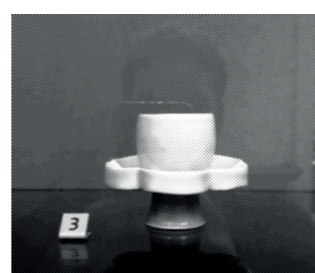
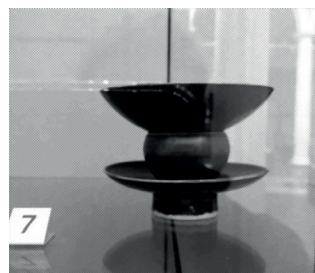
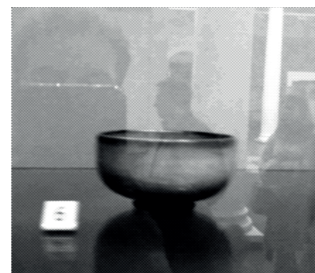
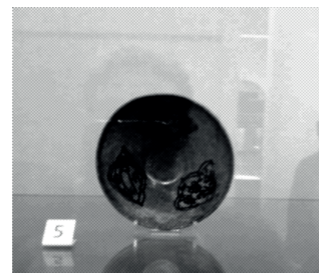
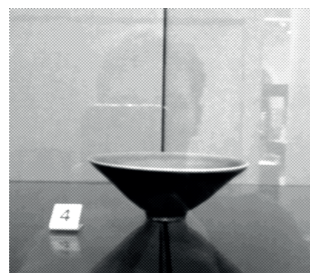
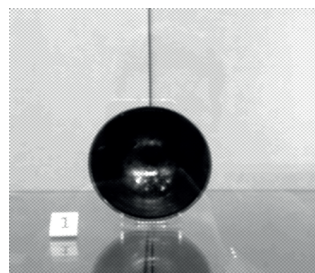
(Pinterest, The London Suburbs 2020)

Lastly, readily available access to the internet (McClinton, 2019) is factor contributing towards the minimizing effects on our attention spans when it comes to understanding our environment (Brennan, 2017). The quicker it is to find the answers through the internet, the less time you will spend investigating it. For example, now that I know the little blue box on top of the streetlamp is a Photocell I don't pay much attention towards it. Whereas if I did not have access to the internet my curiosity and attentiveness towards it would be increased.

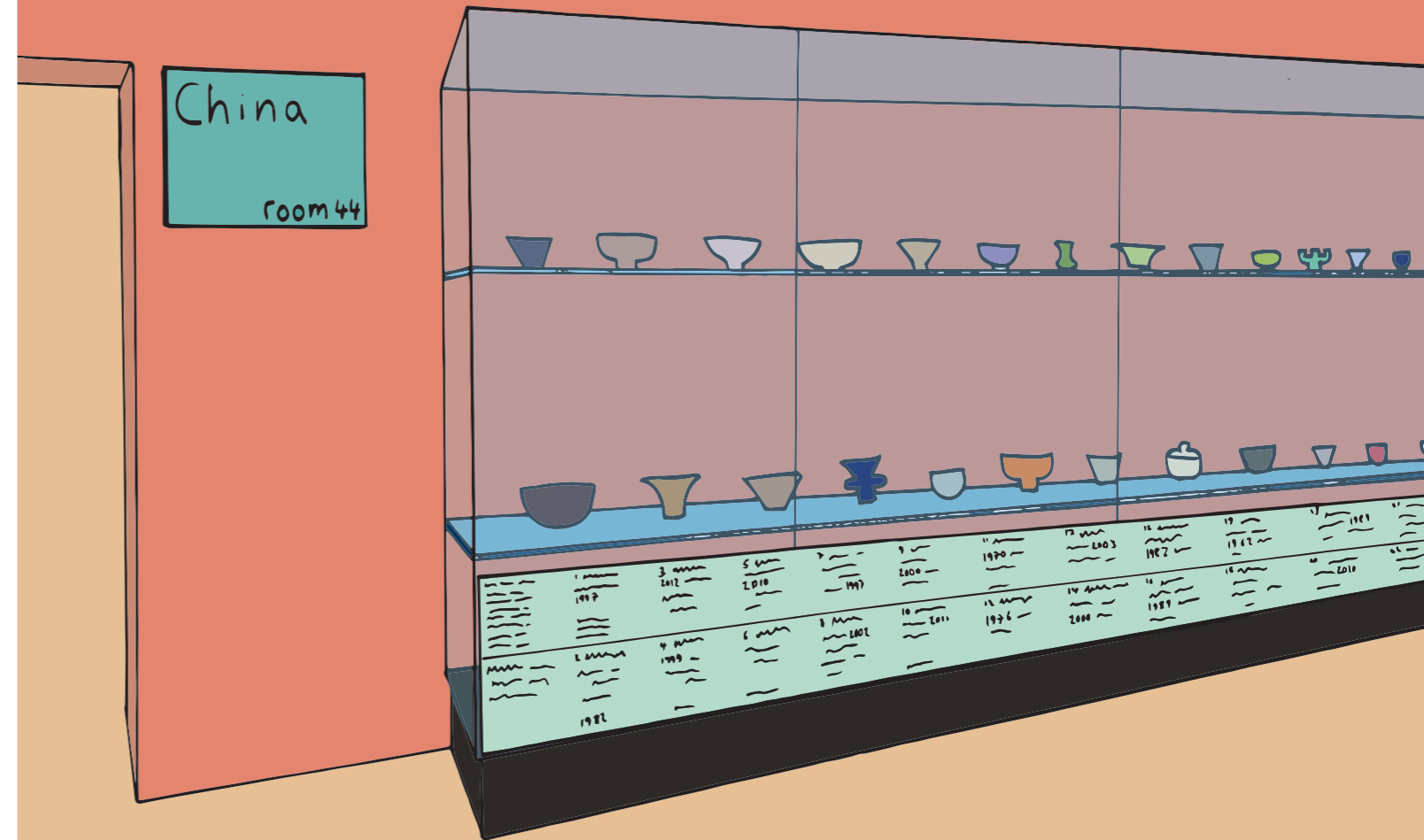


Questioning the Collection

The V&A is a showcase of material civilization and culture. It can be described as a corporate institution that plays a part in sustaining certain ideas and values. As much of musicological literature has shown, museums are just as much about the representation of people as they are about the objects (Dudley and Pearce, 2012). While there are objects in the museum that are purely for aesthetic display, the museum holdings are often there for didactic and political means (Adams, 2010). Certain objects are selected and experienced to illuminate the heritage settings on the changing social and political dynamics.



These ideas and values are created through a linear narrative and systematic classification in which a collection or object sits. The environment in which the narrative sits is far from the real life setting of the objects before being brought into the museum. For example, a cabinet full of traditional Chinese tea bowls lined up, each one dedicated to its own generation, are no longer used in religious ceremonies in which they were so central. They now sit motionless, parched and empty, passively being viewed and judged by its current state, surrounded by an environment of which it is not part of its original context. Apart from a brief description and a room that pertains to China, these objects have been de-contextualized.



However, one can move away from this view of objects sitting in museums, and instead view them as objects that have been re-contextualised (Haidy, 2018). While they are not within their original context, they hold a piece of that context for the viewer to construct. They are still in the setting that is nonetheless real. However, the setting has been designed in such a way that informs the views and ideas of the viewer in accordance to the V&A's social and political stance.



The viewer sees the object as an artefact in a system of classification within the museum. The glass cabinet is a material mediator between the object and the viewer which aids the classification of the object. It is an effective way to construct these certain views as it guides the way we receive information. It separates all our senses but sight and forms an experience which directs a mode of analysis, provokes questions and allows for people to form ideas about the collection. The re-contextualisation happens as soon as the object is placed in a glass case.

In this sense, the Chinese tea bowls are just a sight of directed interpretation by the museum. The museum's image holds numerous factors to guide and help form the viewer's interpretation of a collection. For example, my interpretation of this tea bowl collection has been influenced by the asymmetrical positioning of each tea bowl in terms of its date and origin. Therefore, it demonstrates the percolation of time because the descriptions are muddled between time periods indicating that there is no clear hierarchy between the tea bowls and time

Access

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Touch

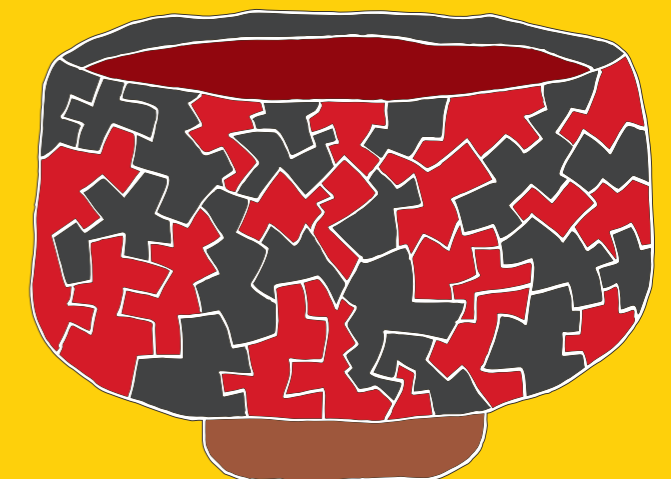
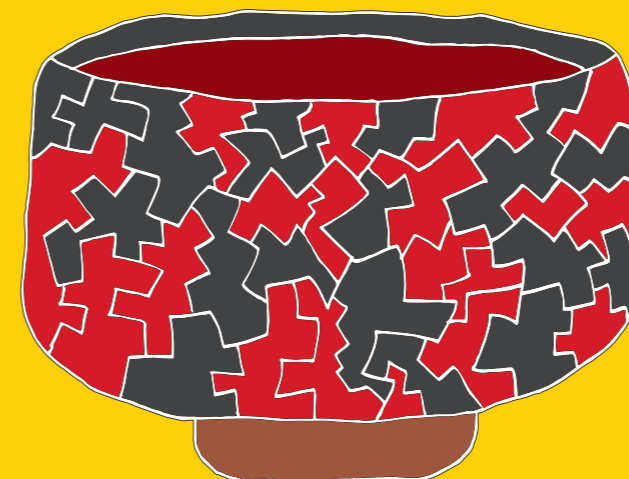
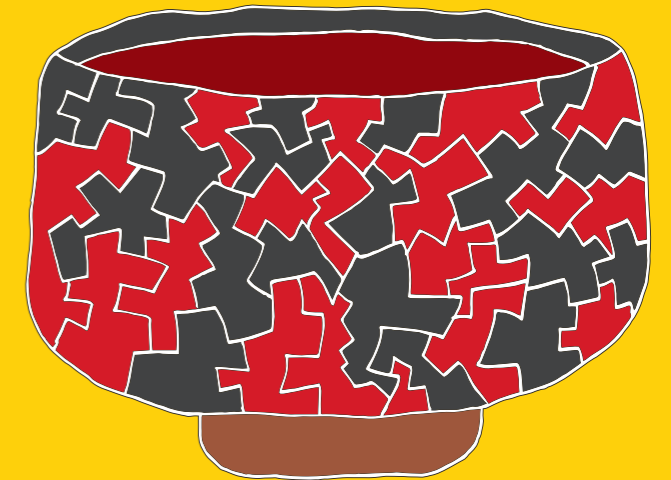
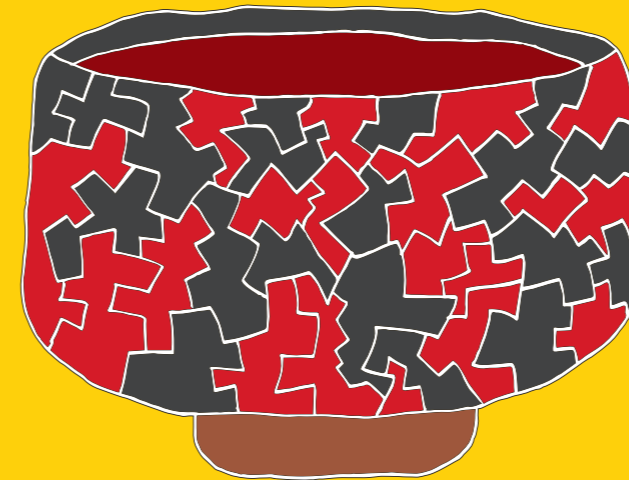
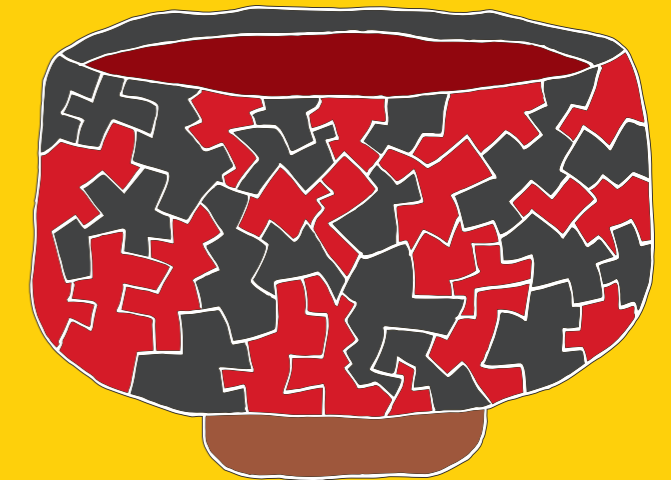


This section explores the tension between personal and institutional constructions on design history regarding access to touching objects in a museum. Within the early history of museums visitors were sometimes able to handle objects and experience their tactile qualities. This method of show casing objects was reduced throughout the nineteenth century and the 'touching public' became the 'viewing public' (Dann, 2012). Museums now have removed this way of interaction through displaying, making statements, authorising views, teaching and ruling over objects.

The physical access to the museum's objects allows for a greater sensuous and intellectual understanding. This is a privilege curators, academics and researchers have over the public. This has led to a more passive experience of the world where touch is secondary to vision (Narkiss & Tomlin, 2008). The tensions build when examiners use their own body and experience with an object as a reference point for which the museum uses as a classification. Classification by this means solely reflects that examiners engagements which can hold an ulterior motive (Haidy, 2018).

Museum objects should be understood by the visitor through physical, emotional and intellectual means. This is because teaching an object or collection involves a material entanglement of complex experiences and affords more intimate engagements (Haidy, 2008). Therefore, by allowing the handling of an object to the visitor it will give them a greater understanding of its nature and cultural heritage. However, studies show that physical access on its own is not enough (Narkiss & Tomlin, 2008). Handling of an object must come within a context, so the experience of an artefact holistically leads to a fuller understanding and appreciation.

However, one of the main issues that comes with handling of fragile artefacts is the degradation of its physical appearance and state. Therefore, the use of tactile artisan-produced copies of original material should be considered through participatory design. This can be seen successfully done, for example, by the Quai Branly museum in Paris (Dann, 2012). As my first section in this essay points out: replication aids our understanding of everyday objects of the past. A replica will allow the visitor to explore, play or use the object as they were intended to do so. In addition to a better understanding of cultural heritage, it has shown to be a therapeutically beneficial process as well as influence creative expression. This would promote value and trust by the Museum to the people of which they are so central (Dann, 2012).



Conclusion

My conclusions is that design is coffee and time is the coffee maker. We filter out the bits of coffee we don't need, and we use the rest. The new designs in public spaces is very rarely 'new' and is often just a replication of something old. This leads to a lack of attention as we already hold a coherent understanding towards such forms of design. Therefore, this does not gage our attention in the way something we did not recognise would. The second part of this essay points out that certain ideas and views about the objects in the V&A are constructed through the museums social and pollical position. It also argues that the glass case is an effective way to construct these certain views as it guides the way we receive information. Lastly, I examine the tensions between the two, and propose using the aspect of replication in order to better understand the nature of the museum's objects and collections. This would give the visitor the opportunity for a physical, emotional and intellectual understanding of the objects through touch.

“In the past, museums isolated artifacts to confirm an authoritarian narrative. Conservators must take care not to become the last bastion of this archaic narrative” (Narkiss, 2008)

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