

Symbolic meanings of antique watch chains and semiotic transformations of culture

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Summary of the doctoral thesis

The subject of the doctoral dissertation entitled *Symbolic meanings of antique watch chains and semiotic transformations of culture* is to analyse the genesis, evolution and symbolic meaning of the watch chain (in the period from the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries until the mid-20th century). Consequently, the main thesis of this dissertation is: the symbolic meanings of watch chains correlated with the semiotic transformations of culture. Because the watch chain was a specific system of symbols that were a visual and material extension of the human personality, allowing one to express one's own identity in a multitude of ways, to shape and consolidate relationships and to create the reality surrounding the individual. Also, its non-petrifying, constantly multiplying sphere of its meanings, symbolic potential correlated dynamically with culture, which was changing on many levels, while maintaining its autonomous existence as a separate cultural object and text.

The innovation of the research carried out is evidenced by the fact that the issue of the symbolic meaning of the watch chain and the attempt to comprehensively and coherently reconstruct its history has not yet been the subject of coherent scientific research, especially from a semiotic aspect. The aim of this dissertation was therefore to prove that this now-forgotten object had been a faithful companion of man for a long time, being a cultural, aesthetic and semiotic product. Despite the passage of centuries since its popularisation, it still holds an enduring cultural, social, artistic and historical value.

Using an appropriate methodology of an interdisciplinary character, the subject matter of watch chain has been adequately exposed, systematised and analysed. This made it possible to confirm the theses formulated at the outset and achieve the aims set out. The analyses carried out further highlighted the need for further research into the significance of watch chains in the cultural sciences.

The work is composed of five main chapters - in the first, the origins of the watch chain are reconstructed, primarily in a historical perspective. Form preceding the watch chain (protodewizka), watch chain proper, form following the watch chain (postdewizka) are

distinguished and cultural implications are shown already at the level of nomenclature. In addition, a general characterisation of the surviving collections in the museum's collections, the issue of makers, workshops and manufacturing centres, the real material value of the watch chain over the centuries and its contemporary status has been included. The next chapter deals with the typology of watch chain, making the necessary systematisation, explaining the terminology of the formal elements and characterising the materials and techniques. Also proposed a typological division into guard chain, fob chain, chatelaine and Albert chain. Specific formal and content distinctions of each type are pointed out. The third section examines the relationship of the watch chain with other manifestations of material culture through the perspective of fashion history. In the course of the discussion, its distinct status in a range of personal items affecting subsequent transformations and possible implications with special and unified clothing was analysed. The next chapter analysed the cultural contexts of the emergence, formation and evolution of symbols in the ornamentation of watch chains. The potential symbolic possibilities of the watch chain are shown due to form, material, colour and possible connotations of word and image. This chapter concludes with a consideration of the symbolism of the watch chain relating to the community and as an expression of an individual's personality. The final section presents possible interpretations of the watch chain as a multidimensional, changing symbol with a specific language. In this way, the varied meanings of the watch chain as a personal object, a piece of jewellery, a work of art and a cultural text are shown. This has allowed it to consider its basic aesthetic, cultural and symbolic functions in the perspective of a changing culture. The collected conclusions made it possible to reconstruct the image of the watch chain as a symbolic system with various functions adapting to the surrounding culture. From the present considerations, horizons for further research on watch chains as a symbols emerge.

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