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Welcome. Come on in! **To plan a multi-layered** **and plurivocal exhibition** **– illustrated by three** **practical examples**

For me, broadly speaking, a good exhibition is made up of three levels: knowledge, emotions and sensory experiences. Each level supports the others so that the contents of the exhibition can be grasped in its diversity and complexity. When I visit an exhibition and experience the feeling of happiness or – depending on its subject – sadness, then I am convinced that the people in charge took account of the three levels and carefully intertwined them. Such an exhibition is plurivocal and multi-layered, it uses diverse media and offers different interpretations. Thus, exhibiting always means to address people with all their senses and experiences – regardless of whether they are laypersons or experts, children or adults¹.

A good exhibition is like a musical composition, a movie or a theatre play. It takes me along on a journey and tells a story. As a curator, I partly work like a dramaturge or director. I ask myself: How do I introduce the subject of the exhibition at the beginning? Where are the climaxes, where are the quiet zones? How do I want to say farewell to my visitors at the end of the exhibition? Which knowledge and emotions should they take away after the visit?

In contrast to all the media mentioned above, exhibitions have three additional potentials that I am particularly interested in: First, the visitors move through the contents and become part of them. Second, they determine the pace and the duration of their stay. Those who have little time

» 1 Bal, M. (2008). Exhibition as film. in R. Ostow (ed.), (Re)visualizing national history: museums and national identities in Europe in the new millennium (s. 15-43). (German and European studies). University of Toronto Press.

should get an overview of the subject through big headings and quotations. Those who wish to stay longer can gain more insights, for example, by means of additional texts, videos and audio stations. In this case, too, I like to use two levels – texts for fast reading and an in-depth discussion. Third, visitors may share what they see and think with others. When I visit an exhibition in company, I can discuss my experiences on site, maybe get associations and develop lines of thought that would not have come to my mind otherwise. As a curator, I can additionally support or provoke these exchanges by wanting that visitors leave traces and the exhibition changes or grows over time. Hence, exhibitions are not merely a three-dimensional form of art or a vehicle for conveying information, but they also bring in the fourth dimension, i.e. time. An exhibition also is like a stroll through a city or landscape during which we ourselves determine the speed, route and perspective and, again and again, discover something new that attracts us and triggers emotions.

Knowledge and atmosphere

When you grow up or work in Switzerland, there is no way of getting around one man – Harald Szeemann. It was he who, after quitting his job as a curator with the Kunsthalle Bern in 1969, actually invented the profession of free-lance exhibition-maker. Without him, the entire profession might not exist at all². His main focus was not on working at a museum or curating an individual exhibition, but rather on presenting his hypotheses and ideas by means of works of various artists – and also with the help of everyday objects. The museum as an exhibition space was just one option out of many for him.

In the summer of 1972 – already before I was born – Harald Szeemann dedicated an exhibition to his grandfather that is still important for my work today. Almost fifty years later, this exhibition about his grandfather has become a myth and still is a point of reference in curatorial work today. Szeemann took three months to screen the estate of his ancestor who had died three years before and, in this process, turned his own apartment into an exhibition space. He tried out how to present the objects, photos and documents of his grandfather together so that his life and personality could be grasped by onlookers. For the exhibition “*Grandfather: A Pioneer Like Us*”³, Szeemann only used everyday objects – no works of art, no valuable exhibits.

» 2 Heesen, A. (2012). *Theorie des Museums zur Einführung* (S.26-29). Junius-Verlag Hamburg.

» 3 Szeemann, H. (2007). *With by through because towards despite*. Catalogue of all exhibitions 1957-2005 (p. 380-388). Tobia Bezzola, Roman Kurzmeyer (ed.), Edition Voldemeer, Zürich / Springer, Wien.

Abstraction and space

In my work in the fields of architecture, urban planning and building culture in the broadest sense, I also ask myself time and again how I can generate knowledge and atmosphere even though I do not have the possibility to bring buildings, cities or landscapes into indoor spaces. In these fields, the main protagonists can never be exhibited in the original – an important difference from art exhibitions. For the subject proper, you always need an abstraction to stand in for the original. In my work at the interface between contents and their presentation, a transfer always takes place. Making this transfer a success is hard work and requires a lot of ideas and experimentation. Like Szeemann in his grandfather exhibition, I try to enable visitors to perceive and experience something that is not available in the original by selecting, combining and presenting contents available as an abstraction.

In this context, cooperation with scenographers always plays a key role for me. Together with them I try to transform the venue in such a way that it becomes the exhibition – instead of merely setting up an exhibition in space. The sequence of rooms defined as well as the walls, floors and ceilings can become part of the narrative. An entrance is not just an entrance, but introduces a topic. Passages lead to new aspects, stairs to new content levels, halls offer overviews. At a smaller scale, display cases, pedestals or frames define a space within space and thereby attribute importance to objects and intensify their aura. Thus, visitors are to enter into a dialogue not only with the contents, but also with the place and its surroundings.

Meeting places and exchanges

I am convinced that exhibitions will continue to be an important medium or maybe even gain in significance in our ever more digital world. The exhibition venue is all the more important as a real meeting place for exchanges and discussions, the more sophisticated and elaborate digitisation becomes. Curators increasingly have to think about potential visitors when designing and presenting exhibitions. The exhibitions and venues of the future will not only put the focus on contents but also on interaction between what is presented and the visitors.

Three examples of my work

Reflecting on and talking about something is one thing. Implementing something is a whole new ballgame. To illustrate the variety of my clients,

subjects, venues and implementations, I have selected three exhibition projects. Their venues ranged from a medieval town house to a hotel resort and on to a former salt warehouse used as a museum today. In all the cases, the exhibition spaces served different purposes in the past or are used for a variety of purposes today. Thus, place and contents are always in a dialogue in my work.

Vanished Places of the Reformation

(Original title: *Verschwundene Orte der Reformation. Zürcher Klöster und Kapellen: von den Reformatoren abgeschafft*), Haus zum Rech, Zurich; 8.6.2018-23.9.2018.

How do you show something that does not exist anymore today? How can you make the times of 500 years ago understandable for people living in the 21st century? Those were the questions that the City Archaeologist of Zurich, other people involved and I asked ourselves. Together with the confrontation between old and new beliefs, the Reformation brought radical change for Zurich in many respects. One out of many was the closure of many churches, monasteries and chapels. In the exhibition we wanted to resurrect a small selection of those vanished places, provide some insights into the differences between the catholic and reformed churches and build a bridge to the present times. Today, there is again a debate on what to do with churches that are not needed anymore.

In the summer of 2018, the exhibition⁴ took place on the ground floor of a medieval building that also houses the construction and building archives as well as dwellings in Zurich's old centre. The exhibition halls bear traces of several conversions and differ by their character. Moreover, the medieval city model is displayed in one of the three rooms and had to remain accessible during our exhibition.

We decided to start by juxtaposing two reconstructed sections of a catholic and a reformed church. Thus, the visitors were able to tune in to the subject and experience the different imageries, bibles and ways of thinking. The second room was dedicated to vanished churches, monasteries and chapels. Using models, visualisations and historical picture documents and photos, we tried to enable the visitors to experience the buildings again. As each place of worship is consecrated to a saint in Catholicism, we also revived them based on historic wood sculptures. We took pictures of these sculptures and merged them into little animations.

» 4 <https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/verschwundeneorte> [access: 26.8.2019], E-Publication of the exhibition: https://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/hbd/de/index/staedtebau/archaeo_denkmal/publikationen/schriftenreihe/heft_13.html [access: 26.8.2019].

These helped us to add a tongue-in-cheek approach to this demanding and abstract topic. In the third room, with the city model in place, we put up large-format “flip images”. By using the lenticular printing technique, it was possible to print several pictures on top of each other. When you moved around in the room, the image changed. Hence, the visitors saw today’s Zurich as well as the same place with a reconstructed chapel, church or monastery as it was 500 years ago in one and the same picture. The pleasure that the visitors took in these pictures confirmed that we made a good choice and that simple analogue techniques are still effective today.

**Hotel Museum Bürgenstock Resort
Lake Lucerne, *Obbürgen*, permanent exhibitions, open to the public since summer 2018**

The almost 150-year history of Bürgenstock Hotels is as thrilling as a detective story. Success and bankruptcy, secret meetings and glamour – the legendary place high above Lake Lucerne has seen it all. Together with a team of interior decorators and hoteliers, I had the task to set the stage for showcasing this eventful history in the newly opened resort. The great challenge of this project⁵ was to develop a common understanding of the subject.

We decided not to set up the presentation in a separate building but to place it along the paths of guests and visitors so that everybody would inevitably walk past it and take up the history of the place in passing. The concept of a distributed museum now comprises four permanent exhibitions, the Celebrity Wall and the Walk of History – partly indoors, partly outdoors. Since the autumn of 2018, guests and visitors have been able to see six places on the history of the Bürgenstock that are spread over the large premises of the resort on their own and free of charge. There is no guard, no guide and no perception of an exhibition as in museums. Everything has to be self-explanatory and easily comprehensible.

Each exhibition has a dual use, has to be robust in everyday life and in maintenance. The most distant exhibition space is located on the shore of Lake Lucerne at the ship and funicular station. It is also a waiting room for the passengers changing here. The two exhibitions located between the central lobby and Palace Hotel and on the way from the Piazza to the spa also serve as access zones. The historical meteorological station now also is an information point with small display cases on various attractions in the resort.

» 5 <http://www.gasserderungs.ch/sinnlich-praezise/projekte/buergerstock-resort> [access: 26.8.2019], (website of the architects in charge).

Using historical films and furniture, ceiling paintings and balcony fragments from erstwhile buildings, brochures and photos from different epochs, the distributed museum paints a varied picture of the diverse and glamorous history of Bürgenstock. Architecture models, photos and a time-lapse video also document recent developments. Just like 150 years ago, you can again stroll through the resort while enjoying the exhibitions and the breath-taking view in passing.

Sky Tram Happiness – An exhibition trilogy in Zurich, Flims and Stans

Classics and newcomers, Heimatschutzzentrum, Zurich, 17.11.2017-28.10.2018

Gondola dreams and vistas. Das Gelbe Haus Flims, Flims Dorf, 24.12.2017-28.10.2018

Small ropeways and freight carriers. Nidwaldner Museum, Salzmagazin, Stans, 23.3.2018-28.10.2018

With more than 800 installations in operation, Switzerland is a stronghold of aerial ropeways. However, many of them are now becoming outdated and, therefore, are dismantled and replaced by new systems. But these historical ropeways are intricately linked to the tourism history of the Alpine region and mountain agriculture – two themes that have shaped Switzerland. Aerial tramways constitute a Swiss cultural asset *par excellence* and enjoy great popularity among the Swiss.

In the winter health resort of Flims-Laax-Falera in Grisons, the first chairlift of Switzerland was built in 1945. This town also is home to Das Gelbe Haus Flims – an exhibition venue devoted to the culture of the Alpine region. As the ropeways of Flims-Laax-Falera had seen major changes in the past few years, the executive board took up this subject for an exhibition. The board commissioned me to do preliminary research. I started enquiring with various institutions and experts and gathering more information about the subject and potential exhibits. Quite unexpectedly, two institutions contacted my client. Both the Swiss Heritage Centre in Zurich and the Nidwaldner Museum in Stans had been exploring the idea whether aerial tramways would be an exhibition topic for their venues. So it came that three institutions working in three completely different places in Switzerland sat around one table and commissioned me to organise three exhibitions. In spite of all the complications that such a project spanning three venues entails, the three clients and I were not willing to produce a travelling exhibition but rather an exhibition trilogy. This meant: three exhibitions on aerial ropeways with different focal areas at three

different places from November 2017 to October 2018⁶. Each exhibition was self-contained and, at the same time, formed part of a common path and made reference to the place and the issues of concern to the people living in the region. The Swiss Heritage Centre presented classics and newcomers, Das Gelbe Haus Flims showed aerial ropeways in tourism and the Nidwaldner Museum focused on small ropeways used in agriculture.

As a connecting design element, all the venues used walk-in wooden gondolas. Depending on the site, they were red (Swiss Heritage Centre), yellow (Das Gelbe Haus) or green (Nidwaldner Museum). The gondolas served as information vehicles for texts and films as well as space-creating elements. Original gondolas and chairs, ropes, sheaves, grips and other objects from the world of aerial tramways complemented the furnishings.

The objective of the exhibition trilogy was to enthuse visitors with this smart means of transport and raise awareness for the preservation of trailblazing historic ropeways. With the exhibition trilogy we wanted to (and did) launch a public debate on the value of aerial ropeways as a cultural asset. The trilogy was generously supported by the Swiss Federal Office of Culture as Switzerland is the first country in the world to build a register – The Ropeway Inventory⁷ – that documents the stock of historical ropeways for an entire country.

In my work in the fields of architecture, urban planning and building culture in the broadest sense, I ask myself time and again how I can generate knowledge and atmosphere even though I do not have the possibility to bring buildings, cities or landscapes into indoor spaces. For the subject proper, you always need an abstraction to stand in for the original. The essay describes how I try to accomplish this transfer with the help of conceptual levels, scenography and the site and translate it into a multi-layered and plurivocal exhibition. This is illustrated by three practical examples. ●

» 6 <https://www.luftseilbahnglueck.ch> [access: 26.8.2019].

» 7 <https://www.seilbahninventar.ch> [access: 26.8.2019].