

## Sources

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## 4.4 THE THRESHOLD OF EXHIBITION VENUES: ACCESS TO THE WORLD OF CULTURE

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A museum exhibition is not a medium like others: By nature it is spatial and involves the visitor as an active participator (see Davallon 1999). For a visit to a museum it is therefore necessary to leave one's home, go to the museum and enter it. In addition, a visit to a museum requires an intellectual effort – which aims at comprehending the meaning of the exhibition – and a symbolic effort: it presumes the entrance into a heavily valorized place of culture, a place of experience and knowledge, which is not yet accessible to all members of society (see Donnat 2008). Visiting a museum exhibition thus implies a physical, intellectual and symbolic passage from the space of everyday life to that of the museum, to the world of art, science, history, in brief, to 'culture'. It is worth noting that one third of Luxembourg's residents have declared that they have never set foot in a museum (see University of Luxembourg, IDENT2 2012/2013 – quantitative survey).

It is this threshold of museums and exhibition venues that constitute the subject of this case study, understood as the more or less expanded space which both separates and connects the everyday space and the exhibition space of cultural objects and knowledge. Using a variety of examples, my concern will be to understand the symbolic function of the threshold and to examine under which circumstances it facilitates the passage between the two spaces and creates a positive 'visitor attitude' in those who cross it.

After establishing how the notion of the threshold is employed in different contexts, I will present a communication-oriented method for analysing museum thresholds, followed by a typology of the latter. The study will conclude with a discussion of the results and perspectives of this analysis.

#### 4.4.1 The Museum Threshold: Interstice, Paratext, Border Area

##### A Spatial, Symbolic and Contractual Fact

First of all, the notion of threshold indicates a spatial fact: it is a space of the ‘in-between’, an ‘interstice’, whose function it is primarily to enable the passage from one place to another (see Starwiarski 2010). But whereas the interstice often suggests a space that is situated between functionally clearly defined constructions or spaces and is fallow (see Dumont 2006), of temporary or uncertain status, without a specific attribution, often associated with the notion of non-place (see Guillaud 2009), the threshold, on the other hand, is more a space that occupies a potentially strategic role of reception and of passage. Thus the threshold is *a priori* a specific interstice that results from one or more sophisticated strategies. The seminar *Zones du seuil* has in fact shown that a building’s threshold is something increasingly neglected by architects, while it has the important function of receiving or rejecting, depending on who identifies themselves (see Coll. 2012). Contemplating the threshold thus also means contemplating its crossing: the threshold manifests itself in the crossing, it is a barrier *and* a crossing, a closing *and* an opening (see Starwiarski 2010).

In addition, the threshold contains symbolic values: it acquires a phantasmagoric quality which is connected to the notion of passage, rite and metamorphosis (see Bonnin 2000), which at the same time brings it close to the notion of *liminalité*. This concept has its origin in the analysis of rites of passage developed by Arnold van Gennep (1909) and signifies the “moment in which an individual has lost a first status and not yet acquired a second one; it finds itself in an intermediate situation and hovers between two states”<sup>36</sup> (Calvez 2000: 83).

Finally, the notion of threshold points to that of the paratext, used particularly in literature (see section 4.5), which is more than a border or a boundary, namely “a ‘vestibule’ that offers everyone the possibility to enter or turn back”<sup>37</sup> (Genette 1987: 7). The role of the paratext is then to make a text accessible, to facilitate its consumption, its reception. This enunciative context thus contributes in establishing a communicative contract between reader and work and allows for a more “relevant reading”<sup>38</sup> of the text (ibid.: 8) by indicating how it should be read (it provides keys to reading) and who is speaking.

**36** | Personal translation of: “Le moment où un individu a perdu un premier statut et n’a pas encore accédé à un second statut ; il est dans une situation intermédiaire et flotte entre deux états.”

**37** | Personal translation of: “Un ‘vestibule’ qui offre la possibilité à tout un chacun d’entrer ou de rebrousser chemin.”

**38** | Personal translation of: “Une lecture plus pertinente.”

### The Functions of the Museum Threshold

In one of the few well-known studies on museum thresholds, Monique Renault focuses on the passage between the urban space and the museum space and defines the latter's threshold as that "which crystallizes the tensions between the two worlds"<sup>39</sup> (Renault 2000: 15). The museum threshold – understood as the space that separates and connects the everyday space and the exhibition space – is in fact first of all a physical space, an 'in-between space' between two different spaces: the public everyday space, potentially the space of living, passage, taking a walk, commerce, work, unrest, action etc. and the museum, the space of culture, knowledge, but also of esthetical pleasure, silence, calm etc.<sup>40</sup>

Etymologically the word 'museum' points to the holy grove of the Muses, protectors of the arts (see Gob/Drouguet 2006) and thus to a 'separated' space, such as the forest. The separation of objects from the everyday world is moreover the actual condition of existence of the museum object – in the sense of the *objet muséal* (see Davallon 1999): this separation is indeed the "first phase of the operation of musealization by which the real items are dislocated from their original environment and acquire the status of museum objects or museal realities"<sup>41</sup> (Desvallées/Mairesse 2011: 661). The 'closed' space of the museum also ensures the functioning of the exhibition as a text (see Davallon 1999 for a more in-depth discussion); the objects are decontextualised and relocated, re-expressed within a tour which is the carrier of meaning.

However, the museum has pledged to be "in the service to society" according to the definition of the International Council of Museums (Mairesse/Desvallées 2011: 14). It therefore has to increasingly open up to society and take on a genuine social role (see Fourès/Grisot/Lochot 2011). But precisely this shift has always been a problem for the museum: the fact remains that there is still a cultured class, a 'separate' medium, a 'special' place, whose doors are sometimes difficult to pass. These doors can at times not only be daunting (and exclude particular social groups), but also in a way 'invisible' and in turn exclude certain social groups for whom they are not part of the universe of the intelligible, thinkable and doable (see Bourdieu/Darbel 1991 [1966]).

The museum threshold also has different practical functions: it has to generate the desire to enter the museum, has to enable visitors to inform themselves about the visit, opening times or entry fees (and thus potentially also to turn back or

**39** | Personal translation of: "[...] ce qui cristallise les tensions entre ces deux mondes."

**40** | Nevertheless, the exterior is never entirely without reflection, observation or art, and the museum area is never free of influences from the outside world. It would therefore be more correct to say that the threshold of the museum offers a passage or a transition between two spaces which are *a priori* different but can approach each other.

**41** | Personal translation of: "La première étape de l'opération de muséalisation par laquelle les vraies choses sont séparées de leur milieu d'origine et acquièrent le statut d'objets de musée ou de muséaliés."

to stay in order to rest or meet up with somebody), to pay possible entry fees or acquire documents that help them to orientate themselves in the exhibition both in terms of space and content. Often there is a cloak room where one can make oneself comfortable for the visit (or sometimes change or rest). In most museums, entrance and exit adjoin, and there is a museum shop where one can buy something as a souvenir of one's visit. The threshold is thus the space that prepares for the visit or the departure and enables the exchange between the two spaces.

As a border space the threshold has to enable the visitors to extract themselves from their everyday lives in order to enter a different time and a different world. It therefore marks the difference between these spaces, and a visit to a museum can resemble a journey into another time-space: the threshold is

“[...] mental preparation, forgetting the self, the previously experienced, it is the conditioning for the challenging and solitary tension of these spaces without voice, invitation to an aesthetic encounter, to a dialogue of the eyes, senses and the intellect”<sup>42</sup> (Renault 2000: 16).

The museum therefore has to ensure that the visitors are deprived of their accustomed spatial-temporal orientation in order to prepare them for the aesthetic and cognitive experience, and in doing so it becomes the access to another world. As in a journey “the visitor is ‘decoupled’ from everyday life and immersed, for the duration of his visit, in a new universe”<sup>43</sup> (Davallon 1999: 174f.). For the visitor this not only involves a passage from one space to another, but from one ‘attitude’ to another: the passerby, the stroller, tourist, consumer is called upon to become an interested and attentive visitor and aesthetic. But according to Renault (2000), and also in my view, this change necessitates a space and a time that permit the visitor to adopt an attitude that is adequate to the visit.

Furthermore, crossing the museum threshold presumes, like the paratext of books, an implicit contract between visitor and museum. Once the threshold is crossed a certain behaviour is expected of the visitor: the exhibition is usually visited in silence, with a certain slowness and attention, without touching the exhibits etc. The visit to the museum is thus a social regulation of ‘good taste’ and ‘good’ behaviour (see Jacobi/Meunier 2000). And it is the museum threshold that imposes upon the visitor a certain deceleration, a certain time of observation, of exchange with the museum personnel or with the group he or she has arrived with (family, friends), a preparation for an encounter with the world of culture. It

**42** | Personal translation of: “Préparation mentale, oubli de soi, de son vécu précédent, il est conditionnement à la tension exigeante et solitaire de ces lieux sans voix, invitation à une rencontre esthétique, à un dialogue des yeux, des sens et de l’intelligence.”

**43** | Personal translation of: “Le visiteur est ‘déprogrammé’ du quotidien et plongé, pour le temps de sa visite, dans un univers nouveau.”

is the preparation for the encounter which allows the adoption of a specific visitor's attitude appropriate to the exhibition to be visited (the visitor may be prompted to be more or less attentive, more or less quiet, more or less nostalgic or open towards the new, depending on the exhibition).

And vice-versa this contract also involves obligations for the museum, right from the threshold: it has to suggest a special relationship to the objects and items of knowledge (see Renault 2000) and this contract has to be honoured with the visit – e.g. an exhibition focusing on aesthetics or emotionality or knowledge transfer has to be advertised as such from the point of its threshold.

Finally, Renault (2000) shows that historically, when comparing the neoclassical art museum with contemporary buildings, museum architecture increasingly tends to 'deactivate' the rupture created by the threshold. The visit to the museum in this way turns into a transit event that links two urban moments, bringing it into the vicinity of places of transit, such as railway stations or subway stations. She thus favours a museum that is discrete from the public space, the condition "necessary in order to bring forth the meaning of the works"<sup>44</sup> (ibid.: 20). As we shall see, this position is debatable. In any event, the role of the threshold seems important: if it is (too) open, it banalizes; if it is (too) closed, it sacralizes, with the risk that passage is prevented. So a great deal comes into play at the level of the threshold: it is not a neutral place.

### **Thresholds of Exhibition Venues: A Communicative and Semiotic Study**

In order to examine the question how thresholds of exhibition venues function, how they behave in terms of the communicative contract and the attitude of the visitor, and what their current development is, I have conducted a communicative analysis of the thresholds of 77 museums and exhibition venues in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The subject of the study is therefore a heterogeneous sample of exhibitions in terms of scale (small, medium-sized, large museum), form (amateur project, professional), geographical location (city, rural) or type (art, history, ethnology, industry etc.).

Thanks to this relatively large corpus, I was able to pursue both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. I have photographed the thresholds of the 77 exhibition venues following a fixed protocol that segmented the museum space according to the principle of spatial and semantic scaling (*emboîtement*), "i.e. according to a regressive process from the general to the particular"<sup>45</sup> (Gharsallah 2008: 48f.). The photographs are produced by first beginning with general views, followed by views of the individual exhibition elements, from the largest to the smallest. These

<sup>44</sup> | Personal translation of: "[...] nécessaire pour faire surgir le sens des œuvres."

<sup>45</sup> | Personal translation of: "[...] c'est-à-dire selon un procédé régressif allant du général au particulier."

are arranged in such a way that the space can be reconstructed on the basis of the pictures.

I have described each threshold on the basis of these photographs: the context of each exhibition venue – type of city, neighbourhood etc.; the architectural elements of the threshold – in front of the entrance and behind it – and of the external environment up to the door and from the door to the exhibition; but also how the threshold is expressed via the existing communicative elements – the name of the museum, reception boards, contents, languages etc.; the moment when one sees the museum's displays – around the museum, from the foyer, behind the foyer etc.; similarly the functions of the places of reception – information, sale, repose etc.

This quantitative approach makes it possible to evaluate the significance of specific tendencies of threshold design and formulate a typology of these thresholds. The qualitative approach to certain 'representative' thresholds is in principle based on a semiotic analysis that aims to highlight the conditions of the possibilities (and the constraints) of certain effects of meaning (see Davallon 1999; Gharsallah 2008). In other words: the semiotic analysis helps us to understand how the threshold acts as a signifier by searching in the expographical dispositif what it expresses independently from the intentions of those who designed it (the *intentio auctoris* according to Umberto Eco 1991 [1990]). The analysis thus returns to searching in the expographical dispositif for what Eco calls the intention of the work or the *intentio operis* (see *ibid.*). The thresholds are therefore analysed as they appear to the visitor, at the same time formulating hypotheses as to the effects of their meaning. These hypotheses concern the threshold's symbolic effect, the communicative contract established by each type of threshold, and the way the threshold could take effect on the visitor's attitude. We should note here that the threshold of a museum is first and foremost the result of architectural constraints (all the more because in Luxembourg the majority of the buildings housing museums were originally not designed for this purpose), but it can also be structured, designed, reinforced or blurred through a series of strategic measures (through the placing of objects, texts, images etc).

#### 4.4.2 The Threshold: A Typological Approach

For defining the threshold we use in principle three criteria: 1) the rupture between the (external) environment and the contents of the exhibition (between the external context in which the museum and the exhibition is situated and between the building and the exhibition); 2) the 'moment' when one glimpses the displays or works for the first time (before entering the museum or behind the reception hall) and 3) the elements preparing for entering the exhibition (the number and kind of elements preparing – or not – this entering). Even though the following typology reduces the particularities of each threshold, it is nevertheless suited to formulate a general reflection on the significant elements of the threshold.

### Exhibitions ‘without Place’

First of all there are museums ‘without place’ and therefore also without a threshold (8 % of the sample). These are very small museums which are located without any separation in the public space: e.g. the *Musée Sybodo de la médecine* (‘Sybodo museum of medicine’), which is located in a wing of the hospital of Kirchberg, in the middle of a patients’ waiting area, or the *Musée des instruments de musique* (‘museum of musical instruments’) which is housed in a corridor and a stairwell of the *Conservatoire de Luxembourg*. These museums consist of ensembles of showcases displaying exhibits and texts (labels and boards). They resemble the exhibitions staged in (media) libraries, but have the feature of not distinguishing themselves from their environment, i.e. there is no rupture between the exhibition area and the surrounding space: the *Musée de la physique* (‘museum of physics’), for instance, is in the corridor of a secondary school next to the physics rooms. The *Musée du relais postal et des écritaires et salle de classe d’autrefois* (‘museum of the postal relay station, writing material and classrooms of olden times’) in Asselborn is situated on the first floor of an old post office, with a restaurant on the ground floor that already offers a glimpse of a number of exhibits.

Here the museum is inextricably connected with the everyday public space. These exhibitions offer no entrance or exit and therefore also no circuit that needs to be followed. It is difficult to determine where they begin and where they end. Only the show cases make it possible to separate the displays from reality, but the ensemble of the show cases is not sacralized or ‘discrete’. The banality of everyday space has the tendency to incorporate the exhibits located in the middle of a space meant for other purposes, thus becoming the object of a passing glimpse, but rarely of a purposeful tour. Symbolically, the lacking separation between external public space and exhibition does not permit the visitor to see it as a coherent text, to follow a meaningful tour or to move around in another time-space. Since the museum merges entirely with its direct surroundings the rupture between the two worlds is blurred and one is not stimulated to decentre oneself in order to approach the exhibits. Such exhibitions thus have much in common with non-places or interstices: places of passage and not of observation that deprive the exhibits of their aura. Only experts (of museums or of the exhibition’s theme) can in my view recognize an exhibition venue, a ‘mini museum’, in these show cases and will be able to adopt a ‘visitor’ attitude by taking the time to explore the exhibition and acquire knowledge. But in the great majority of cases visitors will be no more than passers-by (or patients, or students etc.) while waiting to move on to another activity relating to the place in question (seeing the doctor, attending class, having a meal etc.).

### Exhibitions where the Threshold has no Function

53 % of the sample (41 exhibitions) are in closed buildings specifically intended for housing exhibitions, but once visitors have come through the entrance they have direct access to the works and exhibits. These museums therefore have no

threshold in the actual sense, or, more precisely, their threshold is limited to the entrance door. It is above all the small and medium-sized museums that display this type of threshold. This sudden immersion into the world of the exhibition can be explained with a lack of space or with lacking awareness for the symbolic role of the threshold.

One can distinguish two sub-types of this kind of threshold. The first type is represented in 34 % of the exhibitions. They are marked by a 'hard' entrance and a clear break with their surroundings: the *Musée de l'abeille* ('bee museum') evokes nature even though it is located in the centre of Diekirch, or the *Musée de la Poste* conjures up the postal past of Luxembourg city in the very urban business district around the station of Luxembourg city. The second exhibition type, represented with 19 %, displays an abrupt entrance, but is, at the same time, intimately connected with its direct surroundings: the *Musée A Schiewech* in Binsfeld presents collections relating to the rural world in a rural environment. With this exhibition subtype the threshold seems to begin already well before the door: the geographical space surrounding the museum would then already be a preparation for the contents of this museum. This is also true of the exhibition of the *Massenoire* ('black mass'), which is located in the district of Esch-Belval (an old industrial site), the *Site industriel du Fonds-de-Gras* ('industrial site of the Fonds-de-Gras') or *Musée de la mine Cockerill* ('museum of the Cockerill mine'). The exhibitions' industrial environment has an effect on how these are interpreted and prepares the visitor for what is presented in the exhibition. With exhibitions of this kind the threshold therefore begins long before their doors.

In both cases, these 'immersive' exhibitions require the visitor to already have a certain degree of knowledge of the world they are about to enter and risk putting off laypersons or the non-initiated. They establish a special communicative contract with the visitor that might give the impression as if the mere contact with the exhibits could suffice to understand them: not entirely withdrawn from 'reality', the exhibits are placed on the same level as the everyday exterior and thereby lose their aura for visitors who do not have the knowledge to identify by themselves which of the exhibits are the important ones. This is particularly evident in the rural museums: it is as if the familiarity one experiences when seeing these old objects (which are familiar to us from our grandparents) would suffice to also understand them. One therefore passes from an everyday external space into a 'familiar' space as if one were to enter someone's living room. In addition, these exhibitions without threshold do not oblige the visitor to slow down or adopt a visitor's attitude. Depending on the status the visitor has had outside the museum, it is possible that he or she might retain it inside. For instance, the tourist exploring rural Luxembourg and entering one of these museums without threshold is most likely to remain a 'tourist' rather than change into a 'visitor'. The visitor entering a 'familiar' space might also feel uninhibited by the constraints that are usually imposed by a museum (silence and the prohibition to touch objects).

### Exhibitions whose Threshold Prepare for an Encounter

Finally, slightly over a third (39 % or 30 cases) have a threshold which consists of a room intended for reception, equally segregated from the everyday external space and from the exhibition. Access to the exhibit is therefore progressive. But these thresholds do not all have the same configuration: we can distinguish three sub-types.

1) *Classical thresholds*: 14 % (or 8 cases) of the exhibitions have a reception hall that is separated both from outside and from the collection, which however also serves another function, e.g. for tourist information (*Musée de l'Europe* ('museum of Europe') in Schengen, *Musée et maison du vin* ('museum and house of wine') in Ehnen) or for the sale of objects (*Musée national des mines de fer* ('national museum of iron mines') in Rumelange). To a certain degree this structured space allows visitors to slow down and take a moment's time to extricate themselves from the external reality before approaching the museum's works or exhibits. This space thus separates the exhibit from reality and enables it to acquire a special status and a special aura. Whoever enters there can also take their time to adopt a visitor's attitude appropriate to the visit and the understanding of the exhibition. But this is connected to a choice: visitors can also choose to turn to other activities offered by the space – they can browse or inform themselves about the region, thus retaining their status as consumers, tourists or strollers inside the museum. I therefore argue that for a museum really wishing to prepare for an encounter, it is not sufficient to provide a threshold that is merely physically separated from the interior of the exhibition: it has to multiply the symbols that prepare the passer-by for becoming a visitor.

2) *Visible thresholds*: Certain exhibitions (16 %) have a threshold that is structured, both outside and within the museum, into a number of sections preparing for the encounter with the world of culture. This means, what happens here is not so much a *moment* of reception rather than a *process* of reception. This is for instance the case with the *Musée Forteresse, histoire, identités* ('museum fortress, history, identities') or *Villa Vauban – Musée d'art de Luxembourg* ('Luxembourg art museum') for whose visit it is necessary to first cross a park and subsequently traverse a very calm and sober lobby. Everything along the way leading to the exhibitions is an invitation to calmness and contemplation of the works. And in the lobby, the only place in the *Villa Vauban* where one can see the external world, there are comfortable easy-chairs facing the park that invite reflection. Other examples: the new exhibitions *The Bitter Years* in the *Pomhouse* in Dudelange and *The Family of Man* in the *Château de Clervaux* offer a multiplication of the architectural thresholds and a very present paratext. In *The Family of Man*, the visitor is required to follow the signboards from the city centre and then use a path up to a castle. Standing in front of the castle's entrance one sees a large sign with the inscription 'The largest photo exhibition of all times'<sup>46</sup>, followed by a text

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46 | Personal translation of: "La plus grande exposition photographique de tous les temps."

which outlines how the exhibition was created. Directly after entering the castle two large banderoles indicate the exhibition's title and identify it as part of the Unesco cultural heritage. In the castle yard a board invites the visitor to climb some steps. Inside the castle one notices a large inscription on the wall "*The Family of Man* Unesco Memory of the World" and "A photographic cultural heritage created by Edward Steichen for the MoMA in New York in 1955"<sup>47</sup>. An arrow indicates that the visitor should take an elevator. On arriving on the respective floor visitors are 'received' by two photographs of the exhibition (a face and the head of a statue, looking at him or her), as well as by the same large board as on the previous floor, but with the following information: "503 images, 273 photographers, 68 countries."<sup>48</sup> The visitor walks through the corridor and reaches the lobby. In the back, one finds the information regarding entrance fees and the multimedia visit. In addition, a text elaborates on the history of the exhibition – an exhibition that has travelled around the world and will in the future be 'legendary'. One also learns that the exhibited prints are originals and that the visitor is thereby asked to show the appropriate respect and consideration. Finally the visitor can turn around, open a door and enter the exhibition. The multiplication of the threshold elements is very marked here: it prepares the visitor for an encounter, announcing itself as 'extraordinary' and unique, with an equally unique cultural heritage – with the seal of Unesco serving as a guarantee for quality. Furthermore, various interpretations of the exhibition are suggested long before one actually sees the works: the significance of the photographs as objects of cultural heritage, of the subject matter represented in the photographs, of the exhibition etc. By contrast, inside the exhibition mediation is reduced to a bare minimum: the visitor has additional information in a portable media dispositif, but the exhibition offers no written texts besides those used in the original exhibition in the *Museum of Modern Art* (MoMA) in 1955. Thus this very elaborated threshold already provides the crucial information in order to roughly understand the project and the exhibition and fulfills the function of paratextual information – it is a medialization in the proper sense.<sup>49</sup> One can also see very well that it is not only the architecture that 'makes' a threshold: here it is all the elements of the museum's paratext that clothe the threshold and multiply its sections and effects.

The *Musée national de la résistance* ('national museum of resistance') in Esch-sur-Alzette also has a clearly visible threshold. It requires the visitor to cross a large open square, climb a dozen steps, approach a very impressive neoclassical building with high columns, pass a monument that carries the inscription "Died for their

**47** | Personal translation of: "Un patrimoine photographique créé par Edward Steichen pour le *MoMA* de New York 1955."

**48** | Personal translation of: "503 images, 273 photographes, 68 pays."

**49** | The medialization is here understood as "the production and materialization of social relationships that enable the exchange" (personal translation of: "La production et la matérialisation de relations sociales qui rendent possible l'échange" (Davallon 2007: 10)).

fatherland” and push open a heavy door. Then the visitor enters a dark room, the ‘sacred hall’ with large paintings, in front a column with an urn containing soil from various concentration camps. Here the threshold clearly invites the visitors to remember and to collect themselves and suggests the adoption of a humble attitude. This is not only a promise relating to the exhibited works but a truly psychological preparation of the visitor for the exhibition.

In this case, we see that the threshold can also extend beyond the doors of the museum. This is also the case with the *Musée national d’histoire naturelle* (‘natural history museum’) in which the tour begins at a room of *concernation*<sup>50</sup>: a room which is right at the beginning of the tour, directly behind the foyer, and which is intended to make the visitors look forward to their encounter with the scientific contents they are about to ‘enter’. One can observe very well here that the exhibition’s threshold can not only be in the museum’s foyer but also a little further back, at the beginning of the exhibition. Similarly, the *Musée d’histoire de la ville de Luxembourg* (‘museum of the history of the city of Luxembourg’) and the *Musée national d’histoire et d’art* (‘national museum of history and art’) both have a glass elevator directly behind the reception which takes the visitor to the permanent exhibition. The elevators extend the threshold of these exhibitions by providing a physical journey and a symbolic ascent in time. They decontextualize the visitors, pull them out of their daily routine and recontextualize them in another time-space (a sombre room, surrounded by rocks, evoking a time long past). In the *Musée Tudor* in Rosport, the journey by elevator is even more symbolic since the visitor arrives in a very sombre, almost black room which evokes the time before the invention of the electric generator by Henri Tudor. Light appears on the tour at the moment when Tudor invents the generator.

Here the passage between the exterior and the interior of the museum takes place via a threshold which fulfills symbolic and paratextual functions. Due to the architecture, but also and primarily through the use of scripto-visual, scenographic or iconic signs the threshold appears as something continually accompanying the visitor. It enables the exhibits to take on a specific value: as a constant of a (more or less) long tour, the threshold directs the visitor’s attention to the exhibits and emphasizes their exceptional aspects. The threshold also enables a transformation of the passer-by into a visitor and conveys him or her into a mental state attuned to the following exhibition even before becoming aware of the exhibits. The visitors are accompanied in their transformation and are occasionally even prompted to become more than a visitor: an ‘attentive observer’ in the *Villa Vauban* or the *Musée Dräi Eechelen*; a ‘witness’ in the *The Family of Man*, *The Bitter Years* or the *Musée national de la résistance*; a ‘scientific apprentice’ who asks questions in the *Musée national d’histoire naturelle* or the *Musée Tudor*; a ‘temporal explorer’ in the

**50** | This term was coined by the museologist André Giordan. It refers to a space that ‘concerns’ (*concerner*) the visitor, that is intended to arouse his or her interest in the subject matter (see Giordan 2013).

*Musée d'histoire de la ville de Luxembourg* and the *Musée national d'histoire et d'art*. Here we clearly see how via the museum's threshold identitary micro-adjustments are made.

3) 'Transparent' thresholds: Finally, the most modern museums also have thresholds that accompany the visitors, but without the latter clearly perceiving them as such: these museums (5 % of the corpus, i.e. four cases) do not display the features of overt accompaniment as described above. Instead, they offer a progressive threshold which facilitates the access to the works by playing with transparency and letting the exhibition communicate with the surroundings. Examples of this type are for instance the Mudam, the *Casino – Forum d'art contemporain* in whose foyer and pavilion, the 'aquarium', artist encounters and all kinds of forums take place (visible from the street), the *Musée d'histoire de la ville de Luxembourg* with its large glass wall decorated with colours, logos and symbols of the current temporary exhibitions, or the *Musée d'histoire(s) de Diekirch* ('museum of the history [and stories] of Diekirch') where a part of the permanent exhibition is visible from outside and particularly from the threshold of the church opposite. But at the *Musée d'histoire(s) de Diekirch* and the *Casino* the building is not entered via these transparent spaces, which diminishes the effect of transparency.<sup>51</sup>

The Mudam is the most representative of this type of museums that establish a connection between interior and exterior.<sup>52</sup> It indeed offers an architecture (a work by Ieoh Ming Pei) which is completely geared towards establishing connections between the urban and the artistic space. The use of glass, of passages, of glass roofs permits a visual exchange between interior and exterior: from outside, works can be discovered which are located outside the building, in the moat that runs around the Mudam, and also works that are inside the museum. The northern facade contains small wall openings that point to the square by which the visitor enters the building, but the southern facade, completely of glass, faces the districts of Clausen and Pfaffenthal. Through the large glass facades facing the city the latter becomes an integrated element of the museum.

These thresholds establish a dialogue between surroundings, city, museum, art and cultural heritage which here is primarily performed by the architecture and not so much through scripto-visual or iconic elements. Access to culture is here perhaps an easier one, less impressive than in those museums that show themselves as an accompanist of the visitor: the path leads 'quite naturally' to the museum. For Monique Renault (2000), these thresholds are 'hidden thresholds'<sup>53</sup> which deactivate the rupture with the urban space. In her view, museums with hidden thresholds are increasingly becoming a backdrop for a stroll, such as a round of afternoon window shopping, and intentionally mislead the visitors by

**51** | One could say these museums have, in a certain sense, a 'hybrid' threshold.

**52** | It is also one of the only six museums of the corpus expressly designed and built for this function.

**53** | Personal translation of: "Seuils occultés."

suggesting that they have access to art after paying the entrance fee, that it is sufficient to stroll around and buy a souvenir in order to impregnate oneself with the aura of cultural heritage. I, by contrast, am of the opinion that the transformation from passer-by to visitor happens progressively (since he/she sees the works from outside, prepares for his/her encounter with them and crosses a threshold devoted to the reception). The passage is effected in a subtle way, like an 'unconscious' transition in the visitor who is thus 'guided' to the work, while in actual fact the visitor is engaged in veritable preparatory work. Far from being demagogic, this type of threshold proves on the contrary to be very efficient in transforming passers-by into visitors. It finally leads to the encounter with the work inside the museum, there where mediations can multiply, depending on the kind of public, be it expert or not.

### 4.4.3 Conclusion

The threshold of the museum can be both passage and barrier, outside as well as inside. It can hide or show, receive or exclude, encourage or forbid, hide itself or show itself. It can extend spatially into the exterior and interior area of the museum. It can be a key to understanding the exhibition, and above all it promises to establish a specific connection the world of culture. This space consisting of multiple dimensions, neglected by museology and certain museums, is nevertheless an important place where a crucial part of the museum's mediation can take place.

Naturally, my typology would have to be further refined and one would need to examine what concrete effects the various types of threshold have on the visitors by observing how the latter appropriate them. One could also develop other dimensions, in particular linguistic and symbolic boundaries that are added to the threshold.<sup>54</sup> But at its present point my study indicates that, in terms of quantity, the thresholds show themselves to be more of a boundary than a passage, and more of an interstice (an 'in-between' that is implemented without a particular strategy) than a paratext (which connects two spaces and determines how the second one is to be read) or a border space (which permits performing identity micro-adjustments in the visitor and preparing him/her in the best possible way for a visit to the exhibition).

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**54** | In most museums the scripto-visual register is used to identify the museum but also to impose boundaries: opening times (sometimes limited), entrance fees, all kinds of prohibitions (don't touch, smoking and taking pictures prohibited etc.) – and it rarely happens that a text invites the visitor to enter the museum. In addition, the language used for informing the visitor is in the majority of cases French – only eight places offer all the information in French, German and English – so that the choice of the receiving language can constitute a significant symbolic boundary for the visitor.

According to my analysis, only those among the various identified types of thresholds fulfill a truly mediating function and a symbolic role that allow a progressive approach to the work. Only they create a framework where a visitor's attitude can be adopted and where this process of identity micro-adjustments, with its fluid boundaries, can be accompanied. Even if these elaborated thresholds are often found in those museums that are best equipped in terms of funds and location, the problem can certainly not be reduced to these (albeit important) elements: it is above all the strategic aspect of the museum's mediation that has to be reconsidered – for which the threshold is no doubt only an indication.

#### **4.5 LITERATURE OF THE IN-BETWEEN. THE MULTILINGUAL STAGINGS OF THE PUBLISHER *ULTIMOMONDO***

*Till Dembeck*

This case studies looks into the linguistic and spatial situatedness of literary communication. It follows a line of research that has grown in recent years and which attempts to focus on literature beyond the limitations set by monolingualism – that is, beyond the segmentary differentiation according to territorially localizable languages. Point of departure of these studies is the observation that monolingualism is a norm that came about relatively late in history and was maintained only with massive cultural-political pressure. This norm – research also refers to it as the 'monolingual paradigm' (Yildiz 2012: 6) – consists in the notion that individual speakers 'by nature' have a (standardized) mother tongue and can produce literature appropriately only in this language (see Martyn 2014). In as far as it is subject to this paradigm, literature adjusts to national language segmentation on the one hand and to the mechanisms of transformation between the national monolingualisms on the other (see Gramling 2014). A great number of institutions are involved in this process, not the least and in particular the publishers which, besides the authors, have the most interest in the marketability of literary works (see Lennon 2010).

It is, however, by no means the case that the monolingual paradigm has at any time really had an all-pervasive effect. There are many examples of literature beyond monolingualism, not only but particularly so in a multilingual state such as Luxembourg. This literature uses as it were the interstices that necessarily remain from attempts to delineate and limit languages and linguistic areas. It draws on the fact that, historically and systematically, languages are and always have been hybrid, that is, they emanate from processes of creolization – and are therefore always open for new amalgamations. And it makes use of differences between languages to fuel its creative energy. The emerging new literary forms exploit a linguistic interstice when they generate structures that cannot be clearly