

**Reopening of the Museum der Kulturen Basel
6 September 2011**

"Intrinsic Perspectives – Inspiring Aspects of Anthropology"

The "Intrinsic Perspectives – Inspiring Aspects of Anthropology" exhibition presents the Museum's new programmatic focus, to which all of the Museum's work and activities will in some way refer.

The "Intrinsic Perspectives" exhibition deals with the fundamental aspects of modern anthropology: community, agency, space, knowledge and performance. The emphasis in this selection is on the possibilities of shaping the life we lead within the framework of existing systems and structures. The Museum's thematically focused interregional and interchronological exhibitions have succeeded in engendering debates that are relevant far beyond the confines of anthropology – both for the individual and for society as a whole. The new programmatic approach of the Museum der Kulturen reflects its deliberate decision to forgo the claim that it can, or indeed wants to, be a repository of encyclopaedic knowledge. The Museum is a place for new encounters and inspiration that can provide stimuli and further cultural dialogue through new forms of exhibition and mediation. Curator Anna Schmid comments: "The impact of globalization on everyday life, cosmopolitan tendencies and their regional offshoots, actual individual societies and virtual web communities, cultural plurality and reflections about national traditions are some of the aspects that it is worthwhile considering in a wider context and examining in greater detail. One reason for observing "otherness" has always been to stimulate reflection about one's own identity, with the object of encouraging analysis and knowledge of cultural contexts. Knowledge of cultural backgrounds can have a lasting impact on the deciphering and interpretation of everyday actions and patterns of behaviour and, hence, a conscious approach to differences and commonalities."

Community – Where do you belong?

People are born into affiliations such as kinship, ethnic groups and national entities. This also includes occupational groups and religious communities. Apart from these, there are communities dedicated to realizing specific interests: while some people prefer the social framework of regular meetings with the same group of people, others play team sports, and yet others join self-help groups to cope with life's challenges. Every affiliation is associated with rules and norms that regulate the life of its members to a greater or lesser degree. There are duties and expectations as well as opportunities and possibilities. Mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion determine the extent of our social integration. In this day and age, in which virtual worlds are expanding and complementing our experience to an epoch-making extent and redefining social structures, the aspect of membership of or exclusion from a group has acquired an explosive social dimension.

Agency – How can you act?

By capacity to act we mean a person's ability to act within a framework of existing structures. In doing so, people refer to tried and tested practices, to their own ideas and to their judgement, and on the basis of these weigh up how best to achieve their objectives. All societies have sets of rules and regulations that its members follow and have to follow. Nonetheless, people are by no means puppets of these rules and regulations. The individual always has some room to manoeuvre, no matter how

small it may be, ranging from unconditional allegiance, through peaceful or violent resistance, to critical or subversive activities. Aspects such as the distribution of political and economic power and, closely related to this, access to resources play a decisive role in the selection of a course of action.

Knowledge – What can you know?

Every society practises the economic principle of the division of labour, which implies a specific and unequal distribution of knowledge and responsibility for this knowledge. Accordingly, specialists, whether in research or in crafts and trades or in ritual contexts, possess skills and, hence, knowledge that others do not. At the same time, by excluding others from such knowledge it is possible to establish or consolidate a position of power. With the spread of new communication technologies, access to and handling of knowledge has changed. It is still far too early to foresee or predict the impact of these changes. Similarly, the far-reaching economization of life has changed attitudes to knowledge: increasingly the legitimacy of knowledge is associated with its character as a resource and now largely determines the degree of a society's well-being and prosperity. Anthropological objects are both a store and a result of practical and theoretical knowledge of culture-specific content. The Museum der Kulturen regards it as its function to present both the specialized knowledge of anthropologists and the knowledge stored in objects in such a way that it "corresponds" to visitors' own experiences and interests.

Space – Where can you go?

For a long time space was viewed as a container in the sense of an extension with fixed length, breadth and height within which things happen. This notion of space overlooks the fact that space is made, and is thus a social construct. People intervene in space, use it, change it and appropriate it. Global networking through information technologies and means of transport has dramatically changed perceptions of space. The division of space and the allocation of individual spaces to specific uses and functions has been common practice through the ages. The current discussion about the use of natural resources in the sea and on land illustrates more clearly than ever the extent to which space is the product of political, economic and cultural practices. The development of cartographic techniques and methods and the geometrification of the earth were always, and are still, the starting point and also the result of efforts to access the entire world.

Performance – How do you perform?

Staging is about performance and execution. Here, we take a closer look at exceptional presentations that take the form of rituals, ceremonies, festivities, theatre performances, contests and games. Staging follows rules about the presentation of things, events and acts. All cultures have staging. It can be associated with individuals' life cycles, specific times of the year, religious practices, political events or even a theatre programme. In all cases, however, staging serves to emphasize another function. The purpose of staging is to ensure the success of a process. It is carried out to accompany, tackle or effect change and appeals to both intellect and emotions. Staging is an expressive act, through which we also "display" ourselves. In the final analysis, it is a question of generating identity, and on occasion also competence, by the manner in which we speak, think and act, and of changing this identity solely by consciously challenging one's self-image and other people's perception of that image.