



CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Tim Kramer: Creating New Paths and Forms Together

In the 2011/12 season, the organization Konzert und Theater St. Gallen carried out the project "Arbeit!" [Work!], as part of Pro Helvetia's Arts and Audience Programme, meeting with predominantly favourable responses. The partnership with Pro Helvetia, the supporting research from the Institute for Art Education (IAE) of ZHdK, and above all increased support from the regions of St. Gallen, Thurgau cantons and the two Appenzell cantons proved extremely fruitful for an organization of our size. In addition to a very interesting research phase, we were rewarded with an unusually vibrant performance on the theme of 'looking for work' by non-professionals who, for the most part, had been complete strangers to theatre at the outset. Moreover, we were called upon again and again as an institution to question our own practices of arts mediation. The change of perspective resulting from the active participation of people seeking work clearly impressed upon us the extent to which an established and successful institution binds itself to its existing audience through its forms of communication. Since our mission, in addition to the preservation and transmission of our artistic heritage, involves both taking up new points of view and launching discussion of them, we found this project to be extremely enriching.

Despite these positive aspects, it seems to me that this project has underlined just how difficult it is to differentiate between art-making and cultural mediation. When assessing or requesting contemporary cultural mediation, one finds oneself torn from very early on between conventional art (or its production) and modern, contemporary cultural mediation. For me though, the distinction is extremely vague and over-simplified. Upon closer examination, one realizes that the arts, and especially the performing arts, always have the objective of communicating something with the goal of learning. Art is fundamentally an interaction, and it has always entailed reciprocity. The real problem we are facing today is that the circumstances of communication are changing at a breathtaking pace, that traditional audience groups are dissolving, indeed, in conjunction with the revolutionary changes occurring in society, they can no longer be defined at all. For me, this is where the new developments in cultural mediation come into play. We need to determine collectively what meaning art should have today, what it consists of and who has, or might have a



need for it. Because it is apparent that in a radically diversified society, art can have an identity-forming and, above all, personality-strengthening function. So we are all rowing in the same direction when we question conventional approaches to learning, with the aim of developing a new culture of learning that is appropriate to our time, in order to equip human beings to face the enormous challenges of the present day.

Tim Kramer, actor, director, theatre mediator. Theatrical Director at Konzert und Theater St. Gallen since 2007.



CHANGING PERSPECTIVES *microsilions*: Mediation. (counter)points.

The work of the collective *microsilions*, created in 2005, is a balancing act between mediation in the sense of autonomous activity (not subordinate to curatorial activity or the educational process) and a collaborative practice of art.¹

Over the course of the eight years of the collective's work, our methodology has developed around a few central aspects:

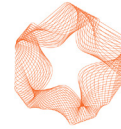
- We respond to institutions who want to use cultural mediation to expand its functions: to go beyond showing and presenting to become a space for collaborative production and action.
- We produce objects with groups of people from civil society and show them to the public.
- We build up long-term relationships with participants.
- We use tools taken from areas outside the arts.
- We do not apply models, instead we adapt ourselves to the environment and group at hand.

microsilions treats the term "mediation" with caution because etymologically it contains the idea of conflict resolution (thus implying a situation of conflict between audiences and works or between non-audiences and institutions) and it is often associated with the idea of transmission.

We attempt, not to transmit pre-fabricated content, but instead to create a space for dialogue that is open to the unexpected.

When our projects are realized in connection with a cultural institution, this unexpected component takes on a critical potential from which proposals for changes can develop. A reciprocal relationship can be created: the institution benefits from our work and the symbolic value it brings, but the institution also forms the basis for a process of critical deconstruction.

Another essential aspect of our approach to mediation is our interest in coupling our practical activities with research into the links between art and education. Starting from this practical/theoretical approach, we adopt a position which could be called "practical militancy", which is to say, we see workers in culture and the arts as people who are sensitive to changes in society and who are socially engaged.



The collective microsillons has collaborated with a great many institutions. Among them is the Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva for whose mediation projects microsillons was responsible from 2007 to 2010. The collective's founding members, Marianne Guarino-Huet and Olivier Desvoignes, currently head up the programme Bilden – Künste – Gesellschaft [Education – (Fine) Arts – Society] of Zurich University of the Arts and are doctoral students at the Chelsea College of Art. In 2008, microsillons received a Swiss Art Award.

1 Work which can be combined effectively with a variety of different approaches and methods: such as those of mediators who take a critical approach, like trafo.K, the artistic activities of REPOhistory or interdisciplinary institutions like the Center for Urban Pedagogy.



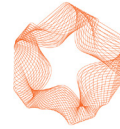
CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Barbara Waldis: Ta ville, ta rue ... ton art. Social Work and Critical Mediation in Public Spaces

I have headed up a module for the bachelor programme entitled “Art et Travail Social: Citoyennetés et Espaces Publics” [Art and Social Work: Citizenships and Public Spaces] in the Social Work programme of Haute École Spécialisée de Suisse Occidentale (HES-SO) since 2009. The module’s creation was the result of a partnership with Ecole Cantonal d’Art du Valais; the participating artists are from Valais, France and the USA. According to the module’s mandate, formulated by the Service of Culture and Integration of the City of Monthey in Valais, its objective is the integration of various groups and institutions in the city. The Service of Culture and Integration makes part of the lobby of the Théâtre du Crochetan available to us to use as a classroom.

In this course, future social workers work with experts from the fine arts arena to develop, realize and analyze projects which encourage the city’s residents to appropriate public space and which encourage social relationships within the community.

The project “Ta ville, ta rue ... ton art” [Your city, your street ... your art], for example, encouraged local residents to think about the quality of sculptures and pictures found in public spaces. The students did research at the Monthey city administration, the communal archives, in the library and on public squares to learn about the procedures for selecting, financing and presenting sculptures and pictures in public spaces. In the context of a performance, they asked approximately one hundred people to tell them which sculptures in public places they liked the least. The students then covered up the artworks cited most frequently. They summarized the results of their research and the discussions with the public in a poster. Their conclusions lend themselves for use in a subsequent project.

This type of project combines aesthetic experiences with the adoption of a critical position and the appropriation of public space. Both social work and a dialogical approach to art share a common interest in revealing new forms of integration in society. While art seeks to provoke a change in how we perceive things, for example, by distorting reality or shifting perspectives, social work focuses on the qualities of individuals or groups, in order to draw on them as resources in collectively orchestrated actions



designed to enable the individuals or groups to participate in society to a greater degree over the long term. Both approaches are intended to reinforce the autonomy and capacity for action of individuals and groups in society.

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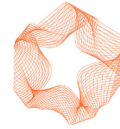
CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Cultural Mediation Working Group, Pro Helvetia: What is Cultural Mediation?

Open-mindedness and curiosity about the entire range of cultural mediation were prerequisites for the four-year programme, in which Pro Helvetia delved deeply into this subject. Pro Helvetia's cultural mediation funding criteria, developed in parallel with the programme, are based on Switzerland's Culture Promotion Act and therefore focus on mediation in the arts. Pro Helvetia's → [promotion of mediation](#) concentrates on projects of high quality, in terms of both art and mediation, which have the potential to inspire the public to engage with the arts autonomously and contribute to the practices of mediation.

→ [Promotion of mediation](http://www.prohelvetia.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/customers/prohelvetia/Foerderung/Vermittlungsfoerderung/2014/131220_Promotion_of_arts_outreach_at_Pro_Helvetia_EN.pdf) http://www.prohelvetia.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/customers/prohelvetia/Foerderung/Vermittlungsfoerderung/2014/131220_Promotion_of_arts_outreach_at_Pro_Helvetia_EN.pdf [10.2.2014]

The boundaries between cultural mediation and related fields of activity, such as education, marketing and socio-cultural animation, are not always clearly defined. Mediation of the arts for children and young adults is undoubtedly very important, but many of the activities involved in that sphere take place in schools or in other training contexts and thus fall within the domain of the formal education system, for which Pro Helvetia is not responsible. An interactive website providing information about current offerings in Swiss museums may well have mediation-type results as a side effect, but since marketing aspects clearly predominate, a project of this kind does not fall within the Pro Helvetia's remit. On the other hand, cultural mediation can overlap with socio-cultural animation, such as when a neighbourhood-based project encourages more profound engagement with an art form while at the same time reinforcing the feeling of community.

The transition between mediation and the arts is also fairly fluid. Art itself is flexible. More and more, we see performance art taking place in public spaces and there are growing numbers of projects aiming unconventional forms of audience involvement: today's formats play out in private dwellings, shopping centres, factories and football stadiums; performers have their audience pilot them as living avatars through a life-sized computer game; passers-by become the protagonists of artistic installations. In productions like these, the boundaries dissolve: art is created only through the participation of the audience, mediation is intrinsic to the work. Would it be possible to use this as a starting point in the attempt to deliberately take the mediation aspects further? A relatively new discipline, arts mediation finds itself in a fascinating process of development, with potentials for evolution in many directions. For that reason,



Pro Helvetia deliberately left room open for this creative energy to flow when defining its criteria for funding mediation, – because that energy is crucial for innovative and dynamic cultural mediation in Switzerland.

Pro Helvetia's interdisciplinary Cultural Mediation Working Group was responsible for developing the funding criteria within the framework of the Arts and Audiences Programme.



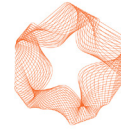
CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Swiss Federal Office for Culture (BAK), Culture and Society Section: What Does Cultural Mediation Mean in the Context of the Confederation's Promotion Activities?

In the context of the Confederation's activities in the field of the promotion of culture, the term "Kulturvermittlung" (cultural mediation) has been used in several different (and to some degree contradictory) ways over the course of many years. Legislation on the promotion of culture, which went into force in 2012, has provided clarification in this respect:

The Swiss Culture Promotion Act (KFG: Kulturförderungsgesetz) uses the terms "Kunstvermittlung" and "Kulturvermittlung" side by side (art. 1 KFG). The differentiation results from the subject matter and/or the area of competence of the Federal Office for Culture and the foundation Pro Helvetia.

Arts mediation [Kunstvermittlung] is anchored in the legislation through a section in the act explicitly establishing competences (art. 19 KFG). The Culture Promotion Ordinance (Kulturförderverordnung: KfV) states: "Measures that lead the public to engage autonomously with the arts and by doing so make artistic works or performances more accessible to the public are deemed to be measures of arts mediation" (art. 8 KfV). Therefore arts mediation denotes the focused handling of existing works, performances or artistic processes with the aim of making them understandable and more accessible to a public. The foundation Pro Helvetia is charged with measures in this definition of the term.

Cultural mediation can fall in the area of competence of the Federal Office for Culture, to the extent that the cultural mediation in question is directly associated with its own promotion measures (art. 23(1) KFG). The preservation of cultural heritage is one example of this in practice (art. 10 KFG); preserving cultural heritage encompasses not only the collection and restoration of cultural assets but also, and with the same justification, research into those assets, opening access to them and mediation of them. It also applies, for instance, to the support of organizations of non-professionals active in the arts and culture (art. 14 KFG), because non-professional organizations of this type constitute binding elements between the preservation and the living development of traditional forms of culture. Thus mediation – in the sense of incitement



to autonomous engagement with cultural assets and/or cultural practices – is one criterion for contributions in the promotion concepts for both of those areas.

The term “Vermittlung” [mediation] as used in the KFG is equivalent to the common usage of the term in both German- and French-speaking regions, which focus around the relationships of intellectual and emotional interactions between artists, works, institutions and the public. Mediation can be clearly demarcated from the semantic fields of diffusion, promotion and marketing (in the sense of the distribution of works, performances or artistic processes on the market).

The Culture and Society Section addresses issues of cultural mediation and participation in culture, specifically in the areas of promotion of language skills, literacy/reading, musical education and lay and folk culture.