



FOR READING AT LEISURE Working in a Field of Tensions 1: Cultural Mediation Between Emancipation and Discipline

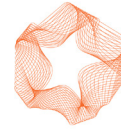
"... there is almost no verb which could not be combined in common usage or in jest with [the prefix] 'ver-', and the basic perspective associated with that is always a movement away from the speaker, indeed, a loss [as in the word for loss itself, Verlust, where addition of 'ver-' transforms Lust, meaning pleasure/desire, to loss]."

(Mauthner 1913)

"I became aware that the introduction consisted of worrying people and not teaching them anything." (Caillet 1995)

Cultural mediation – and specifically arts mediation – should not be thought of (only) as an act of communicating, explaining or describing, nor as the smoothest possible transfer of knowledge from people ostensibly in the know to the ostensibly ignorant. There is a conflict inherent in mediation about who has the right and the opportunity to own art, to see it, to show it or speak about it: a conflict which is almost as old as the arts themselves. The letters of Pliny, written at the start of the first millennium of the Christian era, suggest that even then there were public debates about whether art collections could be locked away as private property or should be kept accessible to the public (Wittlin 1949, p. 109). In the modern era, the upheaval associated with the French Revolution and with industrialization created certain needs, which were reflected at first in the establishment of public museums and soon afterwards in the practice of museum education: the need to legitimize state ownership of cultural assets seized in connection with wars of conquest and colonization; the need to disseminate national myths in order to encourage the growth of a sense of nationhood in the population; to subject the growing working class to the discipline of bourgeois concepts of life; to provide education in aesthetics (in the sense of creative skills and the development of taste) to secure capacities in the context of industrial, global/colonial competition, but also the idea of the democratization of education and – still – the idea that the arts are an element of public life, to which all members of society are entitled (Sturm 2002b, p. 199ff.).

Against this backdrop, 19th-century England saw an institutionalization of museums as a place of education for school classes and later, after the 1851 World Fair, for adult education as well. "Philanthropic galleries" began to appear, places where social reformers, members of the clergy or artists themselves used paintings and sculptures as tools to help factory workers and the "have-nots" gain a better understanding of the civic virtues and present the arts as a component of a successful life independent of class or



origin (→ *Mörsch 2004a*). Many of these galleries, such as the South London Gallery, were started in institutions like the → *Working Men's College* and grew out of the labour movement. At the start of the 20th century Germany's *Kunsterzieherbewegung* [Arts Mediators Movement] advocated the pedagogical necessity of the free expression of the individual. Under its influence, avenues were developed at the international level for access to music, theatre and the fine arts (access both in the sense of reception of works and in the sense of opportunities for engaging in the arts as amateurs). But even back then, "free expression" did not imply freedom of purpose. A century earlier, Friedrich Schiller, in "Ueber die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reyhe von Briefen" [Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man] published in 1801, had conceptualized aesthetic education as an instrument for developing the personality of the individual while obviating a struggle against existing power structures (Bergahn 2000). The objectives articulated by proponents of the art educator movement (*Kunsterziehungsbewegung*) are not dissimilar: "Because the renewal of the artistic education of our people is a question of survival for our people with respect to our morals, politics and industry" wrote Alfred Lichtwark, director of the museum *Kunsthalle Hamburg* and considered the founder of museum education in Germany, in his essay "Der Deutsche der Zukunft" [The German of the Future]. The essay appeared in 1901 in the publication marking the first Arts Education Day in Dresden. Cultural mediation is invoked here as a means of asserting a country as a nation which values industry and culture. Evidence that it was intended to serve this purpose is provided by a historical study published in 2005 which clearly documents the ways in which aesthetics education was used in colonialism to promote European value concepts and forms of government (Irbouh 2005). In the same period though, concepts of cultural mediation under the banner of emancipation were being developed as well. Walter Benjamin, for instance, wrote a programme for theatrical work with children and young people which was substantially influenced by the proletarian children's theatre of Asja Lacis. (Benjamin 1977, p. 764ff.).

Right from the start, combating social exclusion in the cultural → *field* has been both an ambition and a never-achieved goal of cultural mediation. Lichtwark, himself from a poor background, wanted to make education in the arts available to all classes, but he led his "Übungen in der Betrachtung von Kunstwerken" [Exercises in the contemplation of art works] (Lichtwark 1897) with a group of students the *Höhere Töchterchule* [secondary school for girls from middle-class families]. As a rule, even today, institutions like the "Freie Kunstschule" [free art schools] which began appearing in Germany in the 1960s, and the "Kreativwerkstätten" [creative workshops] in Zurich's community centres, still appeal to a fairly selective clientele, especially in comparison with socio-cultural programmes which do not focus on art. The efforts to decentralize and popularize contemporary

→ *Mörsch 2004a* <http://www.textezurkunst.de/53/socially-engaged-economies> [14.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0101.pdf

→ *Working Men's College* <http://www.southlondongallery.org/page/history> [14.10.2012]

→ *Field* see Glossary



theatre seen in France since the 1950s, though they have fundamentally changed the country's theatre scene, have had only a limited impact on the make-up of audiences (Duvignaud, Lagoutte 1986, p. 64; Bérardi, Effinger 2005, p. 75ff.). Mediation programmes in the area of classical music also continue to reach almost exclusively a public that is already interested (→ [Aicher 2006](#)). And throughout Europe, post-secondary art and music schools remain the most exclusive places in which to acquire tertiary education, demanding advance investment on a scale surpassing even that required for universities, whether in the form of symbolic or → *economic capital* (→ [Seefranz, Saner 2012](#)). Yet these very institutions boast that their admissions are based only on "talent" – a concept generally thought of as having no correlation with social or national background.

The terms "culture" and "art", then, are not neutral: they are laden with standards and, accordingly, are magnets for controversy. In the meaning intended by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, a person is seen as "cultured" if that person possesses a certain combination of taste and connoisseurship, which can be articulated through knowledge about the arts and design, the consumption of luxury goods, the way one treats one's own body and the bodies of other people or through styles of dress and communication. The components making up the ensemble of cultivation are subject to a process of change, though with one constant: "culture" signifies the promotion and distinction of a recognized style of life. The term, which is also associated with a concept of the world that is shaped by colonialism, is used in a manner which draws ethnicity-based distinctions, in the sense of "one's own", "foreign" or "other culture".¹ Bourdieu's study, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of "Taste"* was first published in 1979. But it is still cited in numerous scholarly publications to this day. This is because both demarcation functions – setting the boundary between one social class and others, and the boundaries with which we attempt to distinguish between what is supposedly ours and what is supposedly foreign – are still in effect – as old and familiar as they may be. It is against this backdrop that we must view attempts to continue using the term culture while ridding it of the demarcation functions just described. There have been calls for a broader understanding of the term culture, expanding it to include the practices of everyday life and "popular" phenomena: heard from of the French workers' education movement since the 1920s, from the discipline of cultural studies established in England in the 1950s and from Brazil's education for liberation (Freire 1974). The proponents of this approach argue that cultural practices, the research into them and their mediation should support the battle against inequality based on economic conditions or the categories of gender, ethnicity or nation of origin, for instance, rather than confirm and reproduce such inequalities. In the German and French-speaking regions, elements of Kulturpädagogik [cultural pedagogy] and → *socio-cultural animation* have also belonged to this tradition since the

→ [Aicher 2006](#) <http://epub.wu.ac.at/1602> [14.2.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0102.pdf

→ *Economic capital* see Glossary: Capital, forms of

→ [Seefranz, Saner 2012](#) http://iae.zhdk.ch/fileadmin/data/iae/documents/Making_Differences_Vorstudie.pdf [14.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0103.pdf

→ *Socio-cultural animation* see Glossary



1970s, as have the artists who engage in their art in schools and institutions of non-formal education (→ [Mörsch 2005](#)). In the same period, civil rights movements have allied with artists to call for the visibility and participation of minorities in artistic arenas – a demand which people engaged in cultural mediation have long been actively working to meet, above all in English-speaking and Anglo-American regions (→ [Allen 2008](#)).

Given the field of tensions surrounding cultural mediation, described here briefly, which result from a range of historical developments, it should not be surprising that cultural mediation is a highly heterogeneous field. Depending on their objectives and how they understand concepts of arts and education, people can frame and design cultural mediation in a wide variety of ways. Those who see the aim of expanding the audience for established cultural institutions as key find themselves close to the field of marketing. The pedagogical aspect, in the sense of stimulating and moderating debates and guidance and support of artistic creative processes, takes on greater relevance for those who see cultural mediation as an educational activity in a democratic/civil society and/or artistic sense. When mediation is intended primarily to promote economic development, e.g. by boosting the so-called “creative industries”, it may well be directed by a business-type of logic. When mediation is aimed principally at combating structures that give rise to inequalities, it will have interfaces with social work or social activism. All of that notwithstanding, cultural mediation can also be understood as an artistically informed practice – not least due to the fact that artists have to no small extent long been among those working to → [establish cultural mediation](#) as a field of activity and thus have a substantial impact on it ([Mörsch 2004a](#)). Wherever the focus lies though, it is in the nature of institutionalized cultural mediation to find itself in an ambivalent position. Cultural mediation serves to stabilize and legitimize cultural institutions because it provides them with (the) audience and represents their interests to the outside world. It also constitutes a permanent source of disturbance: simply by existing, it reminds people of a promise never yet realized, seeing the arts as a public good. It may be in part due to this reminder, this production of difference within the system, that the status of cultural mediation is often → [precarious](#) and that it tends to be assigned to a lower level of the institutional hierarchy. Accordingly, cultural mediation is still a [feminized](#) (women-dominated) field of activity. Artists regularly evince distrust of mediation, suspecting it of entailing a form of betrayal of art – e.g. by speaking about art in ways that deviate from the discourse of specialists. Or because mediation results in the appearance of people in the arts scene who, by their presence, disturb the routines of that sphere and cause it to become aware of itself directly. From the mid 1990s, people began responding to this tension by developing concepts of cultural mediation taking its very tendency to produce difference and the

→ [Mörsch 2005](#) <http://kontextschule.org/inhalte/dateien/MoerschKueInSchGeschichte.pdf> [25.7.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0105.pdf

→ [Allen 2008](#) http://felicityallen.co.uk/sites/default/files/Situating%20gallery%20education_0.pdf [25.7.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0106.pdf

→ [Establishing cultural mediation](#) see Text 5.RL

→ [precarious](#) see Glossary

→ [feminized](#) see Glossary



impossibility of fulfilling its mission as a productive base for cultural mediation activities. The degree programme “Médiation culturelle de l’art” was established at Université Aix-Marseille in France in 1994, at the behest of the French Ministry of Culture and based on a survey of demand. The programme was directed until 2006 by → Jean-Charles Bérardi, an art sociologist whose approach relates particularly to Pierre Bourdieu and the studies building on his work. From Bérardi’s perspective, médiation culturelle de l’art is a field of political activity. In it, the aim is to insist that cultural institutions be considered public spaces. Here, the intent is not to diffuse the tension between art and the public, but rather to take it as the point of departure and subject matter of debate. One function of médiation culturelle des arts is that of questioning the societal relevance of the arts and the relevance of the society for the artistic field (Bérardi, Effinger 2005, p. 80). This concept of médiation culturelle des arts is strongly influenced by linguistic scholarship, including the theses of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (Effinger 2001, p. 15). In Lacan’s view, talking about the arts inevitably produces difference, because language can never be identical to that to which it refers. There is always some untranslatable remnant which cannot be put into words. However, this difference is productive, in Lacan’s eyes. It forms the basis for the constitution of the self, for the perception of otherness [altérité] and thus for the continued production of symbols. In this context, Jean Caune, one of the leading theorists of French médiation culturelle, speaks of the “brèche” [breach / gap] (Caune 1999, p. 106 ff.), through which “the other” is manifest, but can never be fully understood. From this perspective, the impossibility of realizing the aspiration of repairing the breach between the arts and society by explaining and making accessible constitutes the foundation necessary for an understanding of médiation culturelle. Médiation culturelle is not understood as the transmission of information, but rather as a performative act, a process permitting the creation of relationships among the participants (e.g. mediators, public), the vehicles of expression (e.g. art works) and societal structures (e.g. cultural institutions). Elisabeth Caillet, another prominent figure in French médiation culturelle sees a parallel in this with the complex relationships among artists, their works and the world (Caillet 1995, p. 183). In the German-language arena, the art mediator and theorist Eva Sturm independently developed an approach which is in line with this vision. In her book “Im Engpass der Worte. Sprechen über moderne und zeitgenössische Kunst” [In the Bottleneck of Words: Talking About Modern and Contemporary Art], published in 1996 – which has been highly influential for German-language cultural mediation – she analysed the act of speaking in cultural mediation in the museum, also drawing on Lacan. Where Caune speaks of the “brèche”; Sturm speaks of “Lücken reden” [speaking gaps] (Sturm 1996, p. 100). Cultural mediation becomes, for her, a performative act of translation,

→ Jean-Charles Bérardi <http://www.youscribe.com/catalogue/livres/art-musique-et-cinema/beaux-arts/prolegomenes-une-sociologie-de-l-art-176900> [20.3.2013]



in which something is always lost and something new is added, i.e. some third thing is created, which is never identical to that which is to be translated. Accordingly, she does not see mediating as a form of explanation or arbitration either. The word “Ver-mitteln” [mediate] realises the meaning of the prefix “ver-” in the sense indicated in the quotation at the start of this section: in the meaning of embroilment, the loss of control and the missing the target, but with the positive result of the creation of a web of relationships and spaces for action which are not (always) subject to control.

→ *Rodrigo 2012* <https://www.box.com/s/7bfaa3f603e1dcfdad2d> [14.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0107.pdf

The past decade has seen the emergence of concepts for an arts mediation as a hegemony-critical practice, as deliberate disruption and counter-canonization, in a sense which goes beyond the systemic disturbance described above, which, as we have shown here, has always been associated with institutional cultural mediation as a symptom. These concepts consciously hark back to the movements of the 1970s and '80s described above (Marchardt 2005; Mörsch et al. 2009; Graham, Yasin 2007; → *Rodrigo 2012*; Sternfeld 2005). The term hegemony here refers to the system of rule found principally in Western-style democracies which are structured along capitalist lines, a system based on social consensus rather than implementation by force (Haug F. 2004, p. 3, citing Gramsci). The ideas governed by the consensus are seen by the majority as true and normal. A society's members accept the hegemonic order and live according to its rules and codes (Demirovic 1992, p. 134). In this situation, the consensus, which provides the foundation for the hegemonic order, is the subject of continual debate: it is constantly being renegotiated. Criticism of the hegemony is therefore part and parcel of the hegemonic system. Thus criticism of the hegemony cannot claim to come from outside of the system it is criticizing. Such criticism has a tendency to become hegemonic itself, to itself represent the social consensus. This is where a form of cultural mediation which sees criticism of the hegemony as the basis for its practices comes into play. Cultural institutions and artistic production are among principal forums for negotiation of the hegemonic system. By virtue of what cultural institutions and artistic production offer, and the forms in which they offer it, but also their working conditions, their economies, the spaces for action and the form of their visibility, they are inevitably involved in the creation and confirmation of social norms and values, inclusion and exclusion, power and market, although potentially also in their subversion and modification. Cultural mediation, for its part, is not founded solely in the production of culture and the arts: it is also anchored in the educational field, another forum in which the hegemony is created, criticized and modified. Thus, in every situation, cultural mediation faces the choice of whether to confirm and reproduce existing hegemonic structures or to distance itself from them and transform them. Choosing transformation implies, first of all, contradicting (Haug F. 2004, pp. 4–38): examining



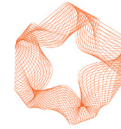
the unquestioned axioms of its own field of activities, analyzing its hidden standards and values. Moreover, this hegemony-critical cultural mediation also wants to have an impact on the institutions and the conditions in which it takes place. Criticism which failed to offer constructive suggestions would, in its self-sufficiency, run counter to the purpose of mediation, which is to create → situations of exchange, which should be understood to encompass not only harmonious exchange but also antagonistic or challenging exchange (Sturm 2002a).² Accordingly, cultural mediation which sees itself as a critical practice in this sense attempts to arrive at a re-thinking and re-learning of the reasons for its own existence. Self-contradiction presupposes a project based on affirmation (Haug F. 2004, pp. 4 – 38).

→ Situations of exchange
see Text 1.1

The texts identified as “For Reading at Leisure” in the following chapters examine the dual dynamic of a cultural mediation evolving between criticism and the re-examination of its own practices. The texts start by presenting the fields of tensions surrounding cultural mediation in the context of the guiding question defined for each chapter. Then they offer some reflections about opportunities for action or transformation relating to those tensions. This first of the subsequent passes – i.e. examining the opportunities identified in that examination with respect to their own hegemonic disposition and the practices of dominance and contradictions which that might entail – is touched only briefly in the texts by pointing out that while the existing tensions in existing relationships cannot be completely dispelled, the aim should be to work within them and shape them in an informed and aware fashion.

¹ “This global concept of cultures took on the form which would prove authoritative for it for the subsequent period ... through Johann Gottfried Herder, and particularly in his ideas about the Philosophy of the History of Mankind, published between 1784 and 1791. Herder’s concept of culture is characterized by three elements: ethnic consolidation, social homogenization and delimitation relative to the outside.” (Welsch 1995)

² And wherein the people who try their hand at developing and implementing proposals for action need not necessarily be the same people who conduct the analyses.



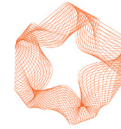
Literature and Links

The text is based in part of the following previously published texts:

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