

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Corinne Doret Baertschi, Fanny Guichard: Two Concrete Examples of Cultural Mediation in Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne

Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne has been offering a cultural mediation programme for various target groups for several years. Classroom performances of “The Miser” and theatrical performances featuring audio descriptions are two examples.

Classroom Performances of “The Miser”

In 2012, Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne and director Dorian Rossel developed a production of Molière’s “The Miser” for school classrooms. The play is performed in the classroom and the performance, which lasts two school periods, is regularly interrupted by discussion with the classes.

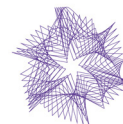
People do not automatically acquire an interest in theatre. There are many preconceptions associated with theatre. By reaching out to pupils and presenting them with a simple, easily digestible form of theatre, we hope to convey to them what is vibrant, direct and universal about theatre without the sometimes intimidating ritual associated with theatre as a social occasion. We believed Molière’s “The Miser” to be well-suited for this due to its humour and its theme of money, which is ubiquitous in our world.

The actors do not only act out scenes from Molière, they also interact directly with the classes. We believe that exposing the tricks of the theatrical trade causes the audience members’ powers of perception and judgement to be engaged differently and that the latter, paradoxically, is of advantage. The set-up in the classroom is almost unobtrusive, with no excessive scenery, costumes or lights, and the theatre unfolds gradually, only through the actors’ performances. The themes of the play provide aspects interesting for classes in subjects like economics, philosophy, sociology, history and psychology, as well as for French classes.

Theatrical Plays Featuring Audio Description

Aware that disabilities render theatre inaccessible to part of the population, in March of 2011 Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne launched an innovative pilot project: the performance of a theatrical play featuring live audio description¹ for people who are blind or visually impaired. To ensure an appropriate reception for these theatre-goers, the theatre arranged to have a staff of volunteers on hand to greet them upon arrival or even provide transport from their homes and assist them throughout the evening.

People who are blind or visually impaired have an opportunity to move around the stage and touch the objects there to become familiar with the scenery and props before the performance. During the performance,

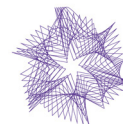


an audio narrator seated at the stage director's desk describes the visual elements of the piece. This description is transmitted via headphones, so it does not disturb the rest of the audience.

Due to the great response the pilot project received, we were able to continue with the programme. Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne now regularly offers plays with audio descriptions. In June of 2012 we invited children who have impaired vision or are blind and their families to a circus performance. A preparatory workshop which they could attend along with other children was also held.

Corinne Doret Baertschi *and* Fanny Guichard *are jointly responsible for public relations at Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne.*

¹ Audio-description is a technique allowing people who are blind or visually impaired to better perceive what is happening visually in films, theatrical plays or exhibition by hearing commentary describing actions as they unfold.



CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Anina Jendreyko: Who is Foreign? Or, on the Art of Dissolving One's Target Group

The project → *fremd?!* [foreign?!] runs in Basel districts where social diversity has long been an aspect of daily life. The project concentrates on theatrical productions with young people between the ages of 12 and 15. It is tied to the classroom community and thus to the institution of the school. At the end of each 7-month rehearsal phase, five public performances are given in a Basel theatre. The work is led by theatre professionals, actors and actresses, musicians and dancers, representing a range of social and cultural backgrounds.

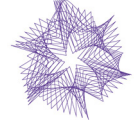
→ "*fremd?!*" <http://www.projektfremd.ch> [20.3.2013]

→ *inequalities* see Text 2.2

Clearly defining the target group at which the project "fremd?!" is aimed is part and parcel of the project. Because it is based in the field of interculturality, "fremd?!" has been accused of exacerbating the → *inequalities* it is intended to combat. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that the project's name, "foreign?!", already casts doubt on the possibility of a clear target-group definition. The question mark and exclamation mark communicate the project's awareness of the ambivalence associated with these attributes and that it examines them with a critical eye.

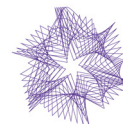
Usually the ambiguities of the project's name become clear during the first meeting with the young participants. The participants themselves do not identify with the theme of migration or the potentially derogatory attribute associated with it. The project "fremd?!" works with a target group which must first discover itself as such.

The impetus for "fremd?!" came from an individual rather than a cultural institution. With the eyes of someone returning home from foreign parts, I became aware quite quickly that Basel had failed to respond appropriately to the cultural diversity which had long been a part of daily life in its schools. Much was (and is) seen as problematic; having a native language other than the usual one was viewed as a deficit. I met classes in which as many as 15 native languages were spoken. Taking this diversity as a starting point, I launched an artistic process using the media of theatre, music and dance. Over the years, the idea underlying "fremd?!" has crystallized: by focusing on diversity of cultures rather than on migration one can expand the cultural landscape, open it up for new content and styles. The project "fremd?!" avails itself of the concept of transculturality, i.e. the mutual interpenetration of cultures. One could say that "fremd?!" took target-group thinking



as its launch point, and moved from there to its own ideological target: the dissolution of the target group.

Anina Jendreyko is an actress and director. She returned to Switzerland in 2006, having lived for many years in Turkey and Greece. After returning to Basel, she initiated the transcultural theatre project "fremd?!", which now has over a dozen participating theatre arts professionals, and serves as its artistic director.



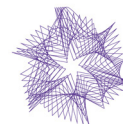
CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Nadia Keckeis, Jeanne Pont: Disability, Culture and Cultural Mediation as a Chain Reaction

As one of the partner projects of Pro Helvetia's "Arts and Audiences Programme", the City and Canton of Geneva in collaboration with Comité franco-genevois [CRFG: French-Geneva Regional Committee] carried out a range of activities addressing the theme "Cultural Mediation, Arts and Disability". The project rattled the preconceptions of the participating cultural institutions and pointed to new ways of doing things.

To make cultural institutions accessible to people with disabilities is to uphold the democratic principle of equal opportunity. In Switzerland this principle is anchored in the Federal Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against People with Disabilities (BehiG 2002).

Taking specific cognitive capacities and behaviours of people with disabilities into account dramatically disrupts established ways of doing things. The more so because people with disabilities do not constitute a uniform group and because the requirements associated with some disabilities can conflict with those of others. A disability can be permanent or temporary; the range of possible disabilities is very large and extremely diverse. In Switzerland more than 1.4 million people live with a disability, i.e. 20% of the population.

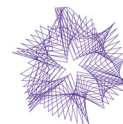
Taking accessibility into account when designing a cultural project creates an opportunity to rethink the encounter with the audience. The cultural mediator is not the only one responsible for this process: the entire cultural institution is involved, and interdependencies are created. The cultural mediator must adapt their cognitive approach to the cultural subject-matter, or even change it entirely, and in doing so react flexibly to particular rhythms and behaviours. The communications officer's job is to ensure that communication tools used are compatible with the aids and appliances used by people with sensory impairments or impaired motor function. The set designer has to make sure that the setting is accessible; people with reception duties have to have basic skills in non-verbal communication and assisting people who are blind. Everyone has to be ready to see situations through another person's eyes, demonstrate creativity and put aside any fear of trying new things. One has no option but to listen to what the other person has to say, whether the speaker is a visitor or another staff member.



No project can be realized without doing some basic analysis of the socio-cultural profile of the target groups or of their relationship to the cultural environment. And it is here that working within networks is so important, because the input of people directly affected is crucial to the ability to accommodate all aspects of their particular disability. This means that the target group itself acts as a co-designer of a specific cultural offering.

The experiments carried out in the project “Cultural Mediation, Arts and Disability” demonstrated that the change of perspective associated with examining both access to venues of culture and subject-matter can result in the creation of essential new forms of cultural mediation from which everyone can benefit.

Nadia Keckeis is the Deputy Director of the Cultural Service of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports of the Republic and Canton of Geneva. Jeanne Pont is the Cultural Attaché of the City of Geneva, Cultural Promotion Service of the Department of Culture and Sports responsible for the development and / or coordination of innovative multi-discipline cultural mediation projects, development of tools for surveys on the arts and culture target groups and practices of the arts and culture.



CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Cultural Mediation Working Group, Pro Helvetia: Cultural Mediation for Whom?

One aspect of cultural mediation projects is that they tend to work with pre-defined target groups. Therefore those involved in promoting such projects need to take a position on the target-group question.

Pro Helvetia does not mention any specific target groups in its funding criteria for cultural mediation projects; instead, it speaks only in terms of aiming the cultural mediation projects at an audience. The choice of this very broad term “audience” was deliberate, and it was intended to leave the question of target group primarily up to the mediators or project directors.

The choice of a specific target group has implications for how the project is targeted, what cultural mediation methods are used, whether expert assistance will be required and, if so, what type. One of the questions Pro Helvetia considers in its qualitative evaluation is whether the project takes the specific requirements of a particular target group into account and whether it has the relevant expertise available (e.g. young people with migrant backgrounds, people with impaired vision, etc.) In Pro Helvetia’s view, a thoughtful approach to target groups is one of the qualities that high quality cultural mediation demonstrates. One indication of such an approach is the involvement of a project’s participants in its development; another is the use of innovative formats which integrate the relevant specialist knowledge about the target group selected.

Pro Helvetia’s interdisciplinary Cultural Mediation Working Group *was responsible for developing the promotion criteria within the framework of its Arts and Audiences Programme.*