



3.3 The institutions as subject-matter

The institutions and venues of arts production and presentation can and do themselves constitute the subject matter of cultural mediation. Many cities host open-studio events; theatres, opera houses and museums convey a sense of how they operate to visitors an “behind the scenes” tours. Programmes like these convey knowledge about the operational aspects of cultural institutions, about how work is divided, and the occupational profiles of their staffs. Participants also have the opportunity to learn about the differences between production and presentation: completed exhibitions and productions are juxtaposed with the daily work routine, the tools, the sounds and smells in workshops and storage facilities, in administrative wings and equipment rooms.

Institutions can also become a topic in → cultural mediation about individual works. This happens, for instance, when decision-making and production processes are explained. Or in cases when mediators explicitly → distance themselves from the decisions of institutions or when they depart from the subject-matter set by the institution and encourage participants to debate.

Cultural mediation formats in which participants actively interact with institutions go far beyond the → reception of content. The → Tate Forum, provides an example. There, young volunteers develop their own programme in the London gallery Tate Britain. One purpose of this programme is to give participants the opportunity to get to know the institution well, but that is not the only aim: participants are also supposed to help the institution to evolve – and to test and reveal its limitations while doing so. In such situations, cultural mediation about institutions crosses over into the sphere of an → affirmative function and can contribute to an engagement with → art as a system.

→ cultural mediation about individual works see Text 3.1

→ distance see Text 5.3

→ reception see Text 4.1

→ Tate Forum <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/on-evolution-peer-led-programme-tate-forum> [15.2.2013]

→ affirmative function see Text 5.1

→ art as a system see Text 3.4