

FOR READING AT LEISURE Working in a Field of Tensions 3: Tacit Learning Objective in Cultural Mediation

“Once struggled for, the ‘right to education’ has become a lifelong duty to educate oneself requiring that learners be flexible and marketable, on pain of their demise”
(→ [Merkena 2002](#))

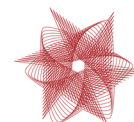
Text 2.RL revealed the necessity to examine the unspoken call for invitees to become more similar to inviters from a hegemony-critical perspective in the context of addressing invitations to cultural mediation. In this section, this issue will be explored and illustrated with respect to the content of cultural mediation. We will examine tacit teaching content and learning objectives in cultural mediation, taking “lifelong learning” as our example.

In 2010, the German Museums Association released → [Museen und lebenslanges Lernen](#), the German translation, in an expanded edition, of a European handbook entitled “Lifelong Learning in Museums”, which was the result of an EU-funded project of the same name.¹ The handbook defines “lifelong learning” as informal learning (i.e. learning not-leading to a qualification that takes place in social settings) and “highlights the importance and significance of learning throughout life”. In addition to providing suggestions relating to adult education practices in museums, the handbook provides a considerable amount of information about historical and current-day power relationships at work in museums and galleries which influence the educational activities there. In this context, the handbook explicitly addresses the issue of racism, one of the few publications of this type to do so (Gibbs et al. 2007, p. 83). It calls on institutions to ensure that “the diversity of staff matches the diversity of the audience the museum wishes to attract” (Gibbs et al. 2007, p. 17). It emphasizes the demand for contemporary museum work to consciously engage with all audiences, and particularly participants in education projects, on an equal footing and to consider the effects of inequalities in that context. It cites the mediator and philosopher Paulo Freire (Freire 1974) as having been influential for the leading learning concepts in today’s museum mediation. With these aspects in mind, one could say that the handbook is informed by the idea of cultural mediation as a critical practice. However, it makes no mention of the critiques articulated over the past two decades of the book’s guiding theme, the concept of lifelong learning itself and the emphasis on the importance of → [soft skills](#) equated with it. The authors, both museum consultancy professionals, describe the potential of museums in this respect as they see it: “Museums can be ideal places for promoting ‘informal learning’. Visitors may leave the museum knowing more than when they arrived: knowledge, understanding, insight or inspiration that helps to make a *positive difference* to their lives” (Gibbs et al. 2007, p. 13, italics added). Although this handbook and other similar publications do identify the radical diversity of

→ [Merkena 2002](#) http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/sozialoekonomie/zoess/Neoliberalismus__passive_Revolution_und_Umbau_des_Bildungswe.pdf [21.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0309.pdf

→ [Lifelong Learning in Museums](#) <http://online.ibr.regione.emilia-romagna.it/1/libri/pdf/LifelongLearninginMuseums.pdf> [12.2.2014]

→ [soft skills](#) see Glossary

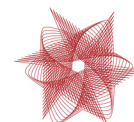


learners as offering a special potential in adult education, they adopt uncritically the assumptions that everyone sees a willingness to engage in “lifelong learning” as equally desirable and that everyone sees a visit to the museum as an opportunity for self development aimed at optimizing their capacities. This blind spot seems to be less a coincidence than a symptom of a literally “tacit” learning objective for cultural mediation: the development of a → *habitus* characteristic of “homo flexibilis” (Sennett 1998), adaptive people who can continually reinvent themselves and survive in a post-industrial economy “geared for short-term relationships and rapid change” (→ *Ribolits 2006*, p. 121) without becoming a burden to the collective. The development of the increasing flexibility in the organization and production of work required by the shift from a Fordist to a → *post-Fordist* mode of production causes the “willingness to build and optimize one’s own work capacity (permanently)” to become an “essential prerequisite for participation in society, and thus the possibility of surviving in post-Fordist capitalism” (Atzmüller 2011). The expansion of the concept of “lifelong learning” can be traced back over the past forty years: from the bottom-up demand articulated in the 1970s to be allowed to learn throughout one’s lifetime (in the sense of fair access to educational resources) through the idea anchored in society since the 1990s that individuals are able to learn throughout their lives (in the sense of a more complex understanding of learning biographies which relativizes the idea of linear occupation-specific qualification processes and development stages, each building on the last) through to the present-day imperative which insists that one keep learning through one’s life in order to stay competitive and avoid becoming an “education loser” (Quenzel, Hurrelmann 2010). All three concepts now coexist and intertwine. This explains to some extent the positive approach articulated in “Lifelong Learning in Museums”. Increasingly, responsibility to meet the requirement of lifelong learning is being shifted to the individual as the “enterprising self” (Bröckling 2007).² To reject this way of seeing oneself would appear not to be a socially acceptable option: it would be seen as actively refusing to plan what, in the current situation, the majority sees as a “successful” life. The fact that soft skills, i.e. personality traits and personal attitudes, are playing an ever larger role in the formulation of learning objectives and educational endeavours is simply a logical extension of this outlook. Our example, Lifelong Learning in Museums, describes the outcomes one could expect from informal learning processes for adults in museums.³ It lists the obvious learning progress relating to specific topics, such as “increased knowledge of specific subjects”, “enhanced understanding of specific ideas and concepts” or “improved technical and other skills”. However, the vast majority of the potential learning results it provides aim at changing the personal sensibilities and attitudes of the learners: at “increased self-confidence”, “personal development”, “change in attitudes or values”, “inspiration and creativity”, “social interaction and communication”,

→ *habitus* see Glossary

→ *Ribolits 2006* <http://homepage.univie.ac.at/erich.ribolits/php/web/archive> [22.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0310.pdf

→ *post-Fordist* see Glossary



“community empowerment”, “development of identity”, right through to “improved health and well-being” (Gibbs et al. 2007, p. 34). With this shift of focus, every museum-goer becomes a therapy subject and the museum becomes a therapeutic facility, since the process of optimizing the various traits is a never-ending one. Teaching participants ways to “use individual potentials creatively” appears to be a more important objective than engaging with the content of an exhibition. (→ *Sertl 2007*, p. 9). Since wellbeing, self-confidence, social and communicative behaviours and values are aspects which could be associated with the private sphere, one might consider their observation and assessment on the part of employees of a cultural institution as trespassing in that sphere. Nonetheless, it is stated, in a tone leaving virtually no room for doubt, that cultural mediation in the context of lifelong learning is intended to increase the individual's willingness to learn more.

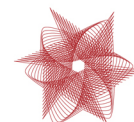
It is no accident that cultural mediation is considered to have special potential in this context. In the 19th century, the age of industrial capitalism, the image of the artist was still one which embodied the opposite of what the bourgeois-style entrepreneurs represented. This is no longer the case today though, in our era of → *cognitive capitalism*. Now there are many points where the qualities ascribed to artists and those of the ideal manager intersect: “autonomy, spontaneity, mobility..., openness..., conviviality, multitasking... availability, creativity, visionary intuition networking” (Boltanski, Chiapello 2004, p. 97.). Accordingly, artists and “creatives” are well suited as role models for the “enterprising self” (Loacker 2010). They are thought to have an ability to improvise (including in dealing with insecurity and poverty), to focus on problem-solving, be curious, optimistic and, above all, able to act on their own initiative. And indeed, continuous personal development and change do figure in the self-concept of many artists (Loacker 2010, p. 401). The basic problem associated with cultural mediation's unsceptical adoption of the task of encouraging lifelong learning as an internalized value is that doing so involuntary encourages the creation or at least the legitimating of inequality. Instead of responding to economic deregulation and rising social insecurity with redistribution, we grant them legitimacy by insisting that individuals be creative and flexible and that they continue to invest in their own human capital throughout their lives.

On a pragmatic level, it should be said that the happily self-governing artist as role model for present-day employment is purely a fictional construct. The majority of artists in Europe face relatively difficult economic conditions. Many of them live on half (or less) of what is officially considered a living wage and do so with either inadequate or no provisions for illness, disability or old age (→ *Lazzarato 2007*). This situation is by no means welcomed by all artists, nor have they integrated it into their own concept of an artist by choice. On the contrary, some are engaging in organized

→ *Sertl 2007* <http://homepage.univie.ac.at/michael.sertl/OffenesLernen.pdf> [21.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0308.pdf

→ *cognitive capitalism* see Glossary

→ *Lazzarato 2007* <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0207/lazzarato/en> [12.2.2014]



resistance. Adaptation is not the only way in which curiosity and a willingness to reinvent oneself manifest themselves: they can also encourage inventive forms of political intervention (Lazzarato 2007). I cite just two of the many such examples here: → [GlobalProject / Coordination des intermittents et précaires d'Île de-France](#), an organization founded in 2003 which is pushing for changes in the employment conditions of people who work in stage productions and the audio-visual sector, and the "Carrotworkers' Collective" in England, in which → [precarious](#) cultural workers have deliberately aligned themselves with other underpaid and poorly secured occupational groups, for instance in the nursing, cleaning and food-service sectors.

In recent years, cultural mediation has also come up in discussions about precarious employment conditions. In her April 2010 article "Spanners in the Spectacle: Radical Research at the Frontline" (→ [Graham 2010](#)), arts mediator, artist and activist Janna Graham reported on the strikes and surveys in which the mediators (arts educators) at the Venice Biennale joined forces with S.a.L.E. Docks and the project housed within it, → [Pirate Bay](#), which itself was associated with the Biennale, to protest the conditions of their employment. S.a.L.E. Docks describes itself as "a permanent laboratory of piracy in the lagoon, a self managed situation active since 2007 in the struggle against all kind[s] of privatization and exploitation of knowledge and creativity." Still, resistance activities remain fairly rare in the field of cultural mediation. Workers employed in cultural mediation (very often self-taught artists) also embody the soft skills so highly acclaimed in post-Fordism: they see themselves, by virtue of their occupation, as socially competent, good team players and good networkers, as inventive in coping with limited resources, as curious and ready to learn new things. Analogous to the artist figure as a role model, cultural mediation is associated with the promise to free up the creative potential of each individual, motivated to no small degree by the interest of economies "demanding workforces that are creative flexible and adaptable" (→ [UNESCO 2010, Road Map](#) p. 5).⁴ And the majority of arts mediators find themselves in precarious employment relationships. Yet they are – perhaps to an even greater degree than artists – (still) a group with a relatively homogeneous social background. Most of them come from the "new middle classes" (→ [Sertl 2008](#)), they are → [knowledge workers](#). In their self-image, the idea of lifelong learning tends to be associated with words like "entitled to" and "can" rather than "must". Seen from this angle, their desire to encourage a willingness to keep on learning among the people who participate in their offerings is also the consequence of an idea of "equality" which is paradoxical. Cultural mediators' aim in one way is to share privileges, create a level playing field in connection to access to the educational resource which is culture. At the same time though, it is to change "the others", to make them more similar to themselves: to convince them that the mediators' ideals

→ [GlobalProject / Coordination des intermittents et précaires d'Île de-France](#) <http://www.cip-idf.org> [7.9.2012]

→ [precarious](#) see Glossary

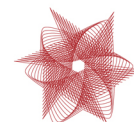
→ [Graham 2010](#) <http://www.faqs.org/periodicals/201004/2010214291.html> [10.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0303.pdf

→ [Pirate Bay](#) <http://embassyofpiracy.org/2009/05/thanks-to-sale-we-have-physical-space-in-venice> [7.9.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0304.pdf

→ [UNESCO 2010, Road Map](#) http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Seoul_Agenda_EN.pdf [22.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0305.pdf

→ [Sertl 2008](#) <http://homepage.univie.ac.at/michael.sertl/IndividualisierungIDE.pdf> [21.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0306.pdf

→ [knowledge workers](#) see Glossary



of the learning individual are the right ones. For the majority of cultural mediators, then, a critical distancing from the idea of lifelong learning would also entail distancing themselves from their own values and standards, and even from the tenets justifying their own activities. This very ability to distance oneself from oneself, though, is the feature which points to educational professionalism.

→ *alternative curriculum* http://carrotworkers.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/pwb_alternative-curriculum.pdf [14.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0307.pdf

Unsurprisingly, there is no easy way out of this paradox (comparable with the paradox of recognition discussed in Text 2.RL). It is not a coincidence that the people who produce the well-founded critiques of lifelong learning and related concepts presented above have tended to be individuals for whom access to educational resources and knowledge about how to learn are givens. Once again, stopping the attempt to use cultural mediation to engender a joy in learning and encourage personal development cannot be the answer. Doing so would only help bolster positions of privilege. The adoption, in the spirit of educational reflexivity, of a sceptical, challenging attitude towards what appear to be wholly positive concepts, such as lifelong learning, would probably result in transformed and transforming practices in cultural mediation. Such an attitude would bar practices aimed at engendering enthusiasm for something in participants or influencing people's personal development "for their own good", in the sense of a tacit curriculum. Instead, instances of critical distancing would themselves become the subject matter of the education. Perhaps materials such as the → *alternative curriculum* developed by the Carrotworkers' Collective for precariously employed cultural mediators, could be used to launch discussions in cultural mediation settings about what being allowed to / able to / compelled to learn means for the participants. One learning objective for cultural mediation might be to replace the demand for continuous, lifelong self-optimization in the name of competition with a concept of life-extending learning which considers the community as a whole and rejects the possibility of losers.

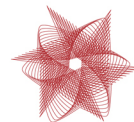
Whichever attitude one chooses to take – it should be clear from the discussion thus far that cultural mediators need to take a position on which objectives they are pursuing in their work and to make those objectives as transparent as possible to participants – always assuming that one is committed to encountering the participants on an equal footing, as the authors of the handbook "Lifelong Learning in Museums" aspire to do.

1 The handbook was a product of the two-year Lifelong Museum Learning (LLML) project funded by the European Commission, supported under the Socrates Grundtvig Programmes from October 2004 to December 2006.

2 The increasing shift of techniques of governmentality into self-governing capacities of the individual now form an extensive research field within the social sciences: governmentality studies.

3 In providing this list, the authors refer to the "generic learning outcomes" designed by Eileen Hooper Greenhill, a matrix intended to identify learning results from a museum visit; → <http://www.inspiringlearning.com/toolstemplates/genericlearning/index.html> [5.9.2012] and Hooper Greenhill 2007 → see Text 7.RL

4 "21st Century societies are increasingly demanding workforces that are creative, flexible,

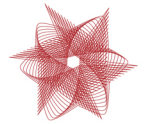


adaptable and innovative and education systems need to evolve with these shifting conditions. Arts Education equips learners with these skills [...]” (UNESCO 2010).

Literature and Links

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Roadmap: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Seoul_Agenda_EN.pdf [22.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0305.pdf

Links:

- Carrotworkers' Collective, Training for Exploitation? Towards an alternative curriculum:
http://carrotworkers.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/pwb_alternative-curriculum.pdf
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