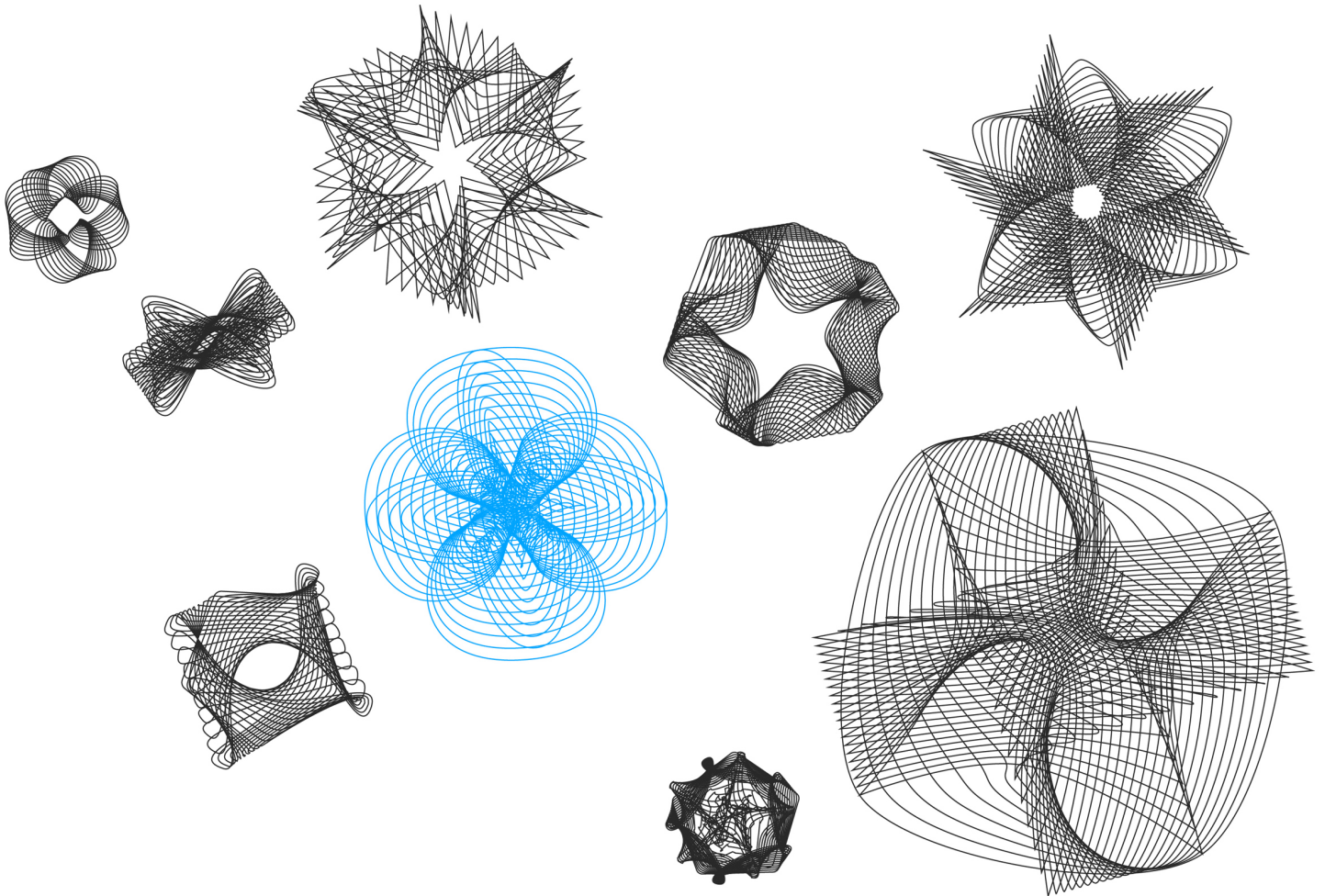


Time for Cultural Mediation

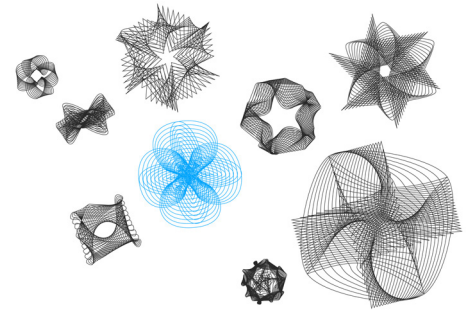
- 1 What is Cultural Mediation?
- 2 Cultural Mediation for Whom?
- 3 What is Transmitted?
- 4 How is Cultural Mediation Carried Out?



- 5 What Does Cultural Mediation Do?
- 6 Cultural Mediation: Why (Not)?
- 7 Who “does” Cultural Mediation?
- 8 Good Cultural Mediation?
- 9 Transmitting Cultural Mediation?

Time for Cultural Mediation

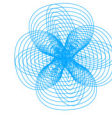
- 1 What is Cultural Mediation?
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4.0 Intro

Two of the key methodological questions in cultural mediation relate to participation: how much participation is involved in a format and what forms of participation are expected of people. As this chapter will illustrate, the extent of participation permitted or desired in a cultural mediation project has many repercussions, affecting how participants and mediators interact and the content and structures of both cultural mediation and its host institutions. The choice of teaching and learning concepts defines another dimension of “how” cultural mediation is carried out. School teachers tend to systematically plan the use of a selection learning forms and concepts for the classroom in advance, with specific learning objectives in view. This is often not the case in cultural mediation settings, where the concepts and forms used tend to be selected on the basis of the mediator’s past experiences and dynamics created as projects unfold. Unsurprisingly, processes that take shape in this fashion tend to be less systematic and more open in terms of both objectives and outcomes. One need not see this as a disadvantage – on the contrary, it represents a characteristic feature and potential specific to cultural mediation. Nonetheless, certain conceptual approaches to teaching and learning appear to have particular relevance for cultural mediation: this chapter presents them in brief.

- 5 What Does Cultural Mediation Do?
- 6 Cultural Mediation: Why (Not)?
- 7 Who “does” Cultural Mediation?
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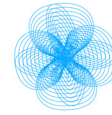


4.1 Participation level: receptive

“The symphony orchestra offers ‘Musikunterricht live!’ [Music instruction live!] to show how a professional orchestra operates. If desired, we provide informational material about the programme in advance, and an orchestra member may visit the school to talk about the life and work of a professional musician. Then the class can attend the dress rehearsal in the sound hall, followed by an age-appropriate introductory talk about the piece.” That is how → [Sinfonieorchester St. Gallen](http://www.theatersg.ch/mitmachen/schulangebote/schulklassen/offene-proben) [St. Gallen Symphony Orchestra] describes a programme it offers for school classes for students aged 13 or over. The programme contains a variety of components intended to introduce pupils to the classical music concert. The participation expected of the group is nearly completely at the receptive level: a musician introduces the profession, a dress rehearsal takes place, a concert mediator appears and talks about the background of the piece being rehearsed. The young people, for their part, mainly listen – or rather, they are expected to listen. Potentially, they have the opportunity to ask questions, which can sometimes lead to discussion. At such moments, participation shifts toward the interactive level.

→ [Sinfonieorchester St. Gallen](http://www.theatersg.ch/mitmachen/schulangebote/schulklassen/offene-proben)
[http://www.theatersg.ch/
mitmachen/schulangebote/
schulklassen/offene-proben](http://www.theatersg.ch/mitmachen/schulangebote/schulklassen/offene-proben)
[2.3.2012]

In other areas in the arts, cultural mediation formats featuring predominantly receptive participation levels include exhibition tours (especially those with audio-guides), readings, director’s talks, and the provision of written information and hand-outs, wall texts, supplemental flyers, catalogues and textual, pictorial and audio information posted online. The receptive level of participation is involved in almost every format of cultural mediation, since receptive participation is entailed in any sequence in which information is transmitted by one person and received by another person listening to it and/or reading it. It is important not to equate reception with passivity: reception is an activity which involves the active production of meaning through perception and interpretation.



4.2 Participation level: interactive

An institution that announces a “discussion” rather than a “tour” at an exhibition is soliciting interaction with the audience. Exhibition-goers are being asked to take part in the discussion by asking questions and contributing their own views and information, rather than simply listen. Formats of this kind frequently involve multiple cultural mediation providers; experts or everyday witnesses are also invited to enter into a dialogue with the exhibitors or mediators. This type of discussion creates a broader context for exhibition tours, which often takes the form of a monologue. The extent to which the audience genuinely engages in the discussion depends on the specific situation, the moderator’s skills, how provocative the topic is and the makeup of the group. There are also projects whose formats require interaction in order to take place at all: exhibitions with elements in which people are expected to try things themselves or set something in motion, or family tours in musical theatres in which instruments are put out for people to try to play, or costumes available for them to put on.

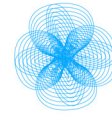
Usually, interactive formats in cultural mediation are intended to allow people to engage with an object for the first time. Increasingly though, they are also being used to give people the opportunity to engage with something at greater depth: one example of this is → [Hands-on Deck](#) at the Netherlands Architecture Institute, where people play planning games exploring urban planning and architectural issues. Cultural mediation providers offering projects with interactive participation levels plan opportunities for and forms of participation in advance and the level of control exerted is high.

Digital media and the Internet have encouraged the proliferation of interactive formats in recent years. For instance, the → [Bavarian State Opera](#) runs a website where children can learn about the various activities and rooms in an opera house by playing simple games, guided by an animated conductor. In programmes like this, the cultural mediation remains largely → [affirmative](#).

→ [Hands-on Deck](http://en.nai.nl/content/988437/hands-on_deck) http://en.nai.nl/content/988437/hands-on_deck [30.4.2012]

→ [Bavarian State Opera](http://www.bayerische.staatsoper.de/data/kinder_flash/index.html) http://www.bayerische.staatsoper.de/data/kinder_flash/index.html [2.3.2012]

→ [affirmative](#) see Text 5.1



4.3 Participation level: participative

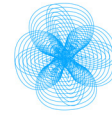
Cultural mediation formats with a participative level of participation allow audiences to independently influence the design, content, form and sometimes even rules within a project and framework defined by the cultural mediation provider. Examples of this include formats like the → *Musikkollegium Winterthur* [Collegium Musicum Winterthur] projects, in which children and young people take part in the creation of an opera. An example from the literary domain is the → *Schulhausroman* [Schoolhouse novel] project, in which young people collaborate with literary figures to produce a novel. The possibilities created by the Internet for participative cultural mediation are also being discussed and developed. In the exhibition field, there are increasing numbers of projects which aspire to “user generated content” and use the Internet as a medium for communication, production and documentation in that context. “Net literature” includes examples such as the → *Assoziations-Blaster* [Blaster of Associations], now in its 12th year, which enables users to randomly generate new texts by drawing on multiple individual contributions. Participation options include entering, reading, rating texts or discussing them in a blog. Although *Assoziations-Blaster* is intended less for the purposes of literary mediation than as a forum for the collective production of literature, it does come up in the discourse on literary mediation. This is an area where the already blurry line between the production of art and cultural mediation is fading rapidly.

One basic observation: when discussion turns to participation – and in cultural mediation circles it does so frequently and in ever more depth – it is crucial to raise the question of who is in the position to allow participation, and who bears the responsibility for its results, as well as who is participating in what and to what degree.

→ *Musikkollegium Winterthur*
<http://www.musikkollegium.ch/jugendhtml> [7.12.2014]

→ *Schulhausroman* <http://www.schulhausroman.ch> [9.5.2012]

→ *Assoziations-Blaster* <http://www.assoziations-blaster.de> [2.3.2012]



4.4 Participation level: collaborative

A collaborative level of participation requires that participants be involved in developing the framework, the topics and the methods of the cultural mediation project. One example is the → [Antikulti Atelier](#) [The name Antikulti is referring to the term “Multikulti” which stands for a multicultural society. It could be translated as “Anti-cultural studio”] project, which resulted from collaboration between the cultural mediation department of Museum für Gestaltung Zürich [Zurich Museum of Design] and Autonome Schule Zürich [Zurich Autonomous School]. In that project, a group of people of uncertain residency status in Switzerland meet regularly with a cultural mediator. The project is led jointly by the mediator and a representative of the group and its sessions take place in the museum’s cultural mediation room. Exhibitions hosted by the museum can (but do not have to) form the starting point for discussions on topics of importance to the group. The project’s activities in connection with the exhibition “Global Design”, which looked at globalization’s impacts on design phenomena, resulted in the creation of “Bleibeführer” [Guide to Staying], which contains useful information for getting by in the city of Zurich. Activities relating to the design objects presented in the exhibition “Black and White – Designing Opposites” led to the idea to develop a shadow theatre. Although it was the cultural mediator who initially put forth the invitation to collaborate, the methods, work conditions and contents are all chosen collectively, and are discussed and modified regularly by the group.

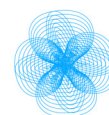
The allocation of resources for analyzing and managing power relationships and conflicts of interest is a prerequisite for projects with a collaborative level of participation, or an institution wishing to design one. This is particularly important when cultural institutions work with groups whose members possess lower levels of economic or symbolic → [capital](#). Frustration will set in unless everyone involved is there on equal footing. Moreover, good intentions on the part of institutions are often associated with → [paternalism](#) and its ilk, although these are sometimes manifested quite subtly. Making power relationships the subject matter and working together to deal with them is predicated upon a certain level of information and an awareness that extends beyond one’s own situation – as well as the willingness to actively redistribute resources and partially break down or modify power structures.

It is therefore far from easy to establish a collaborative level of participation in cultural mediation. When projects do succeed in using

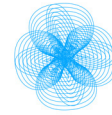
→ [Antikulti Atelier Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen \(ifa\) et al. \(Pub.\) Kunstvermittlung in der Migrationsgesellschaft. Reflexionen einer Arbeitstagung: <http://antikultiatelier.blogspot.ch/p/blog-page.html> \[17.2.2012\]; \[http://iae.zhdk.ch/fileadmin/data/iae/documents/121001_0106-482_RZ_WEB_PublikationKunstvermittlung-Migrationsgesellschaft.pdf\]\(http://iae.zhdk.ch/fileadmin/data/iae/documents/121001_0106-482_RZ_WEB_PublikationKunstvermittlung-Migrationsgesellschaft.pdf\) \[22.2.2012\]; see Resource Pool MFE0404.pdf](#)

→ [capital](#) see Glossary entry on capital, forms of

→ [paternalism](#) see Glossary



the resulting tensions productively, though, interesting avenues for institutional development can be opened. Over the long term, an institution which has collaborative processes in place is more likely to acquire the so sought-after new audience groups, because such processes create genuine opportunities for the new groups to wield influence. If the offer of these opportunities is genuine, the institutions themselves will not emerge unchanged.



4.5 Participation level: demand-based

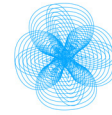
It is still quite rare for a cultural mediation project to be initiated in response to an approach by an interest group requesting a project. One of the mere handful of examples in the German-speaking region is the creation of the 2004 exhibition → [Gastarbajteri](#) – 40 years of Labour Migration at Wien Museum [Vienna Museum]. The Gastarbajteri exhibition explored part of Austrian history through the lens of economic migration, a topic the museum had not addressed until then. The impetus for the exhibition came in the form of a request from the association → [Initiative Minderheiten](#) [Initiative Minorities], which also collaborated in the exhibition's development. In this case, by requesting an exhibition, the association was pursuing the aim of → [representation](#) – seeking visibility for an interest group which had been left out of official historiography. It was demanding equal treatment for a group constituting part of Austrian society, but it also wanted to influence how that group was depicted in the exhibition. These ideas, for their part, had consequences for the cultural mediation programme associated with the exhibition, which the museum contracted out to the independent collective → [Büro trafo.K](#). Büro trafo.K. worked with the initiators to design an extensive programme of guided tours and workshops which reinforced the demand-based nature of the exhibition and its development: creating “counter-narratives” challenging the predominant public forms of representation and historical imagery.

→ [Gastarbajteri](#) <http://gastarbajteri.at> [15.3.2012]

→ [Initiative Minderheiten](#) <http://minderheiten.at> [15.3.2012]

→ [representation](#): see Glossary

→ [Büro trafo.K](#) <http://www.trafo-k.at> [15.3.2012]

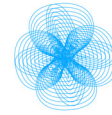


4.6 Teaching and learning concepts: instructionist

A mid-sized Swiss city has a theatre with its own symphony orchestra. As part of its winter programme, the theatre presents a series of concerts along with screenings of films with scores by Arthur Honegger, in honour of the internationally famous Swiss composer. The theatre's director, who had written her doctoral dissertation on Honegger's film music, gave a lecture introducing the first evening in the series. Not unnaturally, the lecture was packed with facts and details from the composer's life and highlighted certain aspects of his musical approach to the moving image.

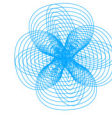
It is unlikely that many of those who attended the event would have said that they did so in order to learn something, had anyone asked. Even the director might have had trouble reconciling her understanding of her own role with the idea that her purpose that evening was to teach people something with her lecture. Yet one has to assume that she wanted to disseminate and increase knowledge about Arthur Honegger among the guests at the event. And in fact, a learning situation did exist for most of the people who listened to the lecture. This illustrates the fact that neither teaching nor learning are always intentional, i.e. conscious and premeditated.

In the (fictive) example described here, the concept of teaching and learning at issue is one informed by the theory of instructionism. Instructionism is based on an assumption that learning is receptive, i.e. is absorbed passively. It unfolds in a linear manner, systematically, one step building on the last, in a direction corresponding with the view of the person teaching. Learning content is understood as a closed knowledge cluster, or parts of one, which experts possess, prepare, and transmit to learners.



4.7 Teaching and learning concepts: action-oriented

Like the instructionist concept described in → [Text 4.6](#), the action-oriented teaching and learning concept assumes that knowledge transmission is the primary goal of the learning situation. Unlike the instructionist concept, the action-oriented concept recognizes that knowledge acquisition is more effective, more sustained and more multi-dimensional when pure instruction is complemented by forms of learning in which the learner becomes active within a framework defined by the person teaching rather than only listening (and perhaps taking notes). People familiar with modern schools will recognize the example of classroom “learning stations” that address a specific theme or themes: at learning stations, children can work individually or in groups to solve, experiment, research and relate in practice to a part of an assignment. If one were to apply action-oriented teaching and learning concepts in the fictional music mediation example described in → [Text 4.6](#), the result might be workshops supplementing the concert/film events, in which participants created scores for video sequences using self-composed or sampled sounds and experimented with how different sound atmospheres affected the perception of video images. Or, a (digital or analogue) game might be set up in the foyer, encouraging people to engage in planning and decision-making processes independently, which would illustrate the risks and tactics of life as an independent composer in 20th century Western Europe. As these examples suggest, an action-oriented teaching and learning concept can involve methodological and social learning subject matters as well as knowledge transfer.

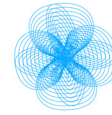


4.8 Teaching and learning concept: Constructivist and social-constructivists

A constructivist teaching/learning concept assumes that learning is based not on the transmission of knowledge by an external agent but instead on processes of organization occurring inside the brain. These processes are seen as the active production of reality by means of construction and interpretation. Reality is a process – one which all individuals, through their actions or interpretational activity, subject to dynamic change. From this viewpoint, the results of a learning process can be directed from the outside only to a limited degree. The implication for teachers is that their role is not so much that of guide and instructor as that of moderator and shaper of a learning environment which is as enabling as possible. Learning, in this view, is always embedded in a specific situation and is greatly influenced by what learners bring with them to a situation.

The social-constructivist theory is an extension of the constructivist concept. Social-constructivist approaches emphasize that people's constructing and interpretative activities are never restricted to a single individual in a closed system per se since the production of reality is always embedded in a matrix of social relationships. Therefore a social-constructivist teaching/learning approach pays particular attention to the ways in which power relationships and standards influence the learning processes of individuals.

In the social-constructivist view, the example of the introductory lecture at the Honegger event discussed in the preceding texts could be seen as involving learning processes apart from the intended instructive transfer of knowledge via the lecture. For instance, from their interactions with one another, audience members are learning how to behave in a concert hall or during a lecture (suppressing coughs, sitting still...). Or they are "practicing" ways to express socially acceptable appreciation or criticism in the given context (audience interested in concerts and films, concert hall). Or they may be learning methods of social punishment, ostracism, if a member of the group fails to live up to social expectations, if, for instance, someone grumbles loudly about the lecturer or starts dancing on the buffet table, enthusiastically singing the melodies from the pieces just performed.



CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Gunhild Hamer: How is Cultural Mediation Conveyed – the Example of the “Kultur macht Schule” Programme

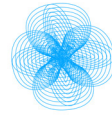
The programme → *Kultur macht Schule* [Culture is Making School] maintains and supports an extensive network of schools, artists and institutions. Interested schools can access a range of offerings emphasizing direct contact with artists and other people engaged with culture. Arts-related subject matter can be discussed and analyzed; content can also be collectively developed and modified by participants. This entails the use of formats which permit multiple and different participation levels: receptive (attending theatrical performances, concerts, literary events), interactive (tours in arts or history education) and participative (e.g. studio visits, workshops, project work with artists). The first time they sign up, teaching staff tend to choose receptive or interactive formats. If engagement with the artistic practice is taken to greater depth, schools tend to pick participative offerings or sign up for “combi-packages” (e.g. interactive tours in an art gallery or museum followed by a studio visit in an arts mediation studio or workshop on performance followed by attendance of a performance in the theatre).

→ *Kultur macht Schule* <http://www.kulturmachtschule.ch> [25.1.2013]

There has been increasing interest on the part of schools in partner projects with individual artists or cultural institutions. These medium- or long-term partnerships offer participants unusual opportunities for participation. Artist residencies in schools allow pupils to witness contemporary artistic creation and create opportunities for them to participate in the artistic process.

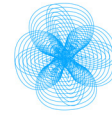
In this format, pupils develop their own opportunities to create and are encouraged to engage in their own artistic expression. They experiment with the effectiveness of their own actions, thoughts and feelings and develop new ways of seeing. Teachers benefit from art-making processes; they learn new methods and are inspired to channel art-related content into the daily school routine. Creative impulses emerging from these partnerships with artists can also be taken up by the school as a whole and contribute toward its evolution and the teaching in it.

The modules, which are specifically designated as introductory or more advanced, encourage teachers to get involved in the cultural mediation work. In this area too, engaging with artistic practices gives groups the opportunity to experience different levels of participation and learning concepts.



We plan to draw on the experiences gathered so far to improve the quality of the existing programmes, and in that context will seek to support participative approaches in particular.

Gunhild Hamer is the Director of the Cultural Education Office (and the Programme "Kultur macht Schule") in the Department of Education, Culture and Sports of the Canton of Aargau and a director with professional and non-professional performers.



CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Thomas Pfiffner: Musikkollegium Winterthur

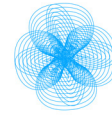
Designing interesting and varied concert programmes of high artistic quality is one thing. Getting people to engage with this musical diversity is another. The latter task has a great tradition at Musikkollegium Winterthur [Collegium Musicum Winterthur]. We reach out to a wide variety of audience segments on several different levels. This begins with free attendance of dress rehearsals for members of Musikkollegium Winterthur: the rehearsals let participants look into the “workroom” of an orchestra, enhancing people’s ear for and understanding of music.

Our youth projects are particularly important. Several times each year we hold events in our “Meet the Orchestra”, “Orchester hautnah” [orchestra close-up], “Orchesterlabor” [orchestra laboratory] and other programmes in which children and young people can have fun while being introduced to the world of classic music and its instruments. The highlight is the huge project “Winterthur schreibt eine Oper” [Winterthur writes an opera]. We have carried out that project twice now, both times with great success. A total of 750 children and young adults participated in it over a period of months, writing the libretto, composing the music, sketching the stage set and, finally, performing the opera themselves (supported in the orchestra pit by Musikkollegium Winterthur). This format, in which young people become creative themselves and begin to make music, is what you might call the ideal form of music mediation.

We also offer the “classic” formats of music mediation, i.e. pre-concert informational programmes, and sometimes post-format “Red Sofa” discussions, where audience members spontaneously come up on the stage and share their thoughts with the conductor and the evening’s soloists and ask any questions they might have. This is music mediation right in the heart of artistic endeavour.

Over time, Musikkollegium Winterthur has developed a music mediation programme with a form of music mediation tailored to every kind of audience (including potential audiences), whether young or old: from our loyal concertgoers to the ideal next-generation audience, from school children to families to companies. One format which is frequently under-appreciated in music mediation circles is what we call our client events, where we design music mediation for selected companies. This format brings together a group of people between the ages of thirty and sixty who would not ordinarily attend classical concerts. It combines an introductory talk on the concert, meeting with the artists and a glimpse behind the scenes to provide an up-close and personal experience of classical music.

Thomas Pfiffner is the Director of Musikkollegium Winterthur, the Vice President of Fondation SUISSE and the Programme Director of the concert series Meisterzyklus Bern.



CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Meris Schüpbach: Project kidswest.ch – A Process of Art and Culture in the Social Context

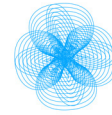
The project → kidswest.ch is an open art and cultural workshop in Bern West open to anyone aged 5–16 at no charge. Once each week children of various nationalities – almost all of them from low-income immigrant families – meet up to experience and create art and culture together. Public appearances are held on weekends and over the holidays, for instance, at kkj.ch, in the Bern Museum of Fine Arts Bern or in the City of Bern's Action Week against Racism. A core group of what is now 12 children has been meeting at kidswest regularly for years; others come for a year or two, a few weeks or just a single day. Since the art workshops are open to newcomers, the group composition is constantly changing.

→ [kidswest.ch](http://kidswest.blogspot.ch) <http://kidswest.blogspot.ch> [25.1.2013]

I plan projects or activities addressing topics, techniques or forms of expression with the children based on sporadically compiled priority lists. Depending on the needs determined (and resources available), I sometimes bring in other artists or students, who then develop and implement a project with the kids. The final product is never the main focus; experiencing and creating collectively always takes priority. Once an idea or plan has taken shape, each child decides whether or not to participate in the project. When children commit to playing a major role, then their participation becomes obligatory; for instance, children who have agreed to play a part in a theatre project or to give a presentation. Usually the ones who have not committed themselves also work on the project with the group, but they have the option to work on their own on the current topic if they want to.

The children figure out what interests them as a group in sporadically held "postcard circles". They each receive a blank postcard, on which they write down, or draw, a topic or an idea for a project. Then the cards are sent around the circle, with the children adding their own thoughts on the idea to each postcard. In the end, the children read their own cards out loud, both their initial idea and the responses to it. After the discussion, they vote on which topics interest them most. A lot of projects develop spontaneously out of shared experiences as well, or through questions asked and answered in encounters with outsiders. The current priority list has inventing and creating stories, painting pictures, doing theatre.

Meris Schüpbach has worked as an independent artist in the social work context since 1981. In 2012 she received the third annual Award for Visual Arts Education in Switzerland from the Swiss Art Association and visarte.Switzerland.

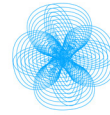


CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Claude-Hubert Tatot: Conveying Cultural Mediation

The mission of the degree programme Trans – Art Education at the University of Art and Design in Geneva is to train socially engaged artists and authors who are aware of political and social environments and are in a position to invent new forms of mediation fuelled by their own artistic experiences and their position as art-makers.

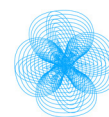
With respect to cultural mediation, the Trans programme seeks to equip its students for research and development. For that reason, it places great priority on both interaction in professional circles and implementing projects in partnerships with cultural institutions. These experiences promote learning, familiarity with current developments and the emergence of new forms of intervention. Instead of presenting students with a set of methods or prescriptions, the programme confronts them with concrete situations and questions. For example, how can one design, create and programme a Christmas market stand for the Théâtre de Carouge? How can spectators at the Les Urbaines festival in Lausanne be encouraged to move from one venue to the next? How can one create games which will enable a young audience to take a closer look at the works of Mamco (Geneva's Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art) or the MAC/VAL (Museum of Contemporary Art of Val-de-Marne)? How can one design a bus shelter during the Festival Art-Chêne which will invite passers-by to engage with it? How can one invite older amateur artists to come to paint at a neighbourhood social centre? What forms of interaction can take place in a public space between passers-by and the works of Thomas Huber?

The forms of collaboration, to which our students bring energy and commitment, adapt themselves to a variety of contexts and address a range of different population groups, depending on whether they take the form of local interventions or international campaigns, smaller projects or institutional partnerships. They represent forms of action research rooted in the reality of the territory explored by Trans. Theoretical approaches from various disciplines and practical activities interweave, bound up in a common desire to explore, propelled by the incessant back-and-forth between the two dimensions. While many decision-makers advocate the use of well-tested projects as models for new activities, we take the opposite approach, training Trans students to innovate. In this respect, we share the attitude expressed in the journal "Passagen" by Carmen Mörsch: "cultural mediation –



and in my eyes this is its most important function, one for which there is no substitute – allows space for a resistant cultural practice, removed from elite enclaves of art appreciation and populist strategies of audience development.”

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CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Cultural Mediation Working Group, Pro Helvetia: Cultural Mediation as Exchange on an Equal Footing

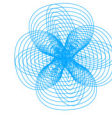
One feature common to all the cultural mediation projects which Pro Helvetia supports is that they each involve an exchange in which all parties meet on an equal footing— an exchange with no predefined hierarchies, within which all partners are equally entitled to express themselves, bear responsibility collectively and listen to one another. The Swiss Arts Council aspires to a type of cultural mediation that is based on interaction among a variety of individuals and brings their varied experiences and knowledge into play, rather than limiting itself to the transmission of knowledge from an expert to an individual or group. The aim is for everyone involved to be both teachers and learners, though everyone does not have to be teaching or learning the same thing.

An equal footing in a relationship can be created when a cultural institution takes on an active role as a mediator that extends beyond the mere provision of content. Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne, for instance, increases the accessibility of theatre to blind people or people with impaired vision by providing live audio-description and hosting events where audiences meet with directors. These allow sighted and blind people to experience a performance together, and that, in turn, offers to the director and the theatre a valuable new perspective on their own work.

During the “Schulhausroman” [Schoolhouse Novel] project, a school class writes a story intended for publication with the help of a writer. Naturally, the young people are influenced and enriched by the writer in this process, but the reverse is also true: the same exchange opens up new worlds of ideas and language to the writer, which will flow into that person’s future work. Thus both the actual target group – the school class – and the writer each profit from the project, but the school as a whole can profit from the experience as well.

By supporting projects structured in this way, Pro Helvetia hopes to contribute towards increased awareness of the transmission of culture and cultural mediation and highlight interaction among all participants in that context.

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

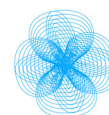


FOR READING AT LEISURE Working in a Field of Tensions 4: Exclusions Engendered by Forms of Open Learning

"In this way, certain ways of seeing art are [...] taken for granted and unconsciously recognized, commended and encouraged in those who have already mastered them. The knowledge that is often necessary for this comprehension and the means and techniques through which that knowledge is acquired are not transmitted, and the people who have not already unconsciously mastered them, and for precisely that reason usually do not dare to ask about them, are disadvantaged in the educational process." (Sternfeld 2005)

In contemporary educational psychology, learning is defined as modifying and acquiring new modes of behaviour and attitudes through experience and/or practice. This concept of learning is broader than the typical notion of school instruction and the targeted transmission of content. Unless it is the result of physical change, illness or something similar, every long-term modification of behaviour or attitude is seen as learning-based. "We are also talking about learning fear and security, of acquiring likes and dislikes, of the formation of habits, acquiring the capacity for planned action and thinking in terms of problem-solving." (Edelmann 1993, p. 5).

Today, the prevailing understanding of learning processes is anchored in the constructivist theory of learning (Reich 2006; Harms, Krombass 2008). In the constructivist view, learning is less a result of instruction than a self-directed process of meaning construction. The acquisition of knowledge and skills is seen as inextricably linked to the production of meaning. This process is circular and based on agency: a specific experience leads to the analysis and the development of abstract concepts. The application of the concepts generates further experience, causing the cycle to begin again (Kolb, Fry 1975).¹ This occurs both in individuals on their own and through interaction (co-constructivist learning) with others. Social relationships and emotions are seen as important factors in the learning process. John Howard Falk and Lynn Dierking, scholars specialising in learning, see learning as an individual's dialogue with the environment for the purpose of orientation. This dialogue is influenced by the interactions among the individual's personal, sociocultural and physical contexts and by their temporalities (contextual learning). Thus, learning, knowledge and experience are always tied to a place, i.e. situated. Learning-process outcomes vary according to the circumstances and conditions under which they take place. From this perspective, the creation of environments allowing multi-layered experiences and ties takes on greater weight relative to the question of what contents mediators intend to convey. The knowledge that learners bring to a situation is deemed just as relevant as the knowledge teachers plan to transfer. This means that the learning situation is based on collective determination and



participation. The teachers see themselves more as guides than as instructors and are always learners as well as teachers. The criteria for “right” or “wrong” blur – failure to achieve targets and unexpected outcomes are no longer considered negative or gratuitous, but instead as experiences which can lead to new movements of learning (Spychiger 2008).

This approach to learning sees cultural mediation, its stakeholders, settings and contents as having special potential. Falk and Dierking, for example, describe the museum as an ideal setting for open learning arrangements, emphasizing exploration, self-direction and independent actions (Falk, Dierking 2000). The psychologist, Howard Gardner, who developed the concept of multiple intelligences (Gardner 2002), a highly influential concept in the field of cultural mediation, sees engagement with art as offering an opportunity to support multiple ways of learning, including ways not focused on linguistic and mathematical intelligence (see also → [Project Zero](#) at Harvard University, which has been researching learning in the arts since 1967). More recent research has looked at the logics associated with the agency of artists involved in cultural mediation and their self-images (→ [Pringle 2002](#), → [2009](#)). These studies reveal correspondences between constructivist learning concepts and the attitudes and approaches of contemporary artistic production. Artists work as “reflective practitioners” (Schoen 1983), in tentative, explorative ways, drawing on their experience. They seldom aspire to have their work be universal. Instead, they usually see it as situated and context-dependent. Artists’ work question ostensibly fixed notions of right and wrong and view failure and unexpected outcomes as productive events, sometimes also as conditions for the creative process (Schmücker 2003). In a 2006 text based on their own experiences, artists Seraphina Lenz and Stella Geppert attempt to systematize the differences between artistic processes and school learning in a model project on arts mediation (Geppert, Lenz 2006):²

→ [Project Zero](#) <http://www.pz.harvard.edu> [30.11.2012]

→ [Pringle 2002](#) http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/we-did-stir-things-up-the-role-of-artists-in-sites-for-learning [30.11.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0401.pdf

→ [Pringle 2009](#) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/artist-educator-examining-relationships-between-art-practice-and> [30.11.2012];

An artistic process

Learning processes in arts mediation

An artistic process unfolds independently and in a self-motivated manner.

Learning processes in arts mediation are initiated by the teacher.

Artistic processes can have an exploratory quality and may therefore include detours and cul-de-sacs. A predefined objective cannot usually be pursued linearly.

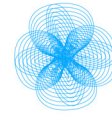
The structure put in place by the school requires an efficient use of time.

Artistic processes involve their own time structures, which are appropriate to the process.

Responsibility for the learning process lies with the teacher. That teacher provides the ideas, the material, the expertise and the time structure.

Artistic processes require communication with oneself and others as well as sensitivity in perception of oneself and others.

Feedback on the work takes the form of an assessment by the teacher in the form of marks.



Juxtapositions such as these, though highly illustrative, function only at the cost of enormous reduction with respect to content. To provide some examples, one might point to the economic and temporal restrictions of artistic project work and contrast them with the long-term nature and continuity of learning in schools, which might better support the initiation of open search processes. Moreover, one ought to note that project work and “self-organized learning” have taken a permanent place in the repertoire of many schools, and in fact now sometimes on the list of required formats and methods (→ [Patzner et al. 2008](#)). Moreover, the claim that artistic work necessarily engenders greater sensitivity in artists’ perception of themselves and others appears somewhat romanticized in view of the tough selection mechanisms, the pressure exerted on artists to assert themselves and cultivate their public images and the level of competition in the artistic field. In addition, it is quite possible that highly product-oriented artists would be less flexible in their approach to learners than would a teacher with a more process-oriented attitude. Thus it is not the professional background, but primarily an “artist”-oriented attitude (as described by Pringle, see above) which is important in the creation of learning situations. This has also been recognized by researchers in education and social sciences. That field has undergone a “performative shift” in the last twenty years: increasingly, artistic methods are included in methodological array and are being studied with a view to their potential for pedagogical activities (→ [Mackenzie 2011](#); Springay 2007; → [Wulf, Zirfas 2007](#), p. 7 ff.). On the other side of the coin, the arts have been taking an “educational turn”: one which is manifested in the increasing numbers of interdisciplinary projects using pedagogic methods, analysing the conditions of knowledge production with artistic means and interacting with participants from the widest variety of groups and individuals (→ [Podesva 2007](#)). Given these overlaps, maintaining a rigid separation between “art” on the one side and “learning” on the other no longer seems appropriate. It is difficult to draw a clear boundary between cultural mediation, art and general education. Drama education can serve as one illustrative example here: as an occupational field it has its own history as a discipline and is constantly evolving. In its more sophisticated varieties, such as those oriented toward → [post-dramatic theatre](#), it is difficult or impossible to distinguish between it and theatrical arts, which for its part has appropriated pedagogic and participative processes for its own uses (see for example the projects of Vienna group → [Wenn es soweit ist](#)).

In some cases, funding-level institutions and organizations have reacted to the interferences among “cultural mediation”, “art” and formal education. One example is the → [Projektfond Kulturelle Bildung](#) [Cultural Mediation Project Fund], created in 2008 by the Berlin Senate and coordinated by an independent office organizationally situated between city-state’s departments of cultural affairs and education and social affairs.

→ [Patzner et al. 2008](#) <http://www.schulheft.at/fileadmin/1PDF/schulheft-130.pdf> [21.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0403.pdf

→ [Mackenzie 2011](#) <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1437> [21.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0404.pdf

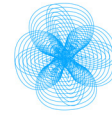
→ [Wulf, Zirfas 2007](#) <http://www.beltz.de/fileadmin/beltz/leseproben/9783407320742.pdf> [21.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0407.pdf

→ [Podesva 2007](#) <http://fillip.ca/content/a-pedagogical-turn> [14.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0405.pdf

→ [post-dramatic theatre](#) see Glossary

→ [Wenn es soweit ist](#) <http://www.wennessoweitist.com> [13.9.2012]

→ [Projekt fund Cultural mediation](#) <http://www.kulturprojekte-berlin.de/en/cultural-education.html> [16.4.2014]

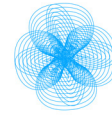


Other examples are the offices set up by Swiss cantons to coordinate co-operation between schools, artists and cultural institutions, which are situated partially in the cantonal education departments and partially in the cultural services.³

→ *Freie Kunstschulen* <http://www.bjke.de> [12.9.2012]

Education drawing on the arts and about them is described repeatedly as holding out hope because of the potential, described above, that it is thought to have. This takes place against the backdrop of crises in the education system and the related challenges questioning its modernity and above all its inclusiveness and whether it serves different learning types. Germany's → *Freie Kunstschulen* [Free Art Schools], for instance, emerged as a reaction to the "education catastrophe" diagnosed in that country in the 1960s (Picht 1964). The Free Art Schools offered (and still do) unaccredited, extra-curricular "free" activities for children and young people in all artistic domains, though in the early days dance, music and theatre were the main emphases. One of the key justifications for the schools' existence was the critique of an insufficiently artistic orientation, excessive pressure to achieve and lack of opportunities for "self-development and creative activity" in regular schools, for which the art schools were intended to compensate (Erhart et al. 1980, p. 15).

Presumably, programmes identifying themselves as "free" and which are designed to promote personal development would have great appeal to a wide variety of users. In fact, however, the free art schools have never really succeeded consistently in living up to their stated aim of being open to all classes and age groups (they are certainly not alone in this respect). Generally, their programmes are used by people belonging to the middle class. This contradiction was recognized early on, for instance, in a study written back in 1980 (Kathen 1980). Looking at the Königsborn district of the city of Unna in Germany's North Rhein-Westphalia, the study describes the infighting and clashing interests associated with the establishment of an art school. At the beginning, young people who had previously spent most of their free time in the streets worked with cultural workers to renovate a building to house a free art school. After this collective process, though, conflict erupted. The ideas about art mediation held by the people giving the courses proved to be incompatible with the interests of the young people involved. This led to the school's closure, and an official protest by the young people. The study's author, herself an instructor at the school, undertook an evaluation of this conflict-ridden experience. To place it in context, she also looked at twelve other art schools in the study. Von Kathen's conclusion is extremely critical: work in the art schools for young people draws heavily on elitist concepts associated with a bourgeois definition of culture rather than attempting to develop alternatives. The schools produce exclusion because their programme structures are unable to retain the interests of children and young people from a variety of classes. Despite its age, this study has lost almost none of its relevance.



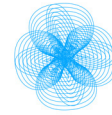
These days, one hears ever more criticism of an unreservedly positive assessment of open forms of learning and “self-directed learning”, which are typical of participative-oriented cultural mediation – the same forms of learning which have been described as constituting its great potential. Michael Sertl, for instance, demonstrates that such forms of learning are based on middle-class parenting practices. They build on abilities and linguistic and behavioural codes which middle class children have already acquired at home. For that reason these forms are most effective for those children in particular and benefit primarily their “self development” (→ [Sertl 2007](#), p. 2). To assert that these forms of learning will be beneficial for everyone is to take the lifestyles and learning styles of the middle class as a universal standard, to → [naturalize](#) them. While Sertl’s remarks are primarily concerned with regular schools, similar objections have been raised in the context of cultural mediation by the arts mediator and theorist Nora Sternfeld (Sternfeld 2005). Sternfeld focuses on the correlations frequently found in cultural mediation between the “call for independent exploration and creative autonomy” and the idea of “natural talent”, which should be developed in each individual separately. This approach is viewed in cultural mediation circles as particularly un-elitist (Sternfeld 2005, p. 22). Referring to Bourdieu (Bourdieu 2001), Sternfeld points out that “talent” itself is a social construct. Researchers have shown that people who are considered “spontaneous”, “creative” and “imaginative” are those whose childhood and socialization took place in middle-class environments. However, both the transfer of specialized knowledge and exercises for practicing techniques of knowledge acquisition tend to be seen in the progressive part of the professional field of cultural mediation as authoritarian, uncreative and out-dated.

It appears, then, that working in open, explorative learning settings is also fraught with contradictions for cultural mediation (again, for those who see cultural mediation as a critical practice aspiring to equality of access). On the one hand, the special potential of cultural mediation lies in developing this kind of learning setting. Correspondences exist between the arts, cultural mediation’s central subject matters, and the pedagogical methods based on open learning settings. They do not involve formalized performance assessment, which potentially promotes process-orientation and openness with respect to outcome. On the other hand though, open learning settings run a risk of producing precisely the types of exclusions which cultural mediation is intended and committed to combating. The study written by Dagmar von Kathen in 1980 provided an answer to the question of how to deal with this contradiction when she criticized the relatively uncritical mode and manner of engaging with art in the free schools. The children and young adults were set exercises to train them in the → [love of art](#) there.

→ [Sertl 2007](#) <http://homepage.univie.ac.at/michael.sertl/OffenesLernen.pdf> [21.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0406.pdf

→ [naturalize](#) see Glossary

→ [love of art](#) see Glossary

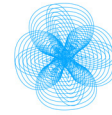


“Yet engagement with art must take the form of critical analysis of art in order for it to be productive in terms of emancipatory aesthetic education. Not every artistic statement is automatically positive [...]. Part of relating to art is understanding and integrating into oneself its societal function, the social position of artists, their high degree of individualization etc. [...]” (Kathen 1980, p. 155).

→ [transformative function](#)
see Text 5.5

Von Kathen also suggests that cultural mediation should have the analysis of the societal function of art as part of its subject matter. That corresponds to the approach advocated by Sternfeld, which requires that institutional exclusions be openly discussed in cultural mediation. Covering them up, she argues, has the effect of legitimizing them, particularly when working with marginalized groups (Sternfeld 2005, p. 31). This is undoubtedly an important component of cultural mediation as a critical practice, and it is feasible in any situation, at least to some degree, given an interest and willingness to do so on the mediator's part. Merely raising the issue of exclusions verbally will not counteract them however. The critique of open forms of learning itself is a matter of privileges. For that reason, critics like Sertl (Sertl 2007, p. 1) are not calling for the elimination of open forms of learning, but rather, insisting that cultural mediators maintain an awareness of the potential of these forms to produce exclusion while using them pedagogically rather than simply taking them on board with euphoric naivety. For cultural mediation aiming at this type of reflexivity, one would first have to develop a sceptical distance from one's own pedagogical “truths”. For instance, cultural mediation for an exhibition which, in the belief that it is fundamentally anti-elitist and democratic, has participants seek out their “favourite picture” and “free associate” with it, might scrutinize this practice to see what can be “freely associated” and expressed in a group situation in a museum without violating the unwritten rules of conduct – or whose associations the mediator finds “interesting”. Knowledge acquisition techniques can themselves be made the subject of education in any branch, instead of placing one's faith in the pedagogical “intuition” of education staff and relying too heavily on the self-direction of learners. This assumes however, that the people providing the cultural mediation are professional enough to have the ability to make their knowledge about methods available to participants – i.e. to present it in a systematic fashion and make it accessible both verbally and through exercises.⁴

Sternfeld also calls on mediators and ultimately cultural institutions to actively express solidarity for the groups and their concerns: “this cultural mediation would see itself as also involving opening up the institutions for political practice and organization” (Sternfeld 2005, p. 32). Serious attempts to combat institutional exclusions would therefore lead to cultural mediation with a → [transformative function](#) for the institutions.



- 1 Other authors have criticized various aspects of the learning circle model put forth by Kolb and Fry and developed their own, more complex models. Due to its introductory nature, this text can offer only a brief sketch of the complex field of learning theories and the conflicting positions within it.
- 2 KLiP ("Kunst und Lernen im Prozess" [Art and learning in the process] took place over the course of three years in various different schools in Berlin).
- 3 A list of all of these coordination offices is available at → <http://www.kulturvermittlung.ch/fr/infotheque/liens/suisse/services-de-coordination.html> [25.1.2013].
- 4 In the postcolonial view, the devaluation of forms of learning like imitation, copying, or learning by memorization supports the colonial claim of Western superiority over non-Western learning approaches (Spivak 2012, p. 46).

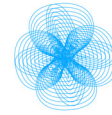
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