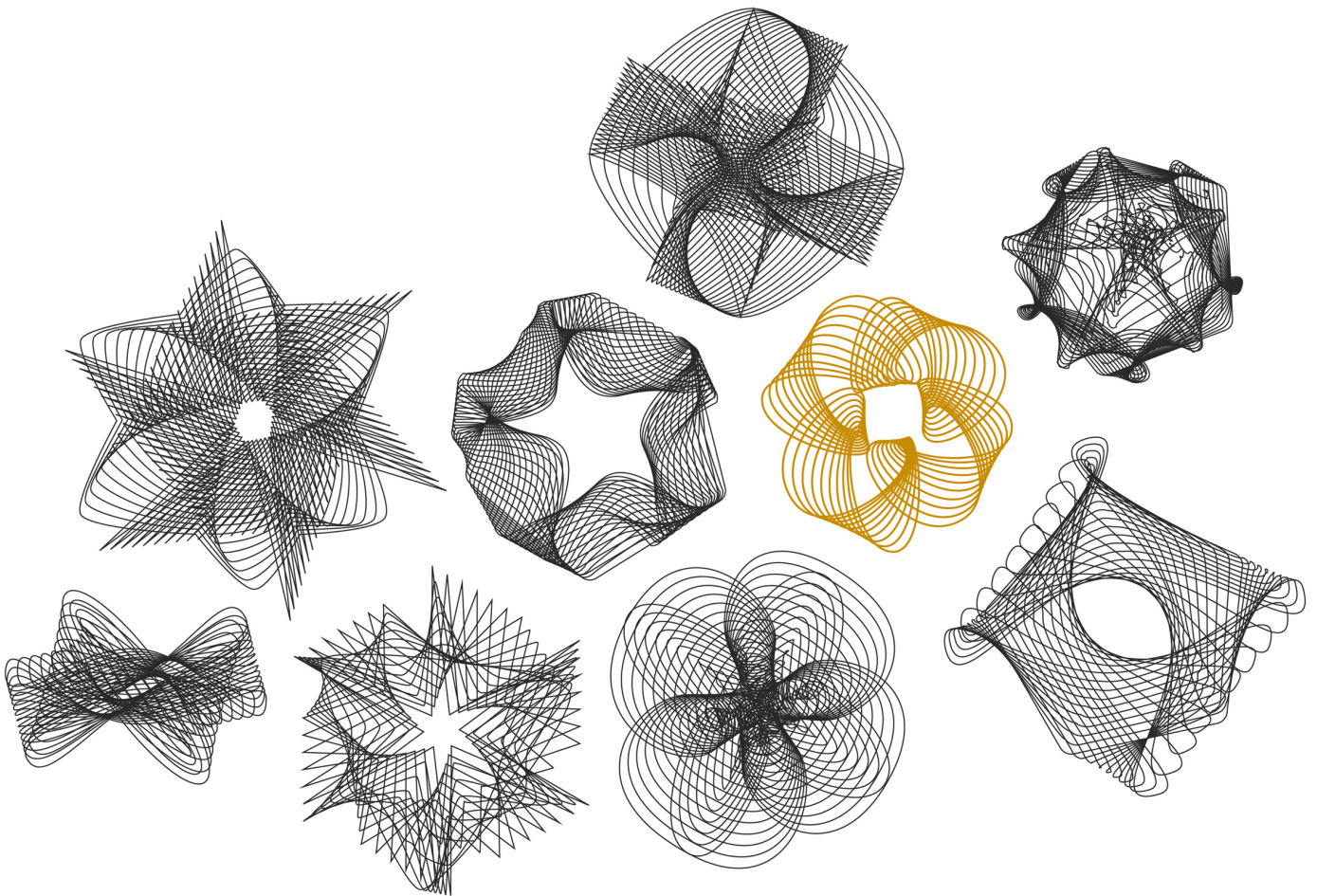


# Time for Cultural Mediation

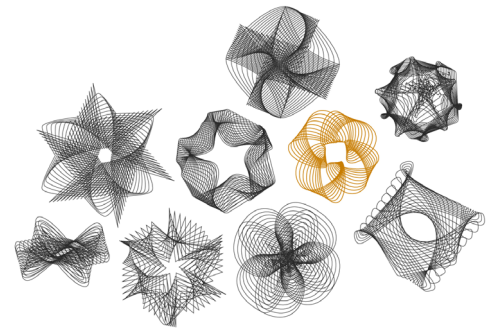
- 1 What is Cultural Mediation?
- 2 Cultural Mediation for Whom?
- 3 What is Transmitted?
- 4 How is Cultural Mediation Carried Out?
- 5 **What Does Cultural Mediation Do?**



- 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?
- 2 Cultural Mediation for Whom?
- 3 What is Transmitted?
- 4 How is Cultural Mediation Carried Out?
- 5 **What Does Cultural Mediation Do?**



### 5.0 Intro

Policy debates about cultural mediation often centre around the effects of projects on their participants: the people they target. One has the impression that the decision to fund a cultural mediation project comes down to whether the “effects” question is answered correctly. A fairly large share of the → *research on cultural mediation* seems to have been conducted with the intent of finding evidence of projects’ effects. We take a different track for this publication and avoid the active use of the “effect” concept (with the possible exception of the “Changing Perspectives” texts, which were written by others). We have chosen to do so because we are not convinced that it is possible to persuasively establish a direct causal relationship between cultural mediation and its users. The factors which result in a change of attitude or knowledge gain, i.e., factors associated with a learning experience, cannot be isolated with sufficient clarity. For that reason, the next section of this publication, “6. Cultural mediation: why (not)?”, takes the view that the purported effects put forth by proponents of cultural mediation in public debates on the subject are in truth arguments serving to legitimize it. We consider the nearly ubiquitous focus on changes in participants effected by cultural mediation to be problematic: it casts participants in the role of people “to be improved”. We believe that one ought first to examine the effects of cultural mediation on those who initiate them, run them or commission them – i.e. on cultural institutions themselves and the organizations and agencies engaged in funding and carrying out cultural mediation.

Therefore, this chapter, introduced by the question of what cultural mediation does, sets out five functions cultural mediation can serve for institutions.

The order in which the functions are presented should not be read to reflect a hierarchy or in the sense of historical-chronological stages of development. In practice, more than one of them tend to operate at any given time. A brief description of the problems associated with each function is included at the end of its description.

→ *research on cultural mediation* see  
Text 7.5

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



## 5.1 Affirmative function of cultural mediation

Cultural mediation is described as affirmative when it serves the function of communicating the publicly acknowledged missions of an institution of high culture. By “publicly acknowledged”, we mean missions which institutions have inherited or, in some cases, which have been defined in writing by professional associations. For instance, in the case of → *museums*, they include the duties associated with the definition of a museum defined in 1986 in the statutes of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) as a “non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”

→ *Museum* [http://www.museumbund.de/en/the\\_museum/aaa/0/](http://www.museumbund.de/en/the_museum/aaa/0/) [12.2.2014]

The affirmative function of cultural mediation treats the arts as specialized domains in which specialized knowledge is transferred. Practices frequently associated with that transfer consist of lectures and other events, and the production and provision of media intended to provide introductory or accompanying information, such as film programmes, director’s talks, tours led by specialists, pamphlets accompanying theatrical plays and wall texts or catalogue texts for exhibitions. These are created by people authorized to speak for the institution who are addressing a specialist public, or at least a self-motivated one.

Accordingly, the following aspects of the affirmative function of cultural mediation are problematic: its exclusivity, its tendency to confirm exclusions and its assertion of a fundamental validity for its contents.



## 5.2 Reproductive function of cultural mediation

Another commonly encountered function of cultural mediation is that of developing the “audiences of tomorrow” through activities with children and young people or by exposing people to the arts who would have sought such exposure on their own initiative, perhaps because their leisure activities are set in locations not within cultural institutions. Cultural institutions are seen as institutions which grant the public access to valuable cultural goods. These goods are not equally accessible to all: even when admission is free or very inexpensive, not all members of a society have an equal sense that the institution’s offerings are intended for them – one hears historically or socially-based exclusion mechanisms or “symbolic obstacles” spoken of in this context. Against this backdrop, the purpose of cultural mediation’s reproductive function is to provide access to these goods to the broadest possible range of audiences. Cultural mediation programmes whose function is primarily reproductive tend to be designed by cultural mediators with pedagogic experience. Examples of projects falling into this category are workshops for school classes and advanced training offerings for teaching staff, programmes for children and families and event-oriented activities with high audience figures such as museums at night events or museum days, concert picnics or the offerings for children and young adults in the Swiss dance festival → *Steps*. We use the term reproductive in such contexts because these projects are motivated to no small degree by the institution’s desire to ensure its own future by creating new users and also because they are associated with activities of caring and providing for.

→ *Steps dance festival* <http://www.steps.ch> [21.3.2012]

The problematic aspect of this function of cultural mediation is that in its attempts to draw in new audience groups the focus is primarily on those who are absent – the people who fail to grasp how good for them the culture the institutions offer might be. Thus this function is characterized by efforts to persuade and induce.

It is rare for institutions to shift their focus to their own content, range of offerings or rules of conduct. Yet these should be scrutinized, because they too contribute enormously to audiences development.



### 5.3 Deconstructive function of cultural mediation

Cultural mediation can take on the function of engaging with a public to critically examine the cultural institutions, the arts and the processes of education and inclusion in the canon of high culture which they facilitate. It can, for instance, be a forum for debating the rules of behaviour which apply in cultural institutions, their accessibility and their authority to define what is high-quality art and what is not. It can expose and explore the → *history of the institutions*, and analyse their ties with power and or market structures. It can also engage with participants to respond to the problems entailed in these issues – for example, by encouraging participants to present their own narratives or objects and place these in the institution as an intervention. Practices serving the deconstructive function of cultural mediation remain rare thus far. Historically, this function is closely linked with critical theory and the practices of institutional critique, which began to develop in the arts in the 1960s. Thus far, one encounters it primarily in the domain of the visual arts. One example is the project “ArtUOM”, run by arts mediator → *Javier Rodrigo* carried out with Universitat Oberta per a Majors [the education programme for seniors at the University of the Balearic Islands] at Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró on Mallorca, Spain, for three years. The participants explored the museum and its exhibitions, conducted interviews and discussions with the people working there and visited workshops and storage rooms – with the aim of understanding the rules which govern the activities of a contemporary art institution and the criteria applied in selecting, showing and evaluating art. They held their own exhibition at the end of each year, documenting in an artistic manner the, to some extent critical, processes of knowledge acquisition which played out within the project and inviting the audience to engage in activities of their own. One clearly deconstructive element in the project is its catalogue, which constitutes an alternative approach to talking about art, which is quite different from the normal modes encountered in the field of artists and professionals.

The example shows clearly that deconstruction-oriented cultural mediation often exhibits characteristics associated with artists even as it analyzes them. The deconstructive function of cultural mediation can also crop up in formats which are primarily affirmative, however: in guided exhibition tours which intentionally question, relativize or criticize the authority of the institution and make it clear that it is one voice among many.

Potentially problematic is the fact that cultural mediation projects with a deconstructive function can have a tendency to become self-referential and self-involved, just as art itself sometimes does. In other words, it formulates critiques but does not address the ramifications of or conditions for applying the criticism.

→ *history of institutions* see Text 3.4

→ *Javier Rodrigo* <http://javierrodrigomontero.blogspot.com/2010/05/artuom-0507.html> [22.3.2012]



## 5.4 Reformative function of cultural mediation

We speak of the reformative function of cultural mediation when experiences or knowledge generated in cultural mediation result in changes intended to improve structures existing within a cultural institution. For example, the Vincenzo Vela Museum in Ligornetto drew on its experiences with visitors with impaired vision from a project supported by Pro Helvetia called “Kulturattaché-e-s” (Grossrieder 2009) to expand its programming in this area over a longer term and to improve the accessibility of the museum to this user group.

One example from the field of theatrical mediation is the → [audio description](#) project carried out at Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne. Visitors with vision impairments hear descriptions of what is occurring on stage in real time during the natural pauses in the dialogue of a theatrical production via earphones. A tactile examination of the stage set takes place before the performance and participants have the opportunity to talk with theatre personnel.

The more effective the information flows within an institution are, the greater the extent to which cultural mediation can fulfil the reformative function – i.e. if mediators have a voice in decision-making at the planning level of the institution and thus are able to apply their project experiences directly and effectively. One almost never finds such structural conditions in place in Switzerland, and it is still quite unusual to encounter them in other countries.

→ [Audio description](http://www.vidy.ch/jeune-public/audiodescription) <http://www.vidy.ch/jeune-public/audiodescription> [11.4.2012]; see Text 2.CP by Corinne Doret Baertschi and Fanny Guichard: Two concrete examples of cultural mediation in Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne



## 5.5 Transformative function of cultural mediation

Cultural mediation sometimes takes on the task of expanding the existing function of a cultural institution and positioning it, for example, as a participant and instrument in shaping society. One example of this is the → [Centre for Possible Studies](#), initiated by London's Serpentine Gallery in London in 2009 and led by the mediator and artist Janna Graham. The centre is an exhibition and event space in a neighbourhood which is strongly impacted by → [gentrification](#) and, in consequence thereof, the displacement of some sections of its long-term resident population. The Centre for Possible Studies, a venue for networking and production, offers space for artistic practice and combines that with the activities and concerns of local interest groups. The latter work with artists, geographers and social scientists, many of whom share countries of origin with large portions of the neighbourhood's immigrant residents. The focus is on investigating and imaging the neighbourhood's future. With this project, the Serpentine Gallery has taken an active stance opposing the dynamics of gentrification, which cultural institutions generally tend to promote or accelerate. One also hears the term → [Soho effect](#) used to describe situations of the latter type.

In this kind of cultural mediation project, cultural institutions are seen as changeable organizations in which the long-term participation of a range of publics in shaping the institution is seen as necessary to maintaining the relevance of the institution and its sustainability. However, this is due less to quantitative considerations (as is the case with the reproductive function of cultural mediation) than to the need to keep in step with the changing forms of cultural production in the knowledge and information society as well as the aspiration to be the source of ground-breaking impulses. Practices associated with the transformative function work in opposition to the hierarchical distinction between curatorial and artistic work and education. For a project to have a transformative function, it is essential that its practices do not stop at intervening in the institution and putting its functions out for discussion (as is the case with the deconstructive function), but go on to change and expand the institutions.

Problematic aspects of the transformative function are its potential instrumentalization of participants to enhance an institution's image and in general the question of decision-making hierarchies within projects aiming at → [collaboration](#) on an equal footing and creating exchange based on partnerships between larger institutions and groups of people possessing less symbolic power.

→ [Centre for Possible Studies](#) <http://centreforpossiblestudies.wordpress.com> [22.3.2012]

→ [Gentrification](#) see Glossary

→ [Soho effect](#) see Glossary

→ [Collaboration](#) see Text 4.4



## **CHANGING PERSPECTIVES** Hans Ulrich Glarner: When Girls Dance Paintings

I feel that cultural mediation is of the highest quality when it allows me to go forward: Towards something new and towards myself. Ideally, that should apply to everyone involved, to me as a member of the public, to me as the mediator, to me as the client. Only practices anchored in a cultural policy strategy can achieve this full effect. It is not only the people being targeted, who want to be pleased, not only the institutions, which seek higher visitor rates, not just the policies, which need to win the backing of the majority. One has to see cultural mediation which is anchored in a strategy of cultural policy as a reciprocal system which puts forth stimuli for improving state support for culture and the conservation of culture. Its purpose is to enable as many people as possible to engage with cultural issues, participate in cultural processes and enjoy access to works of art. This effect can be sustainable only when quality is consistently high. Success in cultural mediation is by no means inversely proportional to quality. Anyone making that suggestion is wilfully holding fast to an elite understanding of art aimed at drawing distinctions rather than encouraging cohesion.

At one event in the art gallery Aargauer Kunsthaus, a 9-year old participant expressed her experience non-verbally. It was towards the end of the event called the "Kunstpirsch" (art stalking); the children were asked to talk about one picture that they particularly liked. The schoolgirl, her name was Albana, told the mediator in broken German that though unable to talk about the picture, she could dance it. Standing in front of the picture, the other children forming a half circle around her, Albana expressed her impressions of it through movement. Her classmates rewarded the surprising performance with spontaneous applause.

A girl, one with no understanding of art in the traditional sense of that term, and who, moreover, was barely able to speak our language, embraced the message of the work of art and shared her response to it with other children. This episode perfectly illustrates the effect of cultural mediation. The art had the power to blast through the habitual conventions of observation and communication, the participant in the mediation programme was willing to take a risk and the arts mediator provided the environment that made this interaction possible. The group identity of the participants was reinforced and at the same time, their horizons were expanded as individuals. That is quality.

Hans Ulrich Glarner is *the Cultural Attaché of the Swiss canton of Aargau*.





## **CHANGING PERSPECTIVES** Felicity Lunn: Arts Education as Intensified Engagement With Art

From the perspective of an art institution, education has a range of impacts on the organization-audience-educators triangle.

Art mediation intensifies engagement with art by uncovering hidden connections. This kind of engagement, which requires more time and commitment than an (anonymous) visit to an exhibition, brings various different perceptions, influenced by cultural background, age, gender and education to the foreground. Programmes that present the opportunity to react to an exhibition to a range of target groups who give feedback to the host organization about how its exhibitions are perceived is an example of such engagement. Cultural mediation allows organizations to perceive other attitudes, reactions and world views. This allows them to learn more about their audiences, but also about the effects brought about by the art they show and how they show it. This knowledge can make an organization think more carefully about the needs of its visitors and see them more as individuals and less as an anonymous mass.

Art mediation is the greatest form of marketing. Compared to conventional forms of communications and publicity, which fail to overcome the initial inhibitions of many people, art mediation encourages participants in a direct and concrete manner to continue visiting the organization and to bring other people with them. The concept of the mediator as host, implying that children and young people invite and can guide their relatives and friends, expands the circle of visitors. This demonstrates that the personal approach to art is more important than “understanding” it.

Considering exhibitions as spaces for genuine communication, art education has the function of a conductor who initiates and encourages the dialogue between an exhibition and the public. Far more than providing purely conventional knowledge or consolidating a traditional understanding of art, art mediation offers new ideas about ways to perceive art, to see it as part of one’s own life. When viewers are genuinely involved, treated as partners, stakeholders or collaborators, art education functions as an engagement with art which accommodates a wide variety of views and interpretations.



Active participation in art mediation fosters a wealth of abilities that are important in the lives of both children and adults in our time: seeing and reacting to visual images, analyzing and communicating content, presenting one's own opinion, listening and debating and respecting the views of others.

*Felicity Lunn served as a curator at London's Whitechapel Art Gallery from 1990 to 1998, from 2005 to 2008, as the director of art association Kunstverein Freiburg (Freiburg im Breisgau) and, from 2009 to 2011 as Regional Curator of the UBS Art Collection. She has been the Director of the art centre Kunsthaus CentrePasquArt in Biel since January of 2012.*



## CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Irena Müller-Brozovic: Ask your Mediator about Risks and Side Effects

Cultural mediation in a multiple-month → *participative project* is not a one-dose miracle pill; it is a process which changes everyone involved.

Host organizations and policy-makers often call for cultural mediation as though it were a measure which had immediate (hopefully long-term) effects and expect to receive confirmation of its efficacy in the form of a list of people it has reached: number of “converts” per event, per Swiss franc. The more people involved, the better. This attitude equates cultural mediation with audience development.

The mediator’s focus is on class, not on mass. Qualities like this cannot be quantified. Nonetheless, mediators, artists, the directors of institutions and cultural policy-makers need good arguments to justify and fund cultural mediation. Because good cultural mediation comes at a price.

In traditional art formats, one tends to find a clear division between artist and audiences. Although performing artists do sense the reaction of their audiences, they can hardly be said to come into intense contact with those perceiving their works. In our long-term, participative Education Projects, by contrast, artists are thoroughly scrutinized as they act. They produce stimuli for creative action, take up the ideas of participants and undergo crises with them, and their exchanges with non-artists let them experience a new aspect in their artistic work, a social-political aspect. In participative projects, this open process is at least as important as the product. Those who are involved feel its effects almost physically and see the mediation work as challenging and meaningful. There is a risk entailed in the fact that an open process is one that can neither be planned nor predicted, and can, in fact, end in failure. Side effects can appear: a change in the artist or institution from the inside out may be detected. At the express request of the artists, the next generation of Education Projects

are being designed to ensure that collaboration between lay-people and professionals is even more intensive. Mediation plays a role in the planning for each season, and an idea for an education project can form the basis for one of the institution’s productions – a paradigm shift! This requires a commitment to mediation at the highest institutional level, and that a cultural mediation project be appreciated both by the public and by decision-makers.

→ *participative projects*  
<http://www.educationprojekte.ch>  
[25.1.2013]



The aim of the “Education Projects” is not to convey knowledge but rather to have lay people and professionals work together to carry out a collective artistic project. Active engagement with art fosters personal development and – particularly in the case of dance projects – a feeling of self worth. After an intensive rehearsal process, the participants move around in the cloakrooms, cafeteria, backstage spaces and on the stages of theatres and concert halls as a matter of course – a conquest of interior and exterior worlds.

*Irena Müller-Brozovic studied piano and music education and music/concert pedagogy in Basel and Detmold. She directs the “Education Projekte Region Basel” for the Department of Culture of the City of Basel. She was awarded the “Junge-Ohren” [Young Ears] prize in 2007. Her clients include Sinfonieorchester Basel and Theater Basel and she teaches music education at the Bern University of the Arts.*



## **CHANGING PERSPECTIVES** Federal Office of Culture, Culture and Society Section: Why does the Swiss Confederation Support Cultural Mediation?

This text also serves as a Changing Perspectives text for section 6. Cultural Mediation:  
Why (Not)?

There are many good reasons to fund cultural mediation from the public coffers. Arguments for doing so can be framed along economic, fiscal, pedagogic, didactic, artistic and social lines, depending on one's point of view.

For the Swiss Confederation, societal dimensions take centre stage. The legislature pointed the way forward by declaring in the Swiss Culture Promotion Act that one of the objectives of the Confederation's cultural promotion is to allow and facilitate access to culture (art. 3(d) KFG: Kulturförderungsgesetz). Projects with that objective receive preferential status for Confederation support (art. 8(a) KFG). The official message [Botschaft] accompanying the legislation directly links the promotion of access with cultural mediation (explanatory commentary on art. 8 KFG).

The emphasis on the aspects of participation and inclusion is explained by the level of importance that the Federal Council attaches to culture: "...culture is an essential factor of political and social life, an effective instrument of integration and social cohesion. Therefore, active cultural policy is not restricted to promoting artistic creation or safeguarding cultural heritage. It is also aimed at encouraging as far as possible participation of all groups of the population in cultural life. [...] The arts sharpen our perception and enlarge our consciousness. There is no better school than art to teach us to see, to enhance our awareness, our capacity to differentiate. Careful and critical listening, watching and thinking teaches people to be alert, to express themselves and to discern. Once a sensorial perception makes the transition to become emotional or intellectual realization, it takes on significance for a broader society. The intrinsic value of culture lies in its ability to allow people to understand themselves and their surroundings and to make themselves understood" (Message on the Promotion of Culture [Botschaft zur Förderung der Kultur] 2012 – 2015).

Participation of a broad and diverse audience has relevance for the legitimacy of cultural promotion: in past decades cultural offerings available in Switzerland (and in other countries as well) have expanded dramatically while the level of audience interest has not kept pace. Thus if this expansion



is to be sustainable, cultural promotion cannot be restricted to subsidizing providers of cultural offerings (expansion and consolidation of offerings). It must also encompass measures to develop future users of arts and culture.

The primary tools used by the Confederation to improve access to culture in the 2012 – 2015 period are language promotion, promotion of musical education, promotion of literacy (measures of the Federal Office of Culture) and the support of arts mediation projects (measures of Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council).

*The Culture and Society Section addresses issues of cultural mediation and participation in culture, specifically in the areas of promotion of language skills, literacy/reading, musical education and lay and folk culture.*



## FOR READING AT LEISURE Working in a Field of Tensions 5: Between Mediation, Art, Deconstruction and Transformation

*"It's not a question of being against the institution: We are the institution. It's a question of what kind of institution we are, what kind of values we institutionalise, what forms of practice we reward, and what kinds of rewards we aspire to. Because the institution of art is internalised, embodied, and performed by individuals, these are the questions that institutional critique demands we ask, above all, of ourselves."* (Fraser 2005)

Cultural mediation as → deconstruction (Sturm 2001) combined with participative and artistic approaches, along with the aspiration to use mediation to analyze the power structures in cultural institutions, and in some cases cause them to change, though comparatively rare, is not a new phenomenon. Among its proponents at the end of the 1990s was the group → Kunstcoop@ at the Germany's Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst Berlin (NGBK 2001) and the group "Stördienst" at Vienna's Museum of Modern Art. The collective → microsillons is a contemporary example in Switzerland, as are → trafo.K, in Austria the duo → Transductores in Spain. One characteristic these organizations share is the context-specific development of arts mediation in the intersection of pedagogical, political and artistic practices, in exchange and in friction with institutions and a wide variety of interest groups. Art movements which see their work as set in the same field of tensions are an important reference for their practices. For instance, the English → Artist Placement Group of the 1960s, which in its turn drew from the Russian avant-garde of the early 20th century, in which artists forged partnerships with factory and agricultural workers (Rollig 2002). By the 1990s at the latest, the participative paradigm of new genre public art had taken shape (Jacob 1995; Lacy 1994, Babias 1995 is an example of how the subject was discussed in the German-speaking region). In this international field of practice it is quite difficult to separate out art, pedagogic and social-political activities, as the boundaries among them are systematically traversed. The movement in art mediation described briefly here grew up in the 1990s, to no small extent in opposition to a museum and art pedagogy whose advocates based their arguments chiefly on developmental psychology and creativity theories. One aspect of that pedagogy which attracted heavy criticism was the idea that attempts only to create enthusiasm and touch emotions failed both the art and the participants because it levelled the potential for learning in their productive resistances. Another point of criticism aimed at the → mechanisms of exclusion associated with access aiming only at individual development.

→ deconstruction see Glossary and Text 5.3

→ Kunstcoop@ <http://www.kunstcoop.de> [18.9.2012]

→ microsillons <http://www.microsillons.org> [18.9.2012]

→ trafo.K <http://www.trafo-k.at> [18.9.2012]

→ Transductores <http://transductores.net> [26.9.2012]

→ Artist Placement Group <http://www2.tate.org.uk/artistplacementgroup/> [26.9.2012]

→ mechanisms of exclusion see Text 4.RL



Since the 1990s, the art world and German-language scholarship on art pedagogy itself have been sources of stimuli emphasizing the autonomy and art-specific characteristics of mediation and highlighting the potential of contemporary art production for institutional education. The approach of “aesthetic education of difference”, for example, associates cultural mediation with the artistic tradition of non-instrumental thinking and views art pedagogy as one possible form of creative practice. Here, arts mediation becomes a point of resistance to the tendency to see it as a service that can be capitalized – to the seamless transmission of specialized knowledge and the optimization of social behaviours of the people involved.

→ [ethnicization codes](#) see Glossary

A third field which is a source of stimuli for art mediation with a deconstructive function is critical museology and the New Art History. These approaches have been questioning the power structures at play in the canon of knowledge as represented by museums and the way that canon is disseminated and taught. These approaches see texts to be read and deconstructed in the order in which objects are presented, the layout of spaces and rules governing behaviour in museums, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's analyses of the production of social exclusion, Michel Foucault's works on power, knowledge and discipline (Bennett 1995; Duncan 1996) and semiotics (Barthes 2003).<sup>1</sup> It attempts to analyze their economies, their gender codes, → [ethnicization codes](#) and the historical and social conditions in which they were formed, while bearing in mind that one can never have a fixed set of critical instruments, that every reading produces new texts. There was a conference held at the Tate Britain in 1992 titled “Gallery Education and The New Art History” (Vincentelli, Grigg 1992) which posed the question “How can gallery educators involve themselves in analysing or deconstructing their own gallery's practice?” In her talk, art historian Frances Borzello indicated that one special challenge and capacity associated with arts education lay in its inability to avoid the materiality of the works and the spaces of museum representation, which the New Art History has subjected to critical analysis while taking refuge in academic language. She said that in its interactions with audiences and subject material, arts education is forced to develop languages which democratize the discourse of New Art History, which also generates exclusion (Borzello 1992, p. 10). Thus Borzello stood up in front of an audience of museum education specialists and deconstructed their own scientific contexts, arguing implicitly against the traditionally devalued status (still detectable today) of cultural mediation work. She spoke of the increased complexity associated with the requirement to change linguistic registers, thus attacking the cliché that arts education inevitably leads to a simplification of content. This way of reading already taps into the aspiration set out in the New Art History (Borzello, Rees 1986) and New Museology (Vergo 1989; Hauenschild 1988) in the 1980s, that of producing counter-narratives through the active





inclusion of groups of largely excluded from museums so far (Giroux et al. 1994) and turning the museum into a place for interaction and debate.

In the 21st century, the intersection of the fields of cultural mediation, art, art studies and museology both in practice and in the discourse led to an → educational turn (→ Rogoff 2008; O'Neill, Wilson 2010) in the exhibition world – i.e. increasing interest in pedagogical formats and issues on the part of those producing exhibitions and artists. That interest was also encouraged by criticism of the market-oriented restructuring of European school systems, in particular in connection with the EU's adoption in 2000 of the → Lisbon Strategy. For that reason, projects and texts associated with the educational turn are often connected to a critique of the application of economic categories to knowledge and in particular to artistic education and training. They are also frequently associated with a search for alternative spaces and practices of education. Accordingly, greater attention was directed to approaches based on critical pedagogy, although people drew on a very broad spectrum of positions in this context, ranging from that of Paulo Freire (Freire 1973) to that of bell hooks (hooks 2003) to Jacques Rancière (Rancière 2007). At the practical level, the educational turn is articulated in, for instance, pedagogic formats for exhibition programmes which define the public as a collaborating element (see e. g. the project → Wide Open School of London's Hayward Gallery in the summer of 2012<sup>2</sup>), in the re-invention of historical forms such as Brecht and Weill's Singspiel (cf. e.g. the productions of the St. Petersburg collective → Chto delat? [What is to be done?]), in the linkages in the production of artistic and didactic materials (c.f. the download of available videos and comics from the collective → Pinky Show, some of whose users are teachers), in self-organized spaces for artist education (e.g. the → parallel school of art; the → Free/slow University of Warsaw) or in artistic projects exploring the conditions of learning (e. g. the work of → Hidden Curriculum of the artist Annette Krauss, in collaboration with students from schools in the Netherlands (Krauss, undated)).

There are many intersections between the contents, intentions and practices of → deconstructive or → transformative arts mediation, on the one side, and the artistic and curatorial inquiries associated with the educational turn on the other. However so far the work done in cultural mediation and the knowledge of its practitioners have seldom been acknowledged by artists or exhibition organizers (→ Sternfeld 2010; Mörsch 2011; schnittpunkt 2012). This ignorance reflects a traditional hierarchy between the fields of art and education. One must hope that collaboration will one day become possible in more places because there are fields of tension which need to be addressed collectively, and with them potentially productive opportunities to interlink the curatorial, artistic and educational production of knowledge. One such opportunity has to do with the → tension which exists between the production of exclusion and the paternalism

→ educational turn see Glossary

→ Rogoff 2008 <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/18> [21.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0501.pdf

→ EU Lisbon Strategy [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm) [14.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0503.pdf

→ Wide Open School <http://wideopenschool.com/> [14.5.2012]

→ Chto delat? <http://www.chtodelat.org> [14.5.2012]

→ Pinky Show <http://www.pinkyshow.org> [25.9.2012]

→ parallel school of art <http://www.parallel-school.com> [19.10.2012]

→ free/slow University of Warsaw <http://www.wuw-warsaw.pl> [7.12.2014]

→ Hidden Curriculum <http://www.post-editions.com/?page=hiddencurriculum> [25.9.2012]

→ deconstructive arts mediation see Text 5.3

→ transformative arts mediation see Text 5.5

→ Sternfeld 2010 <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/unglamorous-tasks-what-can-education-learn-from-its-political-traditions> [14.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0502.pdf

→ Tension see Text 2. RL



of targeted invitation and inclusion policies. The formation of an alliance to analyze the subject collectively and develop options for moving forward which draw on the full range of perspectives might be very productive in that regard. The same applies to another field of tension, that related to the wish for equality within partnerships. For instance, when a cultural institution enters into collaboration with a small educational centre, it does so from a position of power. The power imbalance not be due to superiority of material resources, on the contrary, it is primarily a matter of → cultural and social capital. This means that the creation of an equal footing between partners requires active effort on the part of the institution in cooperation with its partners. Practitioners from all of the relevant professional fields, curating, programme design, the production of participation-oriented art participation and education and arts mediation can recall experiences in which the status of persons actively contributing to project design was downgraded to that of “project materials”. Or in which a situation in which a balance has been struck between everyone’s interests deteriorates into one in which the exploitation of workers was justified by pointing to symbolic compensation. Examining issues from multiple perspectives and developing options collectively could contribute to encouraging self-reflective practices and taking more intentional and deliberate decisions.

A third field of tension is associated with thinking about acting within power structures. This relates to the question about the aesthetic of projects at the intersection of art and education. While cultural institutions cultivate a highly receptive sensorium with respect to what is “good form” or, for some institutions, “cool”, such standards may not always be in harmony with the ways participants and cooperation partners wish to represent themselves. There are a variety of requirements, quality standards and interests in respect of modes of presentation at work here. On the part of the institution, the response to this tension has often been one of either assimilation or exclusion: a project must adapt itself to the design parameters of the recognized authorities in the relevant artistic field, if not, it will not gain visibility or might not even take place. In contrast, self-reflective cultural mediation attempts to take the aesthetic articulations of all participants seriously. However, this should not take place at the expense of the creation, in an informed and elaborated form, of a visibility, which could, in many cases, be beneficial for the project and those involved in it. Again, this balancing act and the negotiation processes associated with it would involve an exchange among cultural mediation, curatorial and artistic practices which might lead to interesting results. Below, we describe an example of cultural mediation in the framework of a partnership between a grassroots group and a large exhibiting institution in order to suggest some approaches for dealing with the fields of tensions at issue.

The research and development project “Kunstvermittlung in Transformation” was carried out in Switzerland in 2009 and 2010 (Settele et al.

→ cultural and social capital  
see Glossary entry on capital,  
types of



2012). Four art universities and six museums took part in the project, the aim of which was to research ways in which museum mediation can be improved. The Institute for Art Education (IAE) of Zurich University of the Arts worked with Museum für Gestaltung Zürich [Zurich Museum of Design] in the project to develop multiple pilot projects. One of these was a co-operative partnership between Nora Landkammer, researcher at the IAE, and the association “Bildung für Alle” [Education for All] and its project, the → [Autonome Schule](#).<sup>3</sup> The Autonome Schule [Autonomous School] provides German language instruction and other activities for Zurich residents who are barred from formal education systems. Nora Landkammer contacted the organization with the plan of developing a cultural mediation project for the → [Global Design](#) exhibition at the Museum für Gestaltung, which explored the impacts of globalization on design.

The exhibition was intended as an opportunity for taking a close look at globalization and visibility, which everyone involved – including the museum – would learn from. Alone the fact that a research institution attached to a large university of the arts made contact with a small grassroots organization of immigrants and non-immigrants placed this project in the paradoxical situation mentioned above, of wanting to create an equal playing field while starting from a position of power. In this particular case, it was possible to influence (though not eliminate) the paradox, thanks to the fact that both the group and the arts mediator were highly conscious of the fact that they were acting in a situation where power was distributed unequally. Right from the start, the group actively sought to clarify how the various roles were to be distributed within the project and who would benefit from the partnership in what way. The group was unwilling to allow itself to be instrumentalized for research purposes or as a means for producing → [symbolic added-value](#) for the museum. In all phases of the partnership, the people involved took great care to ensure that everyone’s motivations were openly articulated, regularly scrutinized and respected, to ensure the preservation of a “minimal equilibrium”, without pretending that the inequality in resource distribution did not exist. Thus, for instance, the partners decided collectively that the arts mediator and one member of the group would lead the project as a team. In this context it was important that the mediator did not define in advance specific processes or subject-matters for the project. Instead, these were actually developed collectively within the group. Accordingly, the project was given the very open name “Atelier” [studio] – the term for a workshop in which the unexpected and unplanned could occur in many different forms of activities. The group was made up of 15 interested persons who were attending German classes at the Autonome Schule. Their first step was to visit the exhibition together, multiple times. After this they met with the chief curator. The first objection was voiced during the group’s visits to the exhibition: the “we” form used in the

→ [Autonome Schule](#) <http://www.schuel.ch> [25.9.2012] see Text 4.4

→ [Global Design](#) <http://www.museum-gestaltung.ch/de/ausstellungen/rueckblick/2010/global-design> [26.9.2012]

→ [symbolic added-value](#) see Glossary



exhibition texts and the catalogue – which stressed that the use of credit cards as a form of payment is normal today – was aimed only at relatively affluent members of society and above all, those with legal residency status. Similarly, the objects shown in the exhibition struck the group right away as being beyond their reach, either financially or because of their immigration status. The invitation to a group to attend an exhibition and work with subject-matter neither of which were created for them or with them in mind, generated the → field of tension between paternalism and the institution's desire to be more open. In response to this tension, the group decided to refrain from defining possible interests in advance, as a target group approach might have dictated. Instead, a space for discussion was opened up to allow the group to ascertain what their positions and interests vis-à-vis the museum and the exhibition might be.

→ field of tension see Text 2. RL

→ participation see Text 4.3

→ collaboration see Text 4.4

As a result, the project should be seen less as a form of → participation than as → collaboration with the institution – one appropriately open-ended with respect to results. Following the exhibition visits, the group worked with visual media in various workshops and developed ways to approach urban space through the camera from the angle of globalization and taking up the themes along which the exhibition was organized: mobility, communication, economy and control. In the course of these exploratory efforts, the group decided to work on the themes from the perspective of people who are living in Zurich illegally and hope to remain there. During the activities in urban spaces it was occasionally necessary for the institution to actively work on the creation of an equal playing field, or to redistribute resources. The cameras for the participants were lent to Atelier by the IAE. A letter accompanied the devices, so that none of the participants who did not have residency permits would be suspected of stealing the cameras if stopped by the police. After a few meetings, the team leading the project suggested that the group collectively produce a publication that would help people in similar situations to get by: a “Bleibeführer” [Guide to Staying], the title an ironic twist on the ubiquitous “Reiseführer” [travel guides] for tourists. The collective creation of that publication filled the next few months. In this phase, the group had the opportunity to work in the third field of tension: the one resulting from differences in aesthetics. The question of the Bleibeführer's aesthetic, its form and its appearance, was not an easy one to resolve. The members of the group came from different socio-economic backgrounds and different geo-political regions and had varying ways of approaching design. The arts mediator intervened to a greater degree at this point than she had in the rest of the process because she felt responsible in more than one way for the project's product: to the museum, to the research institute and, to no small extent, to her own design standards and the cultural mediation project itself. She applied her own design expertise to the process. Though all of the decisions concerning the selection of texts and images were



discussed and made by the group as a whole, in the end the → *Bleibeführer* reflected homogenous, modern standards – and conventions – in its graphic design. This rendered it acceptable to the museum as a product and won it a place next to the other items for sale in the museum shop. At the same time, it was under great demand in Zurich by organizations working on immigration issues. Thus the “professional look” of the publication had multiple tactical benefits and resulted in the release of a second print run for it (Landkammer, Polania 2012).

In this project, the → *cultural mediation's functions* with respect to the museum were complex. They included a reproductive dimension, since new museum-goers were created, at least temporarily. This aspect received less emphasis than did the project's deconstructive function. The latter function was associated with the critical scrutiny of the implicit audience targeting which the museum, and the exhibition visited, “Global Design”, effected – scrutiny which took place not only at the level of discourse but also through the presence of persons who are barred access to most societal resources due to → *routine and structural racism*. Another factor highlighting the deconstructive function is the fact that the creation of *Bleibeführer* constituted the creation of a new contribution which took its place in an array of other pre-existing contributions put forth as interpretations of the theme “Global Design”, and in doing so shifted the meaning of that term. The project also encompassed a transformative dimension: in its formation of a group whose activities extended beyond the formats used in museum mediation in the past, in the opening of cultural mediation as a space for social-political action and through the demand for the “*Bleibeführer*” from another field of social activity. The museum transformed itself within this framework into an “institution critique”, of the kind called for in the quotation which introduces this text from Andrea Fraser, who believes that thirty years of institutional critique should have some effect. In the medium term, the project “Kunstvermittlung in Transformation”, within which the “Atelier” project was set, contributed to a visible change at the museum: with the 2012 creation of the post of “curator of mediation”. That is – and this is part of our thesis – also a symptom of the educational turn described above: the elevation of the status of mediation in many cultural institutions. This elevated status is key to further advances in this field of work. If the standards articulated in the discourse surrounding the educational turn are to be met, it is important that pedagogical expertise consistently be brought into play in cultural mediation projects, to encourage pedagogical reflexive practice. This is not an expertise which the artists involved in cultural mediation or programme designers necessarily have. It remains to be seen whether the educational turn will turn out to be a powerful one, in the sense of a paradigm shift, and result in cultural institutions in which artistic, curatorial and pedagogic knowledge operate in combination and on a basis of equality.

→ *Bleibeführer* <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B8GZVOIC-v9OPsk5sSkJ1MVZ1R2c/edit?pli=1> [22.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0504.pdf

→ *Functions of cultural mediation* see texts für Eilige in 5. What does cultural mediation do?

→ *routine and structural racism* see Glossary



- 1 “[...] [Culler citing Derrida’s Positions] ‘In a traditional philosophical opposition we have not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other ... occupies the commanding position...’. [...] The practitioner of deconstruction works within the terms of the system but in order to breach it” (Culler 1982, p. 95).
- 2 The text announcing the project on Southbank Centre’s website reads “This summer, [...], the Hayward Gallery transforms into Wide Open School. An experiment in public learning, Wide Open School offers a programme devised and fuelled by the imaginations of more than 80 artists from over 40 different countries. Intended as a meeting place for people who love learning but don’t necessarily like being taught, Wide Open School presents the opportunity for people of all ages and walks of life to explore different ways of learning about a wide variety of subjects, alongside leading artists”.
- 3 I wish to thank my colleague Nora Landkammer here for making her written notes available to me; they provided the basis for my brief description, which permitted only a encapsulated version of the project’s complexity.

## Literature and Links

This text is based in parts on the following previously published papers:

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- Artist Placement Group: <http://www2.tate.org.uk/artistplacementgroup> [26.9.2012]
- Autonome Schule: <http://www.schuel.ch> [25.9.2012]
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- Duo Transductores: <http://transductores.net> [26.9.2012]
- European Union, Lisbon Strategie: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/de/ec/00100-r1.d0.htm](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/de/ec/00100-r1.d0.htm) [26.9.2012], <http://www.snesup.fr/Presse-et-documentation?aid=4440&ptid=5&cid=3765> [14.10.2012], see Resource Pool MFV0503.pdf
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- Hayward Gallery, London, Wide Open School: <http://wideopenschool.com/> [14.5.2012]
- Hidden Curriculum: <http://www.post-editions.com/?page=hiddencurriculum> [25.9.2012]
- Chto delat? collective: Petersburg: <http://www.chtodelat.org> [14.5.2012]
- microsillons collective: <http://www.microsillons.org> [18.9.2012]
- Pinky Show collective: <http://www.pinkyshow.org> [25.9.2012]
- Museum für Gestaltung, Zurich, Global Design exhibition: <http://www.museum-gestaltung.ch/de/ausstellungen/rueckblick/2010/global-design> [26.9.2012]
- parallel school of art: <http://www.parallel-school.com> [19.10.2012]