



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]