



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](http://centreforpossiblestudies.wordpress.com), 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 groundbreaking 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) <http://centreforpossiblestudies.wordpress.com> [22.3.2012]

→ [Gentrification](#) see Glossary

→ [Soho effect](#) see Glossary

→ [Collaboration](#) see Text 4.4