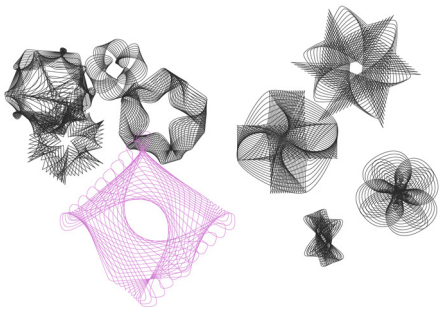

6.0 Intro

Increasingly, cultural and education policymakers and funding bodies are turning their attention to all aspects of cultural mediation. One instigator of this trend was the cultural policy reform instituted by the English Labour Party in 1998. The new policy (re)discovered the social and economic significance of connections between art and education and resulted in an increase of support for such linkages and calls for cultural institutions to do likewise. In the intervening years, cultural mediation has also taken on a greater role in funding decisions in continental Europe, and thus in Switzerland. This shift has had repercussions for cultural mediation as a practice: the field has grown increasingly professionalized overall and differentiation within it – on the basis of methods, objectives and rationales – is increasing. Once the objective was to launch mediation activities and mobilize the requisite funds and enthusiasm for them: this is no longer whole story. Advocates for cultural mediation have put forth a variety of different rationales for the existence of cultural mediation, and it has now become imperative to take a stance and justify one's own approach. To an increasing degree, this necessity applies equally to practitioners of cultural mediation and to decision-makers in the areas of funding policy and the leadership of institutions.

This chapter is an initial survey intended to give readers a sense of the current situation. It sketches out the strategies of legitimization frequently encountered. We stress the word strategies here, because no legitimization can ever be neutral or objective. Each argument advocating cultural mediation is pursuing other aims as well – for instance, that of asserting certain ideas about the social function of art, about the intentions of cultural mediation or about what makes a functioning society and what the individual's contribution to it might be. To shed light on areas of contention among the different rationales, points of criticism that can be levelled against each strategy of legitimization are set out at the end of each subsection.

Following the texts on the individual strategies of legitimization is one devoted to the objections to cultural mediation. In the context of the existing hierarchies, there is indeed opposition to the policy focus on cultural mediation and the redistribution of resources it entails.

The "For Reading at Leisure" text in this chapter delves into the consequences that emerge for cultural mediation when one takes these objections and criticisms seriously.