

FOR READING AT LEISURE Working in a Field of Tensions 8: Quality Evaluation in Cultural Mediation – Between Self-Reflection, Empowerment and Conformity

“Who has the right to ask whom what questions; who has the right to answer; who has the right to see what; who has the right to say what; who has the right to speak for whom?” (Smith 2011)

At the end of the text about → *criticism of quality management* in cultural mediation, we suggested that there is inevitably a normative dimension to the criteria used to assess quality. We will now turn to two examples which illustrate this. In her international study on quality in music and concert education, Constanze Wimmer presents process quality as one of three → *quality dimensions* (→ *Wimmer 2010*). She writes that process quality “determines the artistic and educational concept and enables audience participation” (Wimmer 2010, p. 12). Later she defines a high degree of participation (e.g. in the sense of active musical participation of young people or of active collaboration with teachers during the planning phase of the mediation project) as an indicator of high quality in music mediation. Whether one accepts this as an indicator or not – one cannot help but see that it is not a natural and universal given, but rather a function of the objectives that Wimmer associates with music mediation. To justify this position the study provides statements about the positive effects of “cultural participation” of children and young adults on their attitude to “serious” music and about the United Kingdom’s pioneering role in cultural mediation, which has provided the models that many continental European projects look to. Thus this rationale clearly reveals that the quality criteria are based on an implicit, unquestioned concept of cultural mediation with a → *reproductive function*: the primary aim is to cultivate future generations of audiences through music mediation. (The case studies discussed in the publication also refer to the idea of culture as a tool to induce → *change in social conditions*, in addition to cultural participation, as a legitimization for cultural mediation.)

The German Museums Association and the Bundesverband Museums-pädagogik [Federal Association for Museum Education], in collaboration with the [Austrian music and exhibition mediators’ association] Österreichischer Verband der Kulturvermittler_innen im Museums- und Ausstellungswesen and mediamus, the Swiss association for mediation professionals in museums, published a German-language brochure titled → *Quality Criteria for Museums: Mediation Work*. In addition to guidance on the quality question, it provides an outline of the occupational field of cultural mediation. First, it defines the duties and responsibilities of museum mediation within the

→ *Critiques of quality management* see Text 8.2

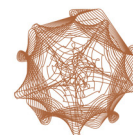
→ *Quality dimensions* see Text 8.1

→ *Wimmer 2010* <http://www.kunstdermittlung.at> [16.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0801.pdf

→ *reproductive function* see Texts 5.1 and 5.2

→ *change of social conditions* see Text 6.7

→ *Quality Criteria for Museums: Mediation Work* http://www.museumsbund.de/fileadmin/geschaefts/dokumente/Leitfaeden_und_anderes/Qualitaetskriterien_Museen_2008.pdf [16.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0802.pdf



institution framework. It then makes certain statements about the contents, → target groups and methods of cultural mediation, as well as discussion about the qualifications of staff and the underlying conditions necessary for high quality museum mediation. A definition of quality is provided for each thematic field. These definitions are given in fairly general terms and oscillate between a description of the activity and the formulation of objectives and quality standards.

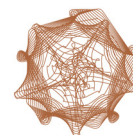
For instance, the topic “methods” reads as follows: “High quality mediation work draws on a wide variety of methods to facilitate the encounter with originals and exhibition contents and with the institution of the museum in general. By doing so, it activates and promotes the cognitive and perceptive capacities of the visitors and guides them in a variety of ways to independent learning with all the senses.” The text under the heading “Target Groups” says: “mediators work for everyone and all of the museum’s visitors. The needs of those visitors vary. The museum mediation staff develop projects for all groups of the museum’s visitors and for potential new visitors, to permit the maximum possible participation in cultural mediation in the museum”. Further on in that section, the importance of trying to achieve → accessibility is stressed as an indicator of quality.

Although the brochure’s preface stresses that it is intended to stimulate further discussion about high quality cultural mediation work, the text does not contain a transparent description of the position of its authors. It offers no justification for why the entire occupational field should be guided by the affirmative and reproductive functions of cultural mediation. The result of those omissions is that the brochure presents these functions as standard – as obvious and unconditionally appropriate. As we have argued in Text 6.RL and elsewhere in this publication, cultural mediation can have very different aims than, for instance, that of facilitating the encounter with originals and the institution for as many people as possible. Accordingly, other sets of → criteria for evaluating cultural mediation are possible. Had the brochure identified the objectives being aspired to in a transparent manner and, above all, placed them in context, this would have been an indicator of the desire to make a contribution to a debate. Instead, the text refers to the development process jointly structured by the associations and the definition of the museum from ICOM (International Council of Museums) as serving as the basis for the brochure’s criteria. This at least invites the suspicion that the intent was to put forth something more along the lines of a binding definition and that this is a case of the affirmation of the power of definition. To no small degree, the brochure can also be interpreted as a contribution, in the spirit of a professional creed, in the struggle for official recognition of a traditionally marginalized field of practice as a profession to be taken seriously.

→ target groups see Texts in 2. Who is Cultural Mediation For?

→ accessibility see Glossary

→ criteria for the evaluation of cultural mediation see Texts in 8. Good Cultural Mediation?



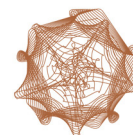
From the viewpoint of hegemony-critical cultural mediation, the text discussed above is problematic due to the → naturalization of its arguments. Critical cultural mediation aspires to approach the normative dimension of criteria and objectives – including its own – with reflexivity at all times, and to examine them with an eye to their inherent power structures. This approach asks itself how the quality requirements imposed from outside (and also those emerging from within the field) can be rendered compatible in a constructive fashion with its → own criteria for critical practice, how the criteria set by an external entity and the framework conditions can be influenced to serve its purposes, and, if that proves impossible, at least how to offer some resistance to them. It also analyzes the type of social relationships which are created by the relatively new imperative of quality assessment and their impacts on the relationships and logics of action within the field of work. Quality assessment implies social relationships which are characterized to a substantial extent by the delivery of results, of verification and evaluation and the submission of evidence. Several questions arise in that context: is a verifying, demonstrating and results-oriented relationship what we want in our dealings with one another, for the structure of relationships and actions in the cultural mediation field? We ask again: “Who has the right [in this structure, CM] to ask whom what questions; who has the right to answer; who has the right to see what; who has the right to say what; who has the right to speak for whom”.

A declaration containing an example of thinking about quality in cultural mediation from this perspective has emerged from the field of theatre mediation. It was published in March of 2012, the month in which the second → Was geht? [What works/what's up?] symposium was held by the Arbeitskreis Theaterpädagogik der Berliner Bühnen [Working Group on Theatre Education of Berlin Stages] and the Institute of Theatre Education at Berlin University of the Arts. The declaration, which is about the knowledge and ability, and the objectives and needs of theatre mediation in theatres, was published in the wake of the symposium. Titled “Wollen Brauchen Können” [Want, Need, Can], it stresses that theatre mediators can “open a protected space for play, thought and experience” and “render oppositions and disturbances productive”, particularly “by changing perspective, adopt a productive distance”. According to the declaration, the aims are not only “culturally educating (acquiring) the theatre-goers of tomorrow, but also facilitating contact between the theatre goers of today and the artistic form of the theatre and with artists” as well as “an artistically-oriented theatre mediation. The aim, in addition to conveying contents and knowledge, is primarily to jointly generate and represent artistic knowledge”. The third section of the declaration details what is needed in the field of work in order for the aims formulated earlier to be realized. This includes ensuring “recognition of the profile and field of the

→ naturalization see Glossary

→ own criteria for critical practice see Text 6.FV

→ Was geht? <http://www.was-geht-berlin.de> [16.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0803.pdf



theatre mediator among artistic and theatrical directors”, obtaining “artistic autonomy and a specific budget for theatre mediation programmes” and establishing “an appreciation of our work with respect to its substantive, artistic and qualitative dimensions”. In connection with that final point, the declaration criticizes the approaches to evaluation currently gaining ground in the various sectors of cultural mediation: “Our work cannot be measured and evaluated in quantitative terms; it is not reflected in the number of events held. It is unacceptable to add up the workshops, audience discussions, theatre club rehearsals, project activities and the number of people who attended and present that number X to oneself and policymakers as successful cultural mediation.”

By tying these three aspects together – potentials, objectives and needs – the authors are seeking an approach to the subject of quality in theatre mediation which does not require to be assessable, demonstrable and verifiable by external bodies. This is an attempt to formulate principles which characterize cultural mediation and thereby determine the specific potential and the objectives and motives of cultural mediation in the theatre arts without reference to endorsement of outside authorities. This entails a commitment on the part of the profession to develop a qualitative and ethical framework for the field of cultural mediation on the basis of continuing discussion among specialists, without separating the two dimensions. A year before the declaration was published, on 31 March 2011, an international agreement on the conduct and ethics of theatre mediators was published (TR) by the associations → *BAG Spiel und Theater* [BAG Play and Theatre] and ÇDD (Çağdaş Drama Derneği) [Contemporary Drama Association] in Antalya. Taken together, the two documents can be seen as a reference for this development process, though both require further discussion and elaboration.

Just as cultural mediation models developed in the United Kingdom have been very influential, so, too, have the quality assessment methods developed there. Alternative approaches for evaluation are also being developed in that country. The impetus is coming for the most part from “community arts” or “socially engaged art”, i.e. partnerships between artists and various publics (most based on contracts from funding agencies or foundations) mainly for → *tackling societal problems collectively*. This is hardly surprising, as such projects tend to be subject to a particularly stringent burden of proof with respect to quality and effects and are caught up in highly varied webs of interests, in an environment where the power is not distributed equally. In 2012, the English artist Hannah Hull, working with many others, developed six → *critical toolkits*, available online, which help mediators analyse their work in artistic projects in the context of psychiatry, rehabilitation and the criminal justice system, in order to facilitate a reflective and → *self empowering* way of dealing with the differing interests. One toolkit called → *Criticality and Evaluation within a Culture of*

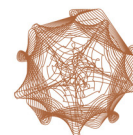
→ *BAG and ÇDD* <http://www.bag-online.de/aktuell/uevet-deutsch.pdf> [18.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFV0804.pdf (German), MFV0805.pdf (English)

→ *facing social problems collectively* see Text 1.3

→ *self-empowering* see Glossary

→ *toolkits* <http://artvsrehab.com/2012/08/14/apply> [17.10.2012]

→ *Criticality and Evaluation in a Culture of Optimism* <http://artvsrehab.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/criticality-and-evaluation-in-a-culture-of-optimism-art-vs-rehab-critical-tool-kit.pdf> [17.10.2012]; see Resource Pool MFV0806.pdf



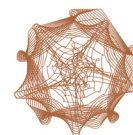
Optimism offers practical suggestions for self-evaluation as a critical practice by the people involved in projects. It includes exercises intended to depict the various interests which play into the creation of an evaluation, and the question of who would benefit or be harmed by the development of a critical description emphasizing the contradictions and complexities of the work and its conditions. Another exercise looks at the description and communication of productive mistakes and one to check whether the individuals involved approve of the concepts which the funding source has put forth for use in the evaluation, or whether there might be other concepts better suited to a self-description.

Another example of a hegemony-critical approach to evaluation processes is that of the practical research of curator, artist and researcher → *Sophie Hope*, who has consulted as an evaluator in cultural mediation and community arts since 2005. Her book *Participating in the Wrong Way?* (Hope 2011) documents her attempts → *to reclaim evaluation as a critical practice*. In her project "Critical Friends", she and a partner initiated and led from 2008 to 2010 a group of people living in London's North Greenwich district developing ways to evaluate community-arts projects in that district. The output of the work of "Critical Friends", which consisted mainly of interviews and observations of participants, was documented by the project group and published in the form of a local magazine. This rendered the work accessible to the population called on to participate in projects, as well as to the commissioners and funders. The work on the magazine also served as a tool for the group to systemize and assess the views and observations they had collected.

The conclusions elaborated on the basis of this documentation work opened up a view of the local structures and relationships and of the broader discourse and funding logics in which the projects are embedded. Though the conclusions underlined positive aspects of the projects, they also challenged, at a fundamental level, the practices of the commissioning organizations and the funding. In this sense they stand in striking contrast to the success stories which frequently result from evaluations in this field. Their critique touched on many subjects: for instance, the tension between the aim of working through a process-based and collaborative approach in the district and the requirements placed on artists to carry out a self-contained project within a relatively short period of time with no prospects of continuance; the terms and conditions of the work, which suggested that the organization was taking for granted that everyone involved would work for far more than the agreed time; the critique that the projects served to soothe conflicts rather than resolve them and use cultural activity as a substitute for political action; on through to the determination that most of the residents (including those actually involved in projects) remained uncertain as to the purpose and benefits of the projects. Against that backdrop, the evaluation put forth suggestions for improving the pro-

→ *Sophie Hope* <http://sophiehope.org.uk> [17.10.2012]

→ *to reclaim evaluation as a critical practice* <http://vca-mcm.unimelb.edu.au/events?id=445> [17.10.2012]



gramme. The group of “Critical Friends” continued to meet after the initial evaluation project was completed to question and rethink developments in the district.

Hope raises the danger that projects like “Critical Friends” risk serving as a fig-leaf if commissioning bodies fail to take action in response to their conclusions. At the time that “Participating in the Wrong Way” was being written, the commissioning organization had not yet reacted to the results of the “Critical Friends” evaluation. Thus it seems appropriate to add another question to the quotation from the American playwright Anna Deavere Smith which introduces this section: “*Who has the right to draw consequences and to take action?*”

Literature and Links

Literature:

- German Museum Council, Berlin, et al. (pub.): Qualitätskriterien für Museen: Bildungs- und Vermittlungsarbeit, Berlin: Deutscher Museumsbund, 2008; http://www.museumsbund.de/fileadmin/geschaefte/dokumente/Leitfaeden_und_anderes/Qualitaetskriterien_Museen_2008.pdf [16.10.2012], see Resource Pool MFV0802.pdf
- Hope, Sophie: Participating in the Wrong Way? Four Experiments by Sophie Hope, London: Cultural Democracy Editions, 2011; <http://www.sophiehope.org.uk/research> [16.10.2012], see Resource Pool MFV0807.pdf
- Smith, Anna Deavere: quoted in Hope, Sophie: Participating in the Wrong Way? Four Experiments by Sophie Hope, London: Cultural Democracy Editions, 2011, p. 29
- Wimmer, Constanze: Exchange – Die Kunst, Musik zu vermitteln. Qualitäten in der Musikvermittlung und Konzertpädagogik, Salzburg: Stiftung Mozarteum, 2010; <http://www.kunstdervermittlung.at> [16.10.2012], see Resource Pool MFV0801.pdf

Links:

- Arbeitskreis Theaterpädagogik der Berliner Bühnen: Wollen Brauchen Können, 2012: <http://www.was-geht-berlin.de> [16.10.2012]
- Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Spiel und Theater, Hannover; Çağdaş Drama Derneği, Ankara: Internationales Übereinkommen über das Verhalten und zur Ethik von Theaterpädagoginnen und Theaterpädagogen (ÜVET), 2011: <http://www.bag-online.de/aktuell/uevet-deutsch.pdf> [18.2.2013], see MFV0804.pdf (German), MFV0805.pdf (English)
- Hope, Sophie: Reclaiming Evaluation as a Critical Practice, lecture, University of Melbourne, 2012: <http://vca-mcm.unimelb.edu.au/events?id=445> [17.10.2012]
- Hope, Sophie: <http://sophiehope.org.uk> [17.10.2012]
- Hull, Hannah, et al.: Toolkits, 2012: <http://artsrehab.com/2012/08/14/apply> [17.10.2012]
- Hull, Hannah, et al.: Criticality and Evaluation in a Culture of Optimism, 2012: <http://artsrehab.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/criticality-and-evaluation-in-a-culture-of-optimism-art-vs-rehab-critical-tool-kit.pdf> [17.10.2012], see Resource Pool MFV0806.pdf