



## CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Nicole Grieve: Kuverum's Annual "London to Go" Cultural Mediation Trip

The trip constitutes an inventive response to the question "How should cultural mediation, in all of its polyphony, its tensions and its potential, be shaped?" The trip offers participants an opportunity to immerse themselves in the cultural mediation methods used in London's museums and other cultural facilities, which are doing pioneering work in this area. The annual trip evolved out of a trip to London arranged by Pro Helvetia in 2008 and carried out by → *Kuverum*, an organization founded by Franziska Dürr. Two versions were offered: one, a trip for experienced cultural mediation supported by → *mediamus*; the other, for students in the Kuverum training programme.

The itinerary is designed by Kristen Erdmann, who is active in cultural mediation in the Swiss canton of Aargau. She assigns great priority to close contact with the "key players" in London to facilitate frank and open exchange.

The trip, which is modified to reflect the group of participants, has the following characteristics:

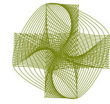
- 15 participants from various sectors of cultural mediation
- 5 intensive days
- 10 museums selected for the diversity of their collections, their size and their funding, encompassing a wide spectrum of structural conditions, positions, missions and mediation practices.
- 12–15 meetings with experts representing a range of orientations and levels within institutional hierarchies
- includes cultural mediators responsible for general programming, one particular sector, workshops, or supervising volunteer mediators
- addresses 5 types of cultural mediation, which can be combined with one another: programming with marketing-like dimensions, cultural mediation, socio-cultural and digital mediation
- delivered through a programme that rotates between presentations, discussions and workshops
- experienced in a format that provides large scope for mutual exchange, in order to present the various views, reveal tensions and facilitate individualized acquisition of content.

Like the orientation circuit in the world of maps visited during a workshop on → *Visual Literacy and Critical Thinking* at the British Library, the trip

→ *Kuverum* <http://kuverum.ch/moduldetails.php?sid=295> [2.1.2013]; <http://kuverum.ch/angebote.php> [2.1.2013]

→ *mediamus* <http://www.mediamus.ch> [16.2.2013]

→ *Visual Literacy and Critical Thinking* <http://www.bl.uk/learning/tarea/primary/mapyourworld/maps.html> [2.2.2013]



invites participants to engage actively and critically with the challenges and trends of cultural mediation.

With an accompaniment in French and Italian, this trip represents a national offering for mediators and directors of institutions and cultural funding organizations to expand their horizons or learn more about the diverse field of cultural mediation.

The trip shows that professional cultural mediation does not simplify cultural processes, but rather “disseminates” a way of engaging with continually new experiences and meanings, as Emily Dickinson<sup>1</sup> once described in a poem about the poetic process and its reception:

The Poets light but Lamps —  
Themselves — go out —  
The Wicks they stimulate  
If vital Light

Inhere as do the Suns —  
Each Age a Lens  
Disseminating their  
Circumference —

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Dickinson: Poem no. 883, ca. 1865.



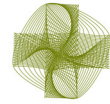
## **CHANGING PERSPECTIVES** Sara Smidt: The Art Museum has Become My Power Station

Is arts mediation an art?" That was the title of a conference held in Vienna decades ago. Yes, it is. Cultural mediation is, by its nature, process-oriented: it does not write down pre-existing knowledge and then present it. Quite the contrary, cognitive processes are set into motion only upon engagement with the audience.<sup>1</sup> It is in the nature of the activity that this exchange is not perceptible to external parties. Even when, for instance, a workshop produces tangible outputs, a piece of woven fabric, a drawing or a rehearsed dramatic scene, the most important moments remain ephemeral and invisible.

However it is important that we find ways to present cultural mediation – or should we make do without statements like “the art museum has become my power station”?

We need tangible materials so that professionals can share their experiences and insights with one another. Not everyone should have to invent everything anew every time. Concepts which have proven effective can be modified and re-modified for use in new contexts. Documented cultural mediation is inspirational.<sup>2</sup> Documented cultural mediation also supplies arguments for stakeholders and facilitates resource optimization. To improve structural conditions, we should not argue with numbers but with impacts on people.<sup>3</sup> Then too, documentation is at least equally important as a resonance chamber. People involved in projects can take a look back, make certain specific aspects visible, ponder further, create linkages between what they have learned and their lives and experience the power of creativity.

But how is this to be done? Joy, doubt, inspiration, these are often personal and not intended for publication. Insights are often slow to take shape and can do so without our being aware of it. How is this to be revealed and presented? On the one hand, we could develop the processes in cultural mediation anew every time and enjoy them without having to make anything visible. Enough pixels and paper have been put out there already. On the other hand, we do need trails to follow. For me, there is only one conceivable approach: the trails are an independent element of cultural mediation and take forms which are suited to the subject, people and location. That means that documentation should be part of the planning and concept from the start and resources should be allocated

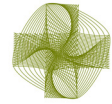


for it. I sense an enormous difference between projects for which I do this, or – very often – do not. If we all documented the projects we cherish, for whatever reason, in an exciting way, the result would be a marvellous archive that inspires and does not obstruct. Our young professional field of cultural mediation needs a tailwind in the form of eloquently documented cultural mediation!

→ [mediamus](http://www.mediamus.ch) <http://www.mediamus.ch> [16.2.2013]

*Sara Smidt Bill lives in Jenaz (GR) and Thun (BE) and is in charge of arts mediation at Kunstmuseum Thun; she also offers consultancy and training services through her firm MuseVM Beratung und Ausbildung; Co-president of → [mediamus](http://www.mediamus.ch), the Swiss association of cultural mediations in museums, she is also a Lecturer in Certificate of Advanced Studies in Museum Work Programme at the University of Applied Sciences HTW Chur*

- 1 This applies to both face-to-face and digital mediation.
- 2 C.f. for instance the project database at → <http://www.kultur-vermittlung.ch> [16.2.2013]
- 3 More than 15 years ago, a beautifully designed photograph box with quotations from a wide variety of people involved was created during the first year of the arts mediation pilot project in Kunsthau Aarau. It won people over. Since then, arts mediation has established itself and grown there successfully.



## CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Ruth Widmer: Theatre in the Local Shop: Touching People's Everyday Lives with Theatre Education

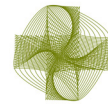
There are essentially three different strands of theatre mediation: a pedagogical approach to the experience of art (educating through theatre), an instructional approach to art appreciation (educating to appreciate theatre) or a general educational approach to perception using theatre-relevant instruments (cf. Hentschel 2010).

These ways of linking theatre work and education can be put to use anywhere where people gather, to work or spend time. Theatres are one venue, but so are neighbourhood squares and streets, factory buildings available between tenancies, schools, museums, or the shop on the corner.

Theatre mediation often uses space deliberately in a way that is designed to engage the perception of participants subversively and thus encourage reflection and new insights. Thus the space becomes one of the methodological instruments, used for two purposes. One purpose is to cause the person on the other side to become active. The other is to build a bridge, so that I, the initiator and moderator of this cognitive and perceptual process, can enter into a dialogue with the widest variety of people and bring together the most diverse groups to engage in a dialogue about the widest variety of topics.

To mark the 25th anniversary of TheaterFalle [Theatre Trap], we carried out several projects in a series called "Schaufalle in Folgen" [Series of Traps on View], which illustrated the objectives and methods described above. The first project was called "Die Familie lässt bitten" [The Family Invites].<sup>1</sup> The second took place in Kunstmuseum Basel and was called "Die Bürger von Calais sind los" [The Burghers of Calais are unbound].<sup>2</sup>

The title "Die Familie lässt bitten" is a reference to the family of people who have worked in Theaterfalle for the past 25 years, but also to the classic situation at the start of a family festivity and, thirdly, to the venue: the familial atmosphere of a corner shop in a working class district, which is currently caught up in the early stages of a turbulent gentrification. We drew on a variety of methods in order to adequately accommodate and bring to life this multilayered meaning of the term family, and to combine entertainment with stimuli triggering reflection and new insights. The audience received headphones and was able to watch the scenes from outside and inside, some scenes were set in the street, others inside the shop. At times the public was directly drawn into the action. This made it possible for them to experience a shift between being directly involved and an almost purely voyeuristic watching. The production was not based on a play and did not even have a script. Specific themes provided its



starting point and leitmotif: for instance, the European football championship which underway at the time. The set-up was simple: a man had invited his mates over to watch television but their wives show up instead. However, there were also some other unexpected people among those who really did show up. The circle of audience and the participants expanded to include neighbourhood residents, who joined in spontaneously, out of curiosity, as observers or active participants. We used a somewhat unconventional cooking studio and we broadcasted the evening as a show on Internet radio to encourage this shift between inside and outside, from observer to active participant, further. So we combined space, a blend of media, everyday actions and theatrical improvisation to give the audience new ways seeing themselves and their neighbourhood. That is cultural mediation: working with people where they live so that they can experience the fact that theatre does relate to them and can be for them. We turned a living space into a stage.

Ruth Widmer is the founder and Artistic Director of → [TheaterFalle Basel](http://www.theaterfalle.ch) and the President of the theatre education association → [tps – Fachverband Theaterpädagogik Schweiz](http://www.tps-fachverband-theaterpaedagogik-schweiz.ch).

1 The trailer on the production → <http://vimeo.com/44470609> [2.1.2013]

2 The audio guide → [http://www.medienfalle.ch/newsletter/SchauFalle\\_2\\_alle\\_Episoden.mp3](http://www.medienfalle.ch/newsletter/SchauFalle_2_alle_Episoden.mp3) [2.1.2013]

→ [TheaterFalle Basel](http://www.theaterfalle.ch) <http://www.theaterfalle.ch> [18.2.2013]

→ [tps – Fachverband Theaterpädagogik Schweiz](http://www.tps-fachverband-theaterpaedagogik-schweiz.ch) <http://www.tps-fachverband-theaterpaedagogik-schweiz.ch> [18.2.2013]



## CHANGING PERSPECTIVES Mediation Working Group, Pro Helvetia: Transmitting Cultural Mediation

The “transmission” of cultural mediation has dual significance for Pro Helvetia: in its role as a funding agency, receiving funding requests for cultural mediation projects, and in its role as a disseminating body, feeding insights and knowledge acquired back into practice. Both roles are still in flux at the Swiss Arts Council, because the funding of arts mediation is a relatively new area in the promotion of culture.

Pro Helvetia’s primary aim in crafting funding criteria specifically for cultural mediation projects was to not to exclude any format that could contribute to improving cultural mediation practices. The guidelines for use by applicants in writing their project descriptions are designed to be open, so that innovative project ideas can be presented in the application submission, while ensuring that a comprehensive picture emerges. This balancing act sometimes means that one side or the other, the applicant or Pro Helvetia, has to request supplemental information. In the ensuing dialogue a mutual “communication” of the way each side conceives the subject emerges.

Cultural mediation projects are process-oriented. A look at the implementation process is often more revealing than the perusal of a project’s outputs. Project blogs, for example, come into play here, by allowing running documentation of the project as it unfolds (e. g. → [kidswest](http://kidswest.blogspot.ch)). Social media instruments of that kind can also help increase the degree of dissemination the project by creating networks of people engaged or interested in the project early on and seeking contact with the public.

Pro Helvetia is aware of the necessity for further action in the area of evaluation and documentation to ensure that knowledge gained in projects can flow into the developments within cultural mediation circles. In this context too, the Swiss Arts Council wants to build on its Arts and Audiences programme and cultivate an exchange of knowledge at the national level, involving both practitioners and funding bodies. This publication, and the many perspectives presented within it, represents one step in this direction. The website → [www.kultur-vermittlung.ch](http://www.kultur-vermittlung.ch) and the newly established cultural mediation association Kulturvermittlung Schweiz also hold potential for the discourse on all aspects of knowledge related to cultural mediation.

Pro Helvetia’s interdisciplinary Mediation Working Group *was responsible for developing the promotion criteria within the framework of the Arts and Audiences Programme.*

→ [kidswest](http://kidswest.blogspot.ch) <http://kidswest.blogspot.ch> [25.1.2013]

→ [www.kultur-vermittlung.ch](http://www.kultur-vermittlung.ch)  
<http://kultur-vermittlung.ch>  
[16.2.2013]