

## Taking Part in Art and Culture (Marseille, 22–24 Oct 20)

Marseille, France, Oct 22–24, 2020

Deadline: Mar 20, 2020

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International Conference "Taking part in art and culture. Practices, theories and policies in today's cultural mediation"

The international conference "Taking part in Art and Culture. Practices, Theories and Policies in today's Cultural Mediation" is focusing on the issue of "participation" in the cultural field. We will be looking into the ways in which it has evolved (notably since the 1970s) and in which it influences the role of cultural mediation today.

The professionalisation of cultural mediation started forty years ago; the field has gradually turned more professional and the function of cultural mediators has generalised. Yet, cultural mediation is still deprived of a univocal definition (Bordeaux & Caillet, 2013). Cultural mediators thus carry out complex and polymorphous activities that are socially expected, and are "jointly required by institutions, by the supervising ministry and by different types of public" (Aubouin & Kletz, 2018: 12). Today, however, they are still suffering from a lack of recognition. It is generally admitted that cultural mediation has a role to play to "bridge the gap" between one or several sections of the general public and artistic propositions. Still, cultural mediators actually accomplish extremely diversified missions (from welcoming, communicating, guiding visits to liaising with the press) depending on the structures where they are employed and their human resource policies (Aubouin, Kletz & Lenay, 2010).

On top of that, a current evolution is spreading at the moment and is threatening these already shaky foundations. Indeed, "participation" has apparently been put at the heart of all stakeholders' preoccupations and is expected to take place everywhere: in schools and in universities, in elections, and, of course, in museums, circuses, theatres and even in concert halls. One of the issues tackled by the conference will be to examine the twofold consequence of these developments on cultural mediators, but also to consider the more challenging issue of the role played by mediators in these developments. Examining this issue will also necessarily include questioning the definition of the notion of "participation".

The question of the participation of "ordinary citizens" in artistic and cultural life is not new. In the French context, one of the landmarks of the issue's evolution has been the New Museology project. Its objective is to desacralise museums so that they may be turned into instruments serving a more egalitarian society (see Desvallées, 1992). Two museologists, Georges-Henri Rivière and Hugues de Varine took active part in this movement and made their ambitions come true under

the form of ecomuseums starting in the 1970s. These spaces abolish a distinction that had hitherto been characteristic of the museum institution: the distinction between spaces where knowledge and discourse on works of art are produced (by curators) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, spaces where these instances of knowledge are received (by the public). Therefore, the public no longer exists as such; we speak in terms of “inhabitants” or “populations” who are invited to take part in the construction of museums that tell their story/ies and that exhibit objects that these people have selected themselves (see Delarge, 2018). At the same period of time, performance art as well as street arts (“arts de la rue”) were enjoying unprecedented growth. They were inspired by the tradition of protest arts that ranged from dadaism to situationism and from agit-prop to happenings (see Chaudoir 2000, 2008; Goldberg, 1979 2011; Gonon, 2007; Harvie, 2013). They implement themselves according to clear objectives, namely to liberate and reappropriate these forms of art that are regarded as enclosed into theatres and stolen away by an elite. By transforming them and constructing them in public space, everyone is invited to take part so that the role of cultural mediators is shifting.

These ventures have gradually lost their momentum as they have been partly weakened by the growing dilution of their revolutionary character. Their posture was to question the relevance of hierarchical structures that preserved the existence of legitimate and illegitimate positions on art and culture; yet, they have apparently been replaced by injunctions to “participate” which are quite at odds with their original project. When theatre-goers are invited to take the stage to respond to actors, when museum visitors are urged to interact with museographic propositions, when cultural users are encouraged to use digital instruments or pursue their visits on line, many so-called “participative” initiatives may confine members of the public within the abstract figure of participants within “schemes they have not chosen, whose challenges develop beyond them and whose purposes they do not share” (Zask, 2011: 9; see also Le Marec, 1993).

However, recent developments have contributed to reviving debates on the genuine egalitarian participation of citizens in cultural life. In 2015, a new norm, hitherto lacking in French cultural policies and concerning cultural rights, was introduced in the French legislative arsenal (the NOTRe Act). It resulted from a long evolution that began at the international level in 1948 (and was notably marked by the Fribourg Declaration in 2007). Its declared objective is to valorise people’s potential contributions to cultural life, whatever their social origins and to emphasise their shared right to take part both as beneficiaries and creators (see Aubry & Blouët, 2019; Meyer-Bisch, 2008). These evolutions have strongly refocussed the debate on neighbouring issues about who currently takes part in the elaboration and/or interpretation of the collective artistic and cultural heritage, about who decides on reception norms (or determines the acceptable way of inhabiting cultural space), and about who is, deliberately or not, excluded from these operations. (Here, reference is made to recent controversial reactions to theatre plays – notably Exhibit B in 2014 or The Suppliants in 2019 – which are proof of the topicality of these issues. See Cervulle, 2017 and Hamidi-Kim, 2019).

The purpose of this conference is to present an overview of these issues through the particular prism of the posture of mediators, a posture that may be characterised as paradoxical, notwithstanding its precarious status in the cultural field. Mediators are the depositaries of the link existing between the public and artistic or cultural offers, and their voice can never be captured as the voice of the public, the voice of artists, nor even as the voice of their employing structures. Their

ceaseless engagement is therefore to struggle out of the confining roles that may result from this posture, because these roles give foundation to an order of things they precisely attempt to abolish. In this order of things, figures of exteriority are constructed within the walls of institutions, and embodied by members of the public who are labeled as unadapted to cultural spaces.

Conference presentations will follow three main axes:

1. The genealogy of practices in participative mediation:

When cultural institutions (theoretically) become public spaces

This first axis will focus on the genealogy of practices in participative mediation. It will also revisit the genealogy of the notions of “public spaces” and of “participation” as they were initially envisaged within cultural projects that were developed from the 1970s, both in France and abroad. Subjects will include the key stages of this evolution such as the emergence of participative museology, of artistic performance or of digital technologies in cultural institutions. The issue of cultural mediation will be tackled through two interdependent prisms: (1) analysing the consequences of the advent of participation on the definition of mediators’ missions; (2) the role of these cultural actors in this evolution. Notably, proposals will examine the influence of cultural mediation in the educational turn in curatorial practices (see Jaschke & Sternfeld (ed.), 2012; Mörsch, 2011; Rogoff, 2008).

2. Mediation and cultural rights:

What is the influence of the cultural rights issue on the design, interpretation and reception of collective cultural and artistic heritage?

Within the second axis of the conference, participants will ponder over the influence, in the field of cultural mediation, of the growing centrality of cultural rights on discussions concerning culture. The issue will be tackled in an intercultural perspective, both through the French case which is developing in a specific historical context and is currently crystallising in numerous, and often controversial, debates (see the above-cited theatrical squabbles), and through several foreign cases – which are notably morphing into debates about a potential “semantic rearmament” (El Hadji Sy quoted in Deliss, 2017) of ethnographic objects within museographic projects, which have been criticised in their turn. Subjects will include questioning the role of mediators, starting from analysing the mechanisms that contribute to the distribution of participation in (or exclusion from) the elaboration, interpretation and reception of the collective cultural and artistic heritage (see Lynch, 2011, 2016; Mörsch, Sachs & Sieber (ed.), 2016).

3. Teaching cultural mediation today:

What is the place of discussion about the current challenges of cultural mediation in the training of mediators?

The purpose of the conference’s third structuring axis is to question the way the afore-mentioned issues are – or could be – introduced and discussed in mediators’ university and professional training. The issue of cultural mediation training is central in the evolutions we are studying; yet, it is rarely taken into account in academic and professional fields. Indeed, these are mostly concerned with the impact of mediators’ work and on its measurable effects. Focusing on cultural mediation training in academic and institutional fields (private and public), as this conference pro-

poses to do, will introduce a comparative dimension (at the international level) which is crucial to understand today's challenges of theory and practice in cultural mediation. In that respect, interest may focus on curricula which are not exclusively devoted to cultural mediation, but which have integrated it over the last few years (in fairly open ways, as is the case for "cultural professions", intercultural mediation, translation, etc.). Examples include curricula devoted to foreign cultural areas. These are pedagogical evolutions which are both pragmatic and strategic, considering that no real dialogue is actually taking place between these training programmes and programmes which are specifically dedicated to cultural mediation.

#### Submission Guideline:

Communications during the conference will be of different types:

- Classic papers, limited to 20 minutes
- Short papers, limited to 10 minutes
- Workshops (presentation of experiences and/or practices in interaction with the public – only a very limited number of workshops can be programmed)

Submissions can be written in English or in French, in Word or PDF. We solicit abstracts of maximum 3000 characters (spaces included) that should clearly present the chosen format among the three formats proposed (classic presentation, short presentation, workshop). The classic and the short presentations should indicate the methodological approach/procedure and should include a bibliography. All submissions should include a title and five keywords and indicate in which of the three conference axes they fit. Submissions should be suitable for anonymous review, and the separate cover letter should include the abstract title, author(s) name(s), institution, and a short bio (at most 150 words).

The abstract and cover letter should be sent via email to [mediation.prendrepart@gmail.com](mailto:mediation.prendrepart@gmail.com)

Submission deadline: March 20th, 2020

Notification of decision: April 20th, 2020

Locations of the conference :

Aix-Marseille Université – Espace « Turbulence », Campus Saint-Charles, 3, place Victor Hugo, 13003 Marseille

Tiers QG de Manifesta 13 – 57 place Bernard Dubois, 13001 Marseille

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Reference:

CFP: Taking Part in Art and Culture (Marseille, 22-24 Oct 20). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 15, 2020 (accessed Jul 16, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/22655>>.