



GLOSSARY

Cultural mediation and its keywords

MÉDIATION
CULTURELLE



Introduction

This glossary is the result of a commission made by Culture pour tous following a simple observation: as mediation professionals, we all feel the need to define and situate our practices, despite the diversity of our experiences. The objective of the commission was thus both very clear and quite sensitive: to construct a reference document that could serve all mediation practitioners.

In some twenty short glossary entries, we define the words and themes that arise most often when projects are conceived and implemented. The definitions were written following a synthesis of writings over the last ten years, all practice fields combined, and consulting theoretical works, journal articles, reports, institutional glossaries, and filmed lectures.

The glossary was not designed as a closed proposition; on the contrary, it is intended to be a working document to enhance and enrich with new terms and concerns that will arise over time.

Have a good read!

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A Art education

Art education designates a group of classroom courses and activities with two objectives: first, the development of skills associated with knowledge, comprehension, and practice of various forms of art; second, the discovery of multiple cultural experiences by visiting spaces for dissemination and creation of art as well as encountering artists and artworks. This training, which involves obligatory courses and individual projects in an academic environment, as well as using recreational time to attend courses, workshops, and camps offered by cultural and community organizations, aims, in the broad sense, to contribute to the education of consumers and actors in the artistic and cultural fields, as well as to the personal, social, and cultural development of young people.

Art mediation

The art context, whether within a museum or outside its walls, is where cultural mediation practices came into being in the 1990s. In this context, mediation covers intervention practices and measures implemented by a variety of actors – museum professionals, artists, amateurs, guides, and therapists – to encourage a closer connection between art and publics. Mediation, which has both an aesthetic and a social vocation, is based on bringing alive and creating value for an experience with art by proposing a dialogue among the artworks, the creative approach (or even the artist or artists), and individuals.

Art therapy

Art therapy is defined as therapeutic guidance based on a process of art creation. The artwork produced and the dialogue around it provide a guideline or framework and a stimulus through self-expression and the revealing of emotions, experiences, and difficulties. Thus, words and images merge during the creative activity to enable each participant to find an appropriate mode of communication. Different media may be used in the creative process, including drawing, painting, and sculpture. In this process, the art therapist acts as a guide in the production and thoughtful interpretation of the artwork produced. Art therapy is practised mainly in healthcare institutions, but it is also found in the fields of social services and community organizations.

C Care through art

Outside of the school context, care through art is an approach within the field of art education that makes culture and art accessible to people limited by their state of health. Developed in healthcare facilities or in participants' residences, care through art is intended to be a collaborative encounter around an art project adapted to the individual's needs, wishes, and capacities. The art practice employed during the process is centred on individual participants and aims to provide them with the pleasure of partaking in a cultural experience, support their creative expression – which enables them to live in the present and temporarily forget about their illness – and thus contribute to their well-being.

Community art

Community art is an approach to collective art creation that involves one or several professional artists and participants who are members of a community (territorial, social, or of interest). In this context, the creative project entails “co-creative” collaborative participation in which artists and participants equally share the decision-making power over the process as a whole and the choice of different characteristics of the artwork (content, mechanisms, terms). The creative process, which is just as important as the result, is used as a tool for encouraging participants to have a voice and revealing their life experiences and concerns, in a perspective of social transformation or, at least, contribution to increased wellbeing.

Cultural action

A vision of cultural policy developed in the 1960s, cultural action is the umbrella term for actions taken to create a closer connection between the cultural and artistic community and the public. Cultural action aims to reduce unequal access to culture by enabling individuals to gain a better grasp of the cultural reality around them and give social meaning to cultural and artistic interventions. The Maisons de la culture, created in this context, are emblematic figures of cultural action.

Cultural appropriation

The objective of cultural appropriation is the adoption of a community's or group's cultural referents, which may be those of the country of origin or the host country, in a migrant context. Cultural appropriation takes place in three steps. The first is defined as a process of awareness raising during which individuals try to relate their own cultural and identity referents to the referents of the culture to which they are being exposed. The second, called taking a position, is instituted when individuals can identify some of these external referents and see themselves through them. The third, empowerment, completes the process through integration and reinterpretation of these referents. Appropriation is the lever needed for cultural transmission.

Cultural democracy

Cultural democracy is generally likened to cultural democratization in the sense that it offers a much more inclusive vision of culture and an alternative approach to the government's (top-down logic) for reaching out to publics. Cultural democracy is based mainly on active participation by citizens through the diversity of their experiences (bottom-up logic). Based on and legitimizing individuals' artistic and cultural practices, notably those designated “amateur,” cultural democracy privileges each individual's self-expression and gives culture an undeniable social scope.

Cultural democratization

A cultural action intervention model created after the Second World War, cultural democratization has two major production, dissemination, and reception objectives. The first is to provide access to artworks and heritage treasures; the second is to stimulate and support contemporary art. The strategies implemented by governments around this “scholarly” culture, now conceived for the general public, are conveyed, among other things, by the development of art education, the creation of new cultural facilities and spaces, the professionalization of cultural mediation, investments in works of public art, and the creation of artists’ residencies.

Cultural mediation

Cultural mediation, at the crossroads of the cultural and the social, deploys intervention strategies – activities and projects – that aim to introduce publics to a variety of experiences in the context of art and heritage institutions, municipal services, or community groups. Situated between cultural democratization and cultural democracy, cultural mediation combines a number of objectives: to provide access to culture and make it accessible to the broadest publics possible, to highlight the diversity of expressions and forms of creativity, to encourage citizen participation, to encourage the building of connections within communities, and to contribute to the personal flourishing of individuals and the development of a sense of community.

Cultural practices

Cultural practices involve multiple forms of consumption of and participation in cultural life, whether they are done daily or in leisure time, in the private sphere or the public space. Concretely, these practices cover visiting cultural facilities and attending cultural events (museums, libraries, media libraries, theatres, movie theatres, concert halls, cultural centres), all amateur practices (music, visual art, theatre, dance, photography), and habits concerning reading, music, the media, and digital technologies.

Cultural transmission

A process of identity construction, cultural transmission takes place within the family, the school, and many socialization spaces. It enables people to acquire from a very young age, by implicit learning – imprinting – knowledge of the cultural norms, codes, and values needed for life in society. Cultural transmission does not suppose only an act of communication and the literal reproduction of behaviours of the preceding generation, but also engages an act of interpretation, appropriation, and transformation of this heritage by those who receive it.

I Interpretation

The goal of interpretation is to reveal the meaning of an object, artwork, place, event, or skill, not only to provide visitors with a high-quality experience, but also to encourage them to undertake critical reflection and raise their awareness with regard to what is being interpreted. Historically, interpretation is based on a series of principles formulated by Freeman Tilden in the late 1950s, in the context of highlighting the natural patrimony of the United States. An interdisciplinary practice defined as a relationship between the interpreter and the public, interpretation is based on visitors' personal experience and tries to reveal meaning that goes beyond simply communicating information. It also seeks, through provocation, to pique the curiosity rather than teach.

M Mediator

The mediator's mandate is to establish connections and relationships between a cultural field and publics. His or her mediation action is based on knowledge of the publics, the content, and the environment, and on the ability to lead activities and to design, organize, and lead projects.

P Participation

The act of participating, or "taking part", covers a number of realities in the cultural field. Participation may be understood, first of all, as multiple forms of cultural practices and of consumption of cultural experiences. Thought of in terms of people, participation expresses the engagement of individuals or groups in the production of cultural projects that contribute to well-being or a sense of community wellness. In a practical perspective, participation may also be understood as different degrees of activeness (or passiveness) solicited during a cultural experience, ranging from acknowledgment, in the context of a visit to a museum, to collaboration or co-creation, in the context of a group artwork.

Publics and non-publics

Depending on the context and the point of view, the notion of "public" can be conveyed by various terms: general public, users, visitors, spectators, consumers, audience. A public—or publics, as the plural form better reflects reality—is a group of people likely to receive the messages transmitted by the cultural environment and to have an interest in an institution, event, place, or art practice. Some of these individuals manifest their interest by visiting or consuming a cultural activity.

The notion of "non-public" groups together all of the people that institutions or cultural facilities are not able to reach with their activities. A number of reasons have been proposed, among them lack of accessibility or interest and possible negative representations associated with cultural institutions.

S Social inclusion

Social inclusion is defined as the principle of respect for diversity and promotion of equal opportunity for all members of a given community. It also covers a group of political, institutional, and community actions aimed at reducing professional, social, and cultural obstacles that lead to exclusion. Social inclusion strategies have the objectives of enabling everyone to have access to the resources and services needed to have decent living conditions, to contribute to the establishment or re-establishment of a sense of belonging, value, and acceptance within the community, to encourage active social participation, and to develop social relations with other members of the community. More and more organizations are integrating cultural mediation strategies as vectors for this desire for inclusion.

Socio-cultural animation

The etymology of the word “animation” has to do both with giving life and with giving meaning or movement. In the cultural and social fields, animation is an intervention model the goal of which is to guide the development of social groups or individuals through activities, events, and projects that have a cultural, recreational, educational, or social vocation and take different forms depending on the living environment and the publics. Cultural animation is undertaken not only to encourage individuals’ expression and growth, but also to stimulate creativity and strengthen ties within the group engaged in the activities.

Socio-cultural animator

Whether they work in a cultural centre, a library, a school, or a community organization, socio-cultural animators are, in a sense, the linchpin for the strategies developed within the philosophy and practices of cultural animation. Combining aspects of social worker, activities creator, and project manager, animators act as organizers, facilitators, guides, or even experts for the publics that they serve.

English translation: Käthe Roth

To find out more: <http://mediationculturelle.culturepourtous.ca/en/>

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