

THE  
VOLKSWAGEN  
GROUP  
FELLOWSHIP  
FOR ART MEDIATION  
AT THE  
STÄDTISCHE  
GALERIE  
WOLFSBURG

ART  
MEDIATION  
BETWEEN  
ATTITUDE  
AND RESPON-  
SIBILITY

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This publication documents the Volkswagen Group Fellowship for Art Mediation at the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg from 2017 to 2020. The goal of the ongoing one-year fellowship is to give art mediators on the verge of starting their careers the opportunity to pursue their inquiring questions and innovative ideas in a research-based manner at a renowned institution. It explicitly promotes experimental formats of mediation and research in order to test, reflect and describe innovative methods in art mediation.

In addition to describing and reflecting on the individual projects, the publication offers handouts and analyses on current questions of art mediation around the topics of „care and responsibility,“ „knowledge and epistemic injustice,“ „dealing with hierarchies,“ and „conditions of digitality.“

Four authors (Silke Ballath, Katharina Klappheck, Elke Krasny, and Nora Sternfeld) have responded to the topics of the field reports of the three fellows CARE LESS (2017/18), Jelena Toopeekoff (2018/19), soppa/bleck (2020/21) and accompanied the contributions from their reflexive and theoretical practice. Thus, the publication covers a broad spectrum of mediating practice, art pedagogical research, and forms of knowledge. The collection exemplifies how art mediation meets contemporary societal challenges.







ART  
MEDIATION  
BETWEEN  
ATTITUDE  
AND RESPON-  
SIBILITY



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RESEARCH BETWEEN  
PRACTICE AND  
THEORY DEVELOPMENT:  
THE VOLKSWAGEN  
GROUP FELLOWSHIP  
FOR ART MEDIATION  
AT THE STÄDTISCHE  
GALERIE WOLFSBURG.

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**SUSANNE PFLEGER,  
GILA KOLB,  
KONSTANZE SCHÜTZE**

The *Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg*, the municipal museum for contemporary art in Wolfsburg Castle, sees itself as an open, creative and experimental institution. Its foundation came from the desire to establish a municipal art collection as a “place of permanent intellectual debate” in the young, industrially-dominated city of Wolfsburg. This educational mission is therefore seen as a central task. The mediation program sees the visitors – young and old – as active participants in the learning processes. The aim of all events is to motivate the visitors in the communication of ideas, show them the possibilities of artistic and creative forms of expression and thus promote their ability to shape their own environment and their own lives. For this purpose, the necessary free spaces and open situations have been created. An openness that continues directly and indirectly in the content documented here.

Between 2017 and 2021, three scholarships for art mediators were offered by the *Volkswagen Group Fellowship* at the *Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg* to give time and space for research between art, mediation, and their theories. In three rounds, art mediators explored the field of tension between artistic mediation, knowledge production, situated responsibility, and discrimination criticism. They offer exemplary answers and encourage the comparison and questioning of practices and professional organization, all of which are laid out in this volume.

Urgent questions for the practice and theorization of art mediation arise – such as the role of art mediation as a service or the institutional continuity of hierarchies and powerful, racist discourses, as well as how to deal with current digitalization. Especially in art mediation, the reason for missing answers and changes lies in the lack of space for exchange, in the lack of existing opportunities for networking and discourse building in a challenging, often also financially precarious situation. Lastly, there is a lack of documentation of good art mediation practice and thus a lack of visibility of art mediation activities and reliable alliances for art education projects. The *Volkswagen Group Fellowship for Art Mediation* seeks to change this situation by creating the conditions for an in-depth examination of art mediation.

The *Volkswagen Group Fellowship* is aimed at newcomers to the profession and as well as addressing people working in research, the arts and/or education. As a newcomer to the profession, it is usually a matter of profiling one’s own attitudes and approaches. It is rarely possible to work on a single topic in depth. Especially at the beginning of professionalization, the sometimes very productive question arises as to why everything has to stay the way it is and whether it could be com-

pletely different? The *Volkswagen Group Fellowship* at the *Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg* provides a free space to pursue questions and contradictions and to document the results for further research.

In this publication, measures in the field of art mediation are undertaken which contribute to a further contouring of art mediation as field reports. In doing this, methods or tools are described, reflected upon and made accessible from practice. The fellows' perspectives are brought together with other perspectives from the field of art mediation so that a picture of a field of work emerges that is positioned between different discourses and interfaces. Accordingly, the fellows of the *Volkswagen Group Fellowship* – their actions as actors in the field, their preliminary work, theses, attitudes, and approaches – form the framework for this publication. Ultimately, the projects and texts documented here aim to make practices of art pedagogical research accessible from the perspective of self-observation and self-reflection for dialogue in research between institutions and individuals.

The first part of the book deals with exemplary aspects of invisible care work. In her contribution, **Elke Krasny** describes the museum as an institution in which many people take care of objects and processes but remain invisible in their reproductive work. A second aspect of care is developed in an educational program by **Care Less** which encourages visitors to care less about doing everything right and more about enjoying art without caring as part of a supported art viewing experience. "People with disabilities are denied artistic expression, and this is not a curiosity of the past", **Katharina Klappheck** begins her article on the complicated relationship between art institutions and people with disabilities. Her proposal for a remedy: radical access, as well as collective action and a fundamentally changed attitude towards social impositions.

In art mediation, as in any other planned and unplanned encounter of people, attributions determine the course of communication and fundamentally influence it, for example, by giving less credence to a statement if it is uttered by a certain group of people. This aspect is the focus of the second part of the book. **Jelena Toopeekoff** transfers the phenomenon of epistemic injustice from social epistemology to participation in art mediation. **Nora Sternfeld** criticizes the storytelling practiced in art mediation as a form of post-factual knowledge transfer which in its appearance as de-personalized knowledge, makes any knowledge transfer impossible in the sense of a dialogue, a negotiation of different knowledge perspectives.



## FOREWORD

The third part of the publication deals with responsibility and the (self-)critical handling of privilege in two contributions by **soppa/bleck** and **Silke Ballath**. With Donna Haraway's notion of "weaving in" as well as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "unlearning", a practice of linking through transgressing, imagining, and experimenting emerges. soppa/bleck, as experts in digital encounters and negotiations of collective proximity (in the times of the first lockdown), offer local encounters. As an experiment, conditions and exclusions of a collective proximity become a space in which critical action can be taken across institutions.

Along these lines, the scholarship enables the gathering of exemplary and experimental contributions to the discourse. It offers resources for theory building and makes it possible to step out of practice and document findings, but also to take note of attitudes. This is unique (so far, unfortunately) in that it has been possible in this fellowship to reflect on one's own actions and their contexts and conditions outside of ongoing mediation operations – and thus the time – intensive practice of everyday art mediation formats. We hope that the results will inspire further work to flow into the discourse!

Such effort and projects need time and attention. In this sense, we would like to thank associates and allies: Sarah Winter for the design and layout of the book, Carina Herring for the editing, Hendrike Schoppa and Elly Ewers for the proof-reading, Frieda Pattenden for the english translation, Cynthia Krell for co-developing the initial idea, and Benita von Maltzahn and Rita Werneyer for turning the idea into a real fellowship. A big thank you also goes to the whole team of the *Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg*.

# ART MEDIATION IN TRANSITION.

—— BENITA VON MALTZAHN

Since 2012, Volkswagen Group has been supporting the qualification of young fellows in the field of culture with its Volkswagen Group Fellowship Program. During their fellowship, the Volkswagen Group fellows gain different insights into the institutions, and they benefit from valuable professional contacts and further recommendations for their future work. The thematic fields for the fellowships are defined together with the institutions and vary both in content and form. In 2017, the *Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg* and Volkswagen Group launched a project to promote innovative arts education: The Volkswagen Group Fellowship for Art Mediation at the *Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg*.

The fellowship offers art mediators the freedom to develop and test new methods and formats at the beginning of their career and use these experiences to further drive the evolution of education in the field of art. In the process, conventional routines are examined in the context of a changing society and its urgent questions, and new perspectives are opened up. At the *Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg* the Volkswagen Group Fellowship is awarded for one year by a jury of experts, accompanied by agency art education in an advisory capacity.

Art and its mediation are important sources of autonomous thought and action. Education and outreach work are therefore among the core tasks of cultural institutions. Art education in particular can be the driving force in opening up to a diverse audience, recognizing existing barriers and breaking them down. Taking on this social responsibility so that art institutions can become even more accessible and develop their full potential, is a key objective of this Volkswagen Group Fellowship. We are convinced that the mediation of contemporary art, especially in Wolfsburg and the *Städtische Galerie*, can provide important impulses for current social challenges. With a sustainable support and coaching of young talents we want to make these ideas, formats and experiences available for use and further development as part of the educational mission of cultural institutions.

The *Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg* is a congenial partner in this endeavor – a creative and experimental cultural institution that offers its visitors an open space for individual insights and active participation and understands its mediation program as a laboratory and diverse place of learning.

We are impressed about the passion and joy of experimentation of the Volkswagen Group fellows as well as the staff of the *Städtische Galerie*, with whom we are all committed to creating the largest possible resonance space for mediation at this institution.

Permanent and project-independent resources are essential for successful education and mediation work. This includes specific competencies and professional knowledge as well as sufficient resources with regard to finances, space, time and personnel. The goal of the Volkswagen Group Fellowship at the *Städtische Galerie* is to make this happen. This publication shows that this has been successful over the past three years. In addition to describing and reflecting on the individual projects, it contains handouts and analyses of current issues of art mediation and shall serve as a useful handbook for other art mediators and institutions.



TEN THESES  
ON ART MEDIATION.  
AN INTERIM STATUS  
AFTER THREE  
YEARS OF THE  
VOLKSWAGEN  
GROUP FELLOWSHIP  
FOR ART  
MEDIATION.

—— GILA KOLB, KONSTANZE SCHÜTZE

When we were children, we, Konstanze and Gila, wanted to become dentists, pilots or physicists. Then, as teenagers, we wanted to be hairdressers or architects. We obviously shared the desire to work with people or to design spaces for people. Today we are research-based art mediators and deal with educational processes in the context of art and design. We chose this biographical entry into a reflection on mediation to show: Art mediation is not a classical profession and presumably very few art mediators, when asked early on about their career aspirations, have ever stated that they wanted to become one. Art mediation is still perceived as a professional field with its own expertise and is a desideratum.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, despite the apparent boom in art mediation, the question remains: What does an art mediator actually do? How does one become one? What does their work and role look like in relation to art and its institutions? How do current social challenges change the field of art mediation and the demands on this profession? How does art mediation see itself: as a profession between art education, art science and art practice? What does it mean to research art education or to research art mediation in an academic way? How do spaces for reflection and revision emerge in a field characterized by freelancing and uncertainty? How can research position itself in this context?

## PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON CONTEXTS, HISTORIES AND SETTINGS

Assuming that art mediators are experts on interfaces (cf. Schütze 2020: 315), they raise questions which are often ignored in the daily practice of institutions, as the titles of the following publications suggest: *Dürfen Sie das? Kunst als sozialer*

\_\_\_ 1

Cf. the analysis by Angelika Doppelbauer (2019): *Museum der Vermittlung*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

\_\_\_ 2

See for example: Rajal, Elke/trafo.K/ Marchart, Oliver/ Landkammer, Nora/Maier, Carina (2020): *Making Democracy – Aushandlungen von Freiheit, Gleichheit und Solidarität in Alltag*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. Oder Büro trafo.K: Garnitschnig, Ines/ Höllwarth, Renate/ Smodics, Elke/ Sternfeld, Nora (2017): *Strategien für Zwischenräume. Ver\_Lernen in der Migrationsgesellschaft*. Schulheft 165. Innsbruck-Wien-Bozen, StudienVerlag.

*Raum* (Are they allowed to do that? Art as a social space) (2001), *Wer spricht? Autorität und Autorschaft in Ausstellungen* (Who is speaking? Authority and Authorship in Exhibitions) (2005), *Was heißt hier Vermittlung? Kunstvermittlung und ihr umstrittener Begriff* (What does mediation mean here? Art mediation as a controversial concept) (2020) – in other words, questions that concern reflection on showing and making art. Furthermore, art mediators can initiate processes that lead to negotiations and changes that become significant, not only at the institutions, but also in the world when art mediation projects have a social impact.<sup>2</sup>

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A MUSEUM EDUCATION AND MEDIATION SPECIALIST CONCEIVES, DEVELOPS AND REALIZES ACTIVITIES THAT RELATE THE MUSEUM, ITS OBJECTS AND ITS CULTURAL POTENTIAL TO A DIVERSE SOCIETY. THE EDUCATION AND MEDIATION TEAM OPENS UP (NEW) ACCESS TO THE MUSEUM AND ITS CONTENTS. THE ACTIVITIES HELP THE MUSEUM BECOME SOCIALLY RELEVANT AND ENABLE CULTURAL PARTICIPATION. FOR THIS PURPOSE, THE EDUCATION AND MEDIATION SPECIALIST WORKS WITH THE VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS OF THE MUSEUM AND WITH PEDAGOGICAL, CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC NETWORKS.

Swiss Association for Education and Mediation  
in Museums 2021: no p. [Translation FP].

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MANY PEOPLE THINK OF MEDIATION PRIMARILY AS GUIDED TOURS THAT CONVEY AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE IN A SHORT TIME IN AS PLEASANT A WAY AS POSSIBLE. AS WITH MANY OTHER PROFESSIONS, HARDLY ANYONE THINKS ABOUT WHAT THE ACTUAL TASKS AND CHALLENGES OF THE CULTURAL MEDIATION PROFESSION ARE. (...) FROM A FORMER STUDENT JOB OR A BELOVED PART-TIME JOB, IN THE LAST FEW DECADES THE POSITION OF ACADEMIC MUSEUM EMPLOYEE HAS DEVELOPED INTO A PROFESSION IN ITS OWN RIGHT WITH EXTREMELY DIFFERENTIATED THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND DIVERSE METHODOLOGIES.

Doppelbauer 2019:11-12 [Translation FP].



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**What do you understand by art mediation?**

PERSONALLY ALWAYS APPROACH ART MEDIATION IN THE SENSE OF SPATIAL MEDIATION. BEFORE ART CAN BE COMMUNICATED, THE MUSEUM SPACE IN WHICH THE ART IS LOCATED OFTEN HAS TO BE COMMUNICATED. THE CONCEPT OF "MUSEUM" IS ALREADY VERY EXCLUSIVE, FULL OF BARRIERS THAT PREVENT MANY PEOPLE FROM EVEN COMING INTO CONTACT WITH A WORK OF ART AND MAKES OTHERS MOVE AND ACT WITHIN IT WITH A CERTAIN DEGREE OF SELF-EVIDENCE. SARA AHMED SPEAKS OF "ATMOSPHERIC WALLS", I FIND THIS TERM VERY APT BECAUSE THESE WALLS ARE PERCEPTIBLE BY SOME AND DO NOT EXIST AT ALL FOR OTHERS. Duygu Örs 2021: n.p.

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**What relationship do you see between the practice of curating and mediation?**

I AM INTERESTED IN MEDIATION AS A SPACE IN WHICH ALTERNATIVE AESTHETIC PRACTICES BECOME POSSIBLE. IN MY HEART I AM ALSO ALWAYS A B OF AN ARTIST, AND I CONSIDER MY PRACTICE (ALSO AS A RESEARCHER AND TEACHER AT UNIVERSITIES) AS AN EXTENDED ARTISTIC PRACTICE. (...) I TRY TO INVENT COLLABORATIVE, CULTURAL FORMS TO DO THIS, TO LET THEM TAKE PLACE, IN WHICH WE (THAT MEANS ALL THE DIFFERENT PEOPLE INVOLVED IN IT, SO I AS A MEDIATOR TOO) CAN GATHER EXPERIENCES.

Shusha Niederberger 2020: n.p.

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**What do you understand by art mediation?**

THE PERPETUATION OF ART THROUGH VARIOUS MEANS, WITH THE SPECIAL CONSIDERATION OF THE FORMS OF COLLABORATION.

Bernadett Settele, Schürch & Settele 2016: n.p. [Translation FP].

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**What do you understand by art mediation?**

ART MEDIATION SHOULD BE A PROCESS OF NEGOTIATION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT PARTIES AND ART OBJECTS INVOLVED. IT IS ONLY MEDIATION IF ALL HUMAN ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED DO THE LEARNING. Ruth Noack 2016: n.p.

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**What is the relationship (for you) between mediation and art?**

IN MY OPINION, ART AND MEDIATION OVERLAP, JUST AS CURATING AND MEDIATING DO. HOWEVER, IF WE LOOK AT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THOSE WHO WORK WITH ART AND THOSE WHO WORK WITH MEDIA MEDIATION, PREJUDICE AND SUSPICION PREVAIL. ONE WAY TO OVERCOME THESE PRECONCEIVED IDEAS IS TO REPLACE THE WORD "MEDIATION" WITH THE WORD "LEARNING", AS THE TATE MODERN DOES. I LIKE THE IDEA OF "LEARNING" IT IS MORE APPEALING TO ME THAN THE TERM "MEDIATION", BECAUSE LEARNING IS POSSIBLE IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS. Helena Björk 2016: n.p.

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**What relationship do you see between the practice of curating and mediation?**

I SOMETIMES SAY THAT I CURATE THE MEDIATION PROGRAM. WHAT I MEAN BY THAT IS: I MAKE A COMPILATION, A COMPOSITION OF SITUATIONS, PRACTICES, OFFERINGS. I THINK THAT THIS IS VERY MUCH AN AESTHETIC PRACTICE, AND IF ONE WANTED TO, ONE COULD ALSO DERIVE A WORK CONCEPT FROM IT, BUT I AM NOT INTERESTED IN THAT. I THINK SEEING THIS AS AN AESTHETIC PRACTICE IS VERY POWERFUL, ALSO BECAUSE THEN MEDIATION DOESN'T ALWAYS HAVE TO DISTINGUISH ITSELF FROM CURATION AND VICE VERSA. Shusha Niederberger 2020: n.p.

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**Why is art mediation important for a museum/institution?**

BECAUSE A MUSEUM SHOULD CARE ABOUT ITS VISITORS AND NOT EXCLUSIVELY AS A POSSIBLE SOURCE OF INCOME ...

Britta Petersen 2016: n. p. [Translation FP].

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**In what context do you work as an art mediator - and how did you come to be doing it?**

THE EDUCATIONAL AIM OF THE MASTER OF ART EDUCATION AT THE BERNE UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS IS "TO DEVELOP A PERSONALITY WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AND JUDGEMENT, GREAT TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCE, ACADEMIC REFLECTION AND PROFESSIONAL MEDIATION AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS." THE AIM IS SUMMARIZED IN THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRAL AUTHORSHIP IN THE FIELD OF ART MEDIATION AND AESTHETIC EDUCATION. WITH THIS I UNDERSTAND THE COMBINATION OF AN ARTISTIC, ART MEDIATING AND THEORY-BASED ATTITUDE AS AN ART MEDIATOR. Jaqueline Baum 2018: n. p.

## RELATIONS AND APPROACHES

At this point we want to make our motivations transparent and thus contextualize our own art pedagogical actions. As research-based art educators with curatorial and activist practices, we take a particular perspective on art mediation: We name discourses, mediate<sup>3</sup> and create spaces for exchange<sup>4</sup> about the more fundamental questions of the field. As agency art education, we advocate for contemporary art mediation. At the same time, we are active in research and teaching at universities. We research art education practice as a space for action and participate in the formation of discourses within these spaces.

As academic research art educators (*white, European background, educated, female-readable-bodied*), we are concerned with what art mediation is, what it could be like, and how it is positioned between art, research, society, and education. We can write this text because our work time also includes such activities – and thanks to the program *Features* at the Kunsthalle Bern, we were given a quiet space for our collaboration during the summer.<sup>5</sup> A good starting point for our positioning is the concept of responsibility. It is the responsibility<sup>6</sup> of a field that we see as being in the process of reconstruction. As participants and co-designers, we are trying to make knowledge visible that can often only be secured from practice and requires very reliable theoretical alliances. We understand theorizing and practice as an interwoven unity of “situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988: no p.). We do not read research positions as genuinely objective but always interwoven with the respective contexts and interested in specific answers, i.e. embedded.

As involved participants in the current discourses, we assume that we (co-)change these terms through our work in art mediation.

## TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACHES AND BEYOND?

So, what can art mediation be? Art mediation is in conflict with the exploitation logic of art which, at the same time, it seeks to avoid. Art mediation oscillates between functionality and service and the need to create free spaces, approaches and opportunities within the institution and

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E.g. in the faculty of documenta 14 a(n)education or as an editor of *Vermittlung Vermitteln*, online at: <https://documenta-studien.de/vermittlung-vermitteln/> or organizer of various summer schools.

\_\_\_ 4

<http://digitalfeminism.net/2020/index.php?l=en>, <https://thearteducatorstalk.net/> [09.09.2022]

\_\_\_ 5

A big thanks goes to Julia Jost from the Kunsthalle Bern.

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More on Responsibility see “Weaving in: Responsibility as a practice of joining together” by Silke Ballath in this book.

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ACCORDING TO DONNA HARAWAY, SITUATED KNOWLEDGE IS NEVER NEUTRAL. IT IS ALWAYS ALREADY A POSITION IN MANY DIFFERENT SENSES: IT SPEAKS FROM A SPECIFIC BODY, FROM A SPECIFIC SOCIAL SITUATION WITHIN POWER RELATIONS, AND IT TAKES A POSITION WHEN IT SPEAKS. IT IS IN THE MIDDLE – IN-BETWEEN SPACES THAT EMERGE BETWEEN ART AND REALITY, REPRESENTATION AND PRESENCE, THEORY AND PRACTICE, AND ABOVE ALL BETWEEN THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGING IT.

Nora Sternfeld 2017: n.p.

to facilitate transformations. In doing so, it is characterized by questions and unavailability and is always in a state of change. This *bug*, i.e. the non-smooth functioning and disruption of trouble-free processes, is an unavoidable part of art mediation and combines, not entirely unexpectedly, with its ability to adopt methods and tools from other disciplines. "It's not a bug, it's a feature" (Carr 2018: n.d.).

In the wake of documenta 12, Carmen Mörsch summarized four possible actions for art mediators with the following adjectives: affirmative, reproductive, deconstructive, and transformational (cf. Mörsch 2009: 9 ff.). In practice, these cannot always be applied in a clear-cut way. But this division still helps us classify and assess the strategies of institutions and actors and view them a bit more clearly. In the context of postcolonial theory, for example, an affirmative approach can certainly mean critically-reflected action. This is what the curator, art mediator, and research activist Ayşe Güleç describes with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as "affirmative sabotage" (cf. Spivak 2007: 172) in the sense of a strategy of art mediation, for example, when art mediators thank visitors for a conflict or kindly insist on their own position despite disagreement (cf. Güleç 2018: 6).

Alexander Henschel, together with Eva Sturm, points out the impossibility of the concept of mediation, especially by elaborating its claim to a primarily white, colonially-shaped concept of knowledge. In political readings, art mediation is often a harmonizing factor that seemingly levels out conflicts. Despite these findings, Henschel advocates the continued use of the term, knowing full well that art mediation will never be leveled under an experimental space for testing artistic precision in description and behavior (cf. Henschel 2020: 553). Could mediating art (in Henschel's understanding) mean being interwoven with artistic practice and the raising of relevant questions and practices (cf. Kolb/Schütze 2017: 151)?

Entering into an exchange through art mediation means occupying space, questioning discourses, and forming relations based on materials and forms of encounter. Under these conditions, researching art mediation is also linked to individual positioning, self-questioning, disputes over sovereignty of interpretation, and moments of empowerment. The author and activist bell hooks<sup>7</sup> describes these processes, which she relates to intersectionality, as an entanglement of theory and practice: the participants in art mediation, among those in this book, act with their

— 7  
Gila Kolb thanks Toni Wagner for  
this reference.

knowledge, their practice as researching practitioners<sup>8</sup> and researching activists<sup>9</sup> as art mediators, researchers, and developers at the same time.

“When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice.”

(bell hooks 1994: 61).

“A theorist is one who has been undone by theory”

(Rogoff 2003: n. p.).

## ABOUT THE FIELDS OF DISCOURSE IN THIS BOOK

Working on art, for visitors, at institutions, and with artists, means appropriating discourses, entering into negotiations, and at the same time permanently opening up the unknown and opening up new contexts. The *field reports* and accompanying texts from the discourses of art pedagogy and art mediation produced by the *Volkswagen Group Fellowship* depict three exemplary micro-conversations for upcoming negotiations. They mark points of discourse in the sense of a location description and situating (via reports and texts) that name tendencies and seek responsible alliances in the field.

### A) Care, carelessness and conditioning

The participants of the **CARE LESS** project used the *Volkswagen Group Fellowship* as an opportunity to create an experimental space for testing art-mediated strategies. In this space, based on the observation that different mechanisms of exclusion take place in museums, they explored speculative possibilities for a training program for supervised art viewing in a performative, post-ironic setting and as a team. **Katharina Klappheck** understands the exclusion of people with disabilities as an evolved and historically perpetuating structure. She formulates approaches of a *cripistemology* that counters the structural exclusions of knowledge of disability as well as knowledge of disabled people and their

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Gila Kolb thanks Martina Bram-amp for this term.

\_\_\_ 9

Gila Kolb thanks Ayşe Güleç for this term.

roots in hierarchical mechanisms of exclusion – by “Crippling up”. Generalized on mechanisms of exclusion and profiles of discrimination, it formulates a collective practice of reinterpreting existing political relations as a chance and an opportunity. This includes writing in one’s

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WE WERE SURPRISED  
THAT THE TERM HIGH CULTURE  
STILL EXISTS. (...) WE ASKED  
OURSELVES WHY THERE  
ARE NO PEOPLE OF COLOR  
LECTURING HERE, NO PEOPLE  
WHO HAVE A PRACTICAL  
BACKGROUND, NO PEOPLE  
WHO HAVE TO LIVE WITH  
LOW INCOMES, NO EXPERTS  
WITH DISABILITIES ETC.

Alliance Mind the Trap 2014:n.p. [Translation FP].



own currently available language. **Elke Krasny** takes up the concept of care and examines the dimensions of its understanding in a kind of praxeological survey based on a performance by Patricia Kaersenhout at the Stedelijk Museum. Stereotypical habits of seeing political, economic and cultural dimensions are unfolded with art as a starting point. She uses the term *Sorge/Care* in a deliberately ambiguous way.

For it is not only the care-giving, the conscious handling of resources, an awareness of conditions and care of bodily constitutions, but beyond that an approach of making visible and allowing contradictions in caring conditions. In other words: With art mediation in Europe we move in *white*, feminized spaces which, at the same time, claim to be open to all which, however, often cannot be realized but which must nevertheless be dealt with politically. Confronting these conditions with artistic-performative strategies is a beginning. Describing them and making them visible is just as important.

## B) Narrative and epistemic negotiations

In art mediation, attributions take place, presuppositions are formed, and roles are performed. This can hardly be avoided and is thus the elephant in the room. The idea of locating the concept of epistemic injustice (according to Fricker 2007) in art mediation arose from **Jelena Toopeekoff's** observations of her own art mediation practice at documenta 14. As a *member of the chorus* (this was the name of the art mediators then), she accompanied very different groups of visitors almost every day and repeatedly witnessed and acted out epistemic injustice. Among other things, her claim of knowledge as an art was repeatedly questioned despite her commission by an institution.<sup>10</sup> Toopeekoff connects this self-observation with discourses from epistemology and critical art mediation. Social aspects and institutional hierarchies play just as central a role as the economic, social, or racialized markers of those involved.

While critical art mediation often aims to address as precisely as possible, comment on discourses, deconstruct narratives, and at the same time, use artistic

strategies, the tendency of storytelling focuses on individual and unproven experiences. With her text *Subjects Imputed to Ignorance. Some reflections on art mediation as a service*, **Nora Sternfeld** takes as her point of departure a moment of confusion that arose when a "talking

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Especially since this situation was itself secured by multiple privileges – European background, white, educated, linguistically sophisticated.

back" (hooks 1989) postfactualized against the canon. She points out that despite postfactual strategies and possibilities, there is a responsibility to understand speaking as an act of struggling for justice, including making transparent which stories are factually told – and which are not.

### C) Responsibility and fragile encounters

The pandemic turned everyone and everything upside down from one day to the next. **soppa/bleck** (Laura Bleck, Josefine Soppa) lived the weeks and months of limited opportunities of physical encounters amid implementing their project. The settings of exuberant, hybrid gatherings in cozy rooms that combined fragile and critical issues with theory reading and experimental exercises could not take place. Instead, the project *We can't go back to normal* emerged. It stands for the duo's effort to work on two thematic complexes at once: In addition to being highly sensitive to the social and political challenges of a status of "pandemic = being unwillingly frozen", soppa/bleck understand the call, coined in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement, as an appeal that *normality* is no longer conceivable in Germany after the racist attack in Hanau in February 2020.

But what was the "normal" before that we can't return to? Who is meant by "we"? What concept of "normal" do institutions and art mediators base their work on, and how should we deal with a "new normal"?

**soppa/bleck**, actually specialized in digital art mediation, dedicated themselves to the present in the year 2020 with a lively analogue setting of encounter and thus formulated an answer to the impossibility of gathering indoors without endangering oneself. They took their responsibility as cultural workers and art mediators seriously, created an image for the complications and, beyond that, made a topic of what was omnipresent with the ubiquitous situation around Covid, including in the park of Wolfsburg Castle. In her contribution on responsibility and art mediation, **Silke Ballath** develops a starting point of currently frequently used terms such as "participation" and "collaboration" which are more complex than the common project descriptions or funding criteria suggest – also with regard to postcolonial perspectives that fundamentally change art mediating actions – and thus condition the attitude of art mediators.

### Unlearning negotiations

What exactly art mediation is and how it can be taught in the sense of a curriculum cannot be conclusively named even after three years of the *Volkswagen*

*Group Fellowship* for Art Mediation and the accompanying research, and this may remain so in the future. For what constitutes art mediation is above all the negotiation of its conditions and its mission – the discourse about what exactly it is, where it takes place, how it understands itself. Critical art mediation continuously questions itself before the overriding social interest of its actions. Thus, it offers us as participants more possibilities than rules, more unsolved problems (cf. Baecker/Kluge 2003) and contradictions (cf. Henschel 2020: 120 ff.) and has, in the best sense, unpredictable dynamics. Accordingly, we have understood the work on the conception and monitoring of the fellowships as cultivating discourse and moderating exchange and collegial cooperation despite uncertainties and open-endedness in the sense of questioning and describing the field.

For us as research-based art educators and teachers, the fellowship is an important opportunity for the negotiation of the strategies, concepts, and conditions of the field. It enables responsible support for early-career professionals to engage in critical exchange with one another, to engage with, and to care for the social, ecological, material, and as well as the political landscape.

We formulate our findings from this work on the following double page spread (pp. 26–27).

#### WHAT'S NEXT?

What can be concluded from these investigations between practice and theory building on the three Volkswagen Group Fellowship fellowships? What certainties can be unlearned through the observations, demands and manifestations? Where should the work on and with art mediation go?

This publication is an invitation to continue the practice and theory of art mediation. It begins with the transparency of our own positions, lays out practices and strategies, and makes suggestions for concrete situations. In doing so, we know that the term “art mediator” is not unproblematic and that it always needs positioning to be used. Should it be understood politically as a demand to local politicians? Or to drive negotiations in the field? Or to develop collegial methods and practices? What is certain is that art mediators move in the present, with the present and in present discourses and encounter them in a situational way. Especially in these times, there is a need for players who are aware of their responsibilities and the contexts of their work, or who are becoming more aware of them. With this contribution we would like to encourage you to do so.

# TEN THESES ON CONTEMPORARY ART MEDIATION.

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## 1. ART MEDIATION IS POLITICAL, ALWAYS!

Even if political contexts are not explicitly negotiated within a format of art mediation, art mediation works in political contexts by confirming hierarchies and narratives, questioning them or even setting them in motion, i.e. transforming them. Art mediation can make access possible or impossible. It can transport a canon, to question it, to comment on it, as well as to shape something new.

## 2. ART MEDIATION IS A CONTACT ZONE

This concerns both its practice as a space of opportunity and its theorization as a site of education, which has its history(s). These must be understood as made, contested, and thus changeable (cf. Sternfeld 2013: 134). If art mediation, in the words of Mary Louise Pratt, is a contact zone (cf. Pratt 1991: 33), then its discourses, agents, and strategies are up for negotiation in which nothing is certain except the framework of the encounter itself.

## 3. ART MEDIATORS WORK AS TRANS-DISCIPLINARY CROSS-BORDER COMMUTERS

They curate, they research, they investigate, they are technicians, experts of educational processes with art, they are copywriters, learners, teachers, hackers, freelancers, artistic agents, they draw knowledge and ways of operating from art, art history,

pedagogy, social work, ecology, criticism of racism as well as from design and administrative processes and negotiate with a variety of stakeholders. They negotiate with different stakeholders, are organized in collaborations and collectives, and are often left to their own devices. This list could be extended, depending on the concrete project. This explains why art mediation cannot always be defined clearly. It describes the potential that "savoir-pouvoir" (Spivak 1993:34; Sternfeld 2009: 28) of art mediators who understand the skill of opening spaces in which something becomes possible and which do not yet exist in this way. They are urgently needed.

## 4. THE TOOLS OF ART MEDIATORS ARE MANIFOLD

They are adapted, retold, learned, exchanged, varied, rein-vented, re-enacted. There is no one method or set of methods for art mediation (not even for the teaching of art in schools). Rather, it is a matter of creating a situation, of planning it, reacting to it, and reflecting on it. The necessity to create choreographies through impulses and contexts sometimes succeeds and sometimes does not. Because some tools will not be able to deconstruct the hierarchies in which they are located (cf. Lourde 1984/2007:7). On the other hand, however, a shift can also take place within a system which in turn requires entirely new and

situation-specific tools. For inspiration on what such tools might look like, we recommend, for example, publications such as *Documenta 12 education I & II* (2009), *Dating the Chorus* (2017), and *Teaching for people who prefer not to teach* (2017).<sup>11</sup>

#### 5. ART MEDIATION MUST BE INDEPENDENT AND BE ABLE TO RELY ON FUNDING

Without independent organization and financing it will just be a service reproducing content and hierarchies. It will just be a hobby for the privileged enthusiast. Becoming organized together is the first important step in securing good working conditions in an uncertain environment.<sup>12</sup>

#### 6. ART MEDIATION NEEDS A CONTRACT, BUT

it must not be obliged to reproduce the content of the commissioning party.

#### 7. ART MEDIATION NEEDS TIME

There is nothing more to say.

#### 8. ART MEDIATION NEEDS ITS OWN SPACE

That should go without saying.

#### 9. ART MEDIATORS ACT FROM WITHIN THE MIDDLE

They create ephemeral spaces of education that change, transform, allow for doubt, moderate and, if necessary, nourish themselves through the reflective, inquiring gaze of the players. Art mediators therefore act in a researching and formative way. By acting, they inform theory and are theoretically informed.

#### 10. AND FOR SAFETY'S SAKE: ART MEDIATION IS NOT EDUCATION

Art mediation does not make anyone a better citizen. Art mediation enables experiences that can also have social and political consequences, but it does not have to.

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*education. II, Between critical practice and visitor services: results of a research project*. Berlin, Diaphanes; Ayşe Güleç/Claudia Hummel/Sonja Parzefall/Ulrich Schötter/Wanda Wiczorek (2009): *documenta 12 Education 1: Engaging Audiences, Opening Institutions Methods and Strategies in Gallery Education at documenta 12*. Berlin, Diaphanes.

\_\_\_\_ 12

See <https://doc14workers.wordpress.com/> [09.05.2022].

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— ELKE KRASNY

THE RE-  
PRODUCTION-  
QUESTION:  
ART MEDIATION,  
CARE AND  
QUESTIONS  
OF CARE.

CARE IS  
ALWAYS PRESENT,  
RARELY VISIBLE,  
ALWAYS  
REQUIRING  
SOMETHING  
FROM US.

JOAN TRONTO

It is Saturday, February 6, 2016. A woman is at work. She is cleaning in the museum. She is cleaning the museum. She is wearing a work coat, a uniform, like cleaners wear during their working hours. She is pushing a cleaning cart that contains all the utensils she needs to do her job. She cleans off the dirt from the floor of the museum that visitors bring into the museum on the soles of their shoes and leave behind with their footsteps. Later, the woman will say that no one saw her. She will realize that she has not been recognized. Her friends, even members of her family, will not have noticed her. It is as if her work has made her invisible. It is as if her work were to blame for her not existing in the eyes of those moving through the museum, in the perception of the public of the museum. Her work makes her disappear. The public gaze is so culturally trained and socially attuned that it overlooks those who clean, care for, and keep the world clean. They are not there.

It is Saturday, February 6, 2016. The woman cleaning is in the Stedelijkmuseum, founded by a group of private citizens in 1875, who, under the leadership of the

banker and art collector C.P. van Eeghen, took the initiative and provided funds and works from their private collections, thus ensuring that a new museum building was opened in 1895, also for modern art. She is in the process of making art. She is doing a performance. Her name is Patricia Kaersenhout. She is a visual artist, activist, womanist.<sup>1</sup> She is Dutch whose parents came to the Netherlands from Suriname. In art historical terms, her performance can be understood as part of a genealogy of artistic engagements with issues of reproductive labor, also referred to by terms such as care work or invisible labor, in which Kaersenhout refers directly to a work by Mierle Ukeles Laederman that has achieved iconic status in the feminist art canon and was performed by the artist with the title *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance – Outside and Inside* at the Wardsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut in 1973.

The following reflections on reproduction and reproductive work are based on my understanding of art mediation which considers art as a starting point to think about and unfold existential questions, political, economic as well as cultural dimensions of these questions raised by artistic works. The term *Sorge* (engl. care) is ambiguous in German. This text is written with this ambiguity in mind. On the one hand, *Sorgearbeit* (care work) is used to talk about those activities that are also captured by the term reproductive labor, which in turn covers the larger territory of reproduction in biological and ecological terms, but also in technological or artificial terms, the original as distinct from the reproduction. Care leads to anxiety, to restlessness, to worrying, to being in a state of worry. I share with many feminists a concern for care and care work. The way in which our societies can currently ensure that everyone is taken care of is determined by deep crises, economic, political, but also mental, ethical, spiritual, moral crises. Care is in crisis. Ensuring that everyone can be taken care of is a challenge on many levels in terms of politics, economics, government, administration, policy, and law. Here, the notion of “caring for something” takes on a large-scale meaning that goes beyond, and at the same time profoundly affects, the dimension of the work of daily caring and enabling it so that everyone is cared for in the best possible way. How this caring is determined politically and economically determines how everyone is cared for.

\_\_\_ 1

The term ‘Womanist’, which Kaersenhout has chosen as a self-designation, goes back to Alice Walker. Womanism refers to the feminist movement of women of color (cf. Philipps 2007).

In accordance with this perspective, I am not concerned in the following with an art-historical classification of Patricia Kaersenhout’s performance, with an examination of institutional critique of the museum, with questions

of what can become artistic material, technique, method – such as the cleaning agents here – and also not with a reappraisal of visual and performative genealogies within art. These genealogies always pose the question of the original and thus of originality, and could therefore lead to the conflict between original and reproduction on many levels on the basis of this work. Rather, I am interested in showing how one can think of and with art in order to feel these concerns, speak about these concerns to which the uncertain conditions and the politically painful situation of reproductive work and care work fundamentally gives rise.

To begin thinking about Patricia Kaersenhout's performance, I will start from the floor, the floor and its contamination. Every floor in every museum in the world must always be cleaned from dirt. The floors are restored as clean through the work of cleaning. Reproduction is literally the restoration. Through this work of restoring cleanliness, the floors then look as if they were never dirty, they are preserved in their condition and can continue to exist. This ultimately has to do with the continued existence of the museum itself which must be preserved and maintained so that the objects for which museums have a duty of care have an environment in which they can continue to exist and be viewed in museum spaces that are open to the public. Restoration, preservation, continued existence, continuance are central dimensions of reproduction. In a general definition of reproduction, the dimensions are applicable to living beings, to nature that is not considered living, such as rocks or bodies of water, to objects on all scales from small objects to buildings and infrastructures, and to technologies. These dimensions also apply to other aspects of human existence, such as cultural, spiritual, religious, epistemic, legal and political, which determine social being, the coexistence of people with their world. Reproduction must therefore be understood in ecological, economic, social, and cultural contexts, all of which depend on the historically specific conditions that determine the attitudes to and realities of reproduction through the politics of everyday life as well as politics in general. Without reproduction, biological species are threatened with extinction. Without reproduction, relationships and relations, social, technological, and ecological co-existence ceases to function.

If we want to grasp analytically why the artist Patricia Kaersenhout becomes invisible during her performance *The Clean Up Woman* and why this kind of work robs people of their presence in the eyes of others, makes them disappear, then it is essential for the analysis to ask the central question of which view of people and the world has led to the formation of the political and economic conditions that generally make reproductive labor invisible. Although *The Clean*

*Up Woman* specifically presents the tasks of cleaning and tidying thus revealing an area of reproductive labor. This labor is profoundly determined by structures of exploitation under capitalism and is often performed by people. Since the possibilities of existence and biographies are often shaped by globalized feminization and ethnification of reproductive work, by migration for economic and political reasons, and by the legacy of imperial-colonial-patriarchal modern capitalism, I understand the performance as showing the regime under which reproduction takes place and suffers.

Today's crisis of reproduction is causing the disappearance of those who carry it out. This disappearance must be fully understood, not only on the level of the visual, but on all levels of political, economic, social and cultural existence. What is made to disappear is not only the exploitation and disregard of the lives lived of the individual people who are exposed to the conditions of being made invisible. Rather, it is necessary to understand analytically and politically that the violence that underlies this invisibility is itself made invisible and thus increases to an extreme because it becomes imperceptible, and no one demands change.

The entire complex of reproduction is put into the proverbial state of being out of sight, out of mind by this violent action of making it disappear. This violence of making reproduction disappear can look back on long traditions in the history of Western forms of organization of politics and economics.

In the genealogy of the Western history of ideas, especially in the two areas of political philosophy and the theory of the state, closely linked in the thinking of the ancient Greek world, since Aristotle the so-called private, which we can also grasp through the notion of reproduction, although not fully, but certainly in essential parts, is considered on the one hand, as a prerequisite for participation in public and political life, and on the other, a potential threat. Only those who were not weighed down by this work and were not entangled in the physical toils of the realities of these activities of rebuilding human life from day to day were free for political life. This means that there was a class of people who had to do this work for others, so that they could freely determine the political decisions of living together in the Polis (the city). The oikos, the household, which included domestic coexistence, but also the agricultural production of animal husbandry and planting food, had to be done by women, by slaves, by paid workers who produced all that which made free for the political, which ultimately meant that the conditions of the oikos did not form part of politics.

If the conception and the history of ideas had been different, then it could also have been the case that precisely only those who knew about what the conditions for human coexistence with the world of the oikos meant and how these directly affected the bodies, their being, their possibilities of existence, were allowed to engage in politics. Then, a political history of thought could have developed that put reproduction in the center and did not make it disappear. Especially in the political tradition of the separation of the private and the political by Hanna Arendt in her main work *The Human Condition*, published in English in 1958 and published in her own translation in German in 1960 with the title *Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben*, this separation became essential for the theoretical comprehension of political action which causally presupposes a public space of appearance and at the same time constitutes and produces it through physical co-presence. The modern museum, which was one of the new institutions of the late eighteenth century and, as through libraries or theaters, the nation states' organization of the public sphere is shown through participation in culture. The culture of these nation states, shaped by imperialism and colonialism, can now be understood as a culturalized space in which the politics of the private and public, the politics of appearance spaces are shown through collected objects and artistic works. Viewed in this way, *The Clean Up Woman* shows what the museum, representing hegemonic logics, has always condemned to invisibility. Reproduction – and this includes the reproduction of the museum itself – as unworthy of appearance. The current rediscovery of the person behind the figure of the black servant, who in real life went by the name of Laure, in the iconic painting *Olympia* by Manet in the exhibition curated by Denise Murrell, *Le modèle noir: De Géricault à Matisse*, shown at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris in 2019. The exhibition explored the significance of her presence in those works associated with female servants in the modern metropolis of Paris at the time, and is one indication of many, that the history of reproduction that has been stored and handed down in the visual arts and has been made to disappear, can be revealed and made accessible again through critical art mediators.

Historically not only political philosophy and state theory have been concerned with the separation of the private and the public, but also economic theory, in particular the political economy presented by Engels and Marx which allows the private and the public to be grasped under the structure of reproduction and production. This is essential for feminist activism, which not only points out this separation, but also attempts to change it.

Feminist activists in the context of the second women's movement, especially the *Wages for Housework* groups active in Italy, Germany, Canada, and the United States, developed a perspective of political economy in relation to this separation that is still decisive today. Based on Marxist theory and at the same time in contradiction to the androcentric view of the left on housework which is assigned to the private sphere.

Reproduction is a prerequisite for life and survival. Without continuous reproduction the human species ceases to exist, this concerns social reproduction and biological reproduction with all the conditions of the possibilities that have to be present for this. Therefore, as humans, as part of the so-called human species, we cannot choose to reproduce or not. We are never free from the requirements of reproduction, but are causally dependent on it for our life and our continued existence, as individual living beings and as a species in coexistence with other species. Reproduction is crucial for life. Many feminist theorists who have dealt with the democratic-political dimensions of reproduction under the term care, such as Joan Tronto, or philosophers such as Judith Butler, who have dealt centrally with the existential dimensions of vulnerability and precariousness in their reflections on the ethics of coexistence, have pointed out that this dependency on reproduction and, consequently, interdependency are inescapably necessary and must be understood as existential. This is part of the human condition. What humans can determine, fix, influence, decide, change, is how politically, economically, socially, culturally, epistemically, ecologically the conditions of reproduction are taken care of. Consequently, reproduction in the contexts influenced and permeated by human life and influence is always produced, co-determined by humans and made by humans. The essential has decisive influence on what is captured by the term essentialization. Not all have been held equally responsible historically for what is essential. Those who have been assigned responsibility for it by Western hegemonic social structures, by political and economic norms that determine coexistence, have been essentialized on the basis of their gender as well as their ethnicity, and have been declared responsible for reproduction qua their nature, are fully affected by the violence of being made to disappear. Those who have to take care of reproductive work, of caring, are particularly threatened by being structurally exposed to the precarious and not being able to take good care of themselves and their loved ones and neighbors. Caring has not been well taken care of politically and economically since the imposition of capitalist principles of exploitation and extraction.

Our present is marked by the long-lasting effects of this expulsion of care-bearing labor from politics. Today, there is a growing understanding that reproduction cannot be conceived exclusively as social, but that the ecological, material and social are deeply intertwined, not only on the level of bodies and their living conditions, but also on the level of cultural life practices. Therefore, one could speak of eco-material-social reproduction in a broader sense. In this context, the museum is a place of exemplary interest. On the one hand, the museum is seen as a modern institution in which new rituals of citizenship are practiced and tested, as the feminist-materialist art historian Carol Duncan argued in her 1991 essay *Art Museums and the Rituals of Citizenship*. What this meant for all those who were excluded from the status of citizenship, and who, as is well known, are those who in the vast majority of cases have to take responsibility for and care for the tasks of reproductive labor which I argued in my 2017 book *Citizenship and the Museum: On Feminist Acts*. In the context of analyzing the violent invisibility of reproductive labor and, by extension, the conditions of this labor in the museum, it is equally essential to understand the museum as an institution of that epoch that, since 2019, has been officially considered a new geological time period under the name Anthropocene, denoting the epoch in which, due to industrialization, the process began that has led to the present catastrophic state of climate change and destruction. We can understand this catastrophic state of the planet from the point of view of reproduction as a state in which the capacities for ecological, material, but also social reproduction cannot regenerate, the conditions for keeping alive through reproduction are threatened by the sixth mass extinction, and the possibilities of reproduction are currently under even more enormous pressure due to the new Covid-19 virus, declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020.

Reproduction makes history. This means that the conditions for possible continuity, survival and restoration are, in principle, necessary for the existence of what we call history, the continued existence of human life. History makes reproduction. This means that the conditions for the possible continuation and restoration of life and survival are made and determined by human beings.



To care, to be cared for, to care in a different way for care – this is the challenge of our present time which also arises in critical art mediation. Its potential lies in thinking about and revealing the causes of the violence of invisibility, based on and with works such as *The Clean Up Woman*, and in imagining how the potential of art can be used to make another way of caring imaginable. Only when reproduction becomes imaginable in a different way, will it be possible to care for caregiving in a different way.

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— CARE LESS

TRAINING  
PROGRAM FOR  
SUPPORTED  
ART VIEWING.

WE THINK THAT  
THE OBSERVERS  
IN THE ARTS  
COULD TAKE  
MORE “CARE”  
BUT COULD ALSO  
WORRY “LESS”  
ABOUT IF THEY  
ARE DOING THE  
“RIGHT” THING.

#### CARE LESS

Based on the observation that different mechanisms of exclusion take place in museums, a group of people came together to experimentally perform in art exhibitions with *CARE LESS – Training Program for Supported Art Viewing*.

The experimental arrangement makes use of different elements such as *LARP – Live Action Role Play*, wellness, a collective experience and learning method, and supported exhibition visits. In the performance, the “method school” *CARE LESS* asserts, performs and affirms itself as a company that promises to view art with individual support and in a new way by questioning an individual’s viewing routines.

## CARE LESS

The actual practice can be described as a speculative process, opening up a space of action to investigate the possible limitations of art institutions and viewing habits. CARE LESS looks at the rules and systems of exhibition spaces as well as at the viewers themselves. Some people live with the phenomenon of cultivating isolation mechanisms from an artistic moment as a result of their own specialized and professional approach to discovering and accessing art in their profession. However, nowadays there are many more who deal with art and regularly reach their limits. Some are overwhelmed by too much information and become disoriented. Others do not even pick up the central theme. CARE LESS would like to individually address these and other concerns.

CARE LESS was developed in 2015 by Paula Mierzowsky as a final project of her free art studies with Mathilde ter Heijne at the Kunsthochschule Kassel. Together with Norgard Kröger, Annika Nesheim, Kai Bannert, Henrik Seidel and Charlotte Hermann, a collective was formed that hosted many more members and temporary co-performers during its three-year intensive working phase.

What follows is a collection of reflections, quotes, and suggestions for CARE LESS methods that emerged during the one-year *Volkswagen Group Fellowship* 2017-18.

### **GET LOST, GET INSPIRED, GET ACTIVE!**

Enjoying art is like real life: People vacillate between boreout and burnout. On the verge of nervous breakdown and capitulation. The cure, it is murmured, is being in the right flow (i.e. being in the situation of forgetting everything around you). But achieving this is easier said than done.

In a protected setting, we expose ourselves in "Stress Art Perception Manner" to an excess and thus a multitude of impressions that can be compared to the endless swiping through media channels and timelines – and act as burnout realizers. Or we create so-called BOREOUT-islands for overstimulated art colleagues. CARE LESS works in practical research and carries out speculative self- and external tests. We accompany extreme situations in order to provide a protective space. With our form of Artistic Perception and Art Viewing we also address individual Art Issues – e.g. fears or dislikes, possible overwhelming demands – of the visitors. We care about our fellow human beings and their outbursts and prevarications. Not everyone is capable of coping with the current overload of art enjoyment.

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# THE ENGAGEMENT WITH ART IS ROOTED IN A CERTAIN BELIEF.

CARE LESS

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## The nut. Little pick-me-up for your pants pocket

EXPERIENCE HOW THE NUT FEELS IN THE POCKET OF YOUR PANTS AND HOW ITS POWER FLOWS INTO YOUR HAND AND HEART. AN INSIDE STRENGTHENING AND LIBERATION. EXPERIENCE HELP AND GUIDANCE. PASS IT ON. GIVE SOMETHING TO THE WORLD TO FEEL. RELEASE YOUR OWN EMOTIONS. WITHOUT JUDGEMENT - WITHOUT SHAME AND ADJUSTMENT. UNCOVER TOGETHER WHO HAS WHICH PATTERNS AND FOLLOWS WHICH RULES. SEE TOGETHER IF THEY ARE AUTHENTIC. LET YOURSELF FALL INTO YOUR OWN DESIRE AND TRUTHFULNESS. WITHOUT RESPECT FOR THE NEEDS OF OTHERS. LEAVE THE PATH.

CARE LESS, Ode to the Louvre in Abu Dhabi

---

I FEEL AS IF I FORGET EVERYTHING AND CAN NO LONGER REMEMBER THE REALLY TOUCHING MOMENTS AND CAN NO LONGER OR ONLY VERY SELDOMLY RECALL THE UNREFLECTED ENJOYMENT, IMMERSION, AMAZEMENT AND EXPERIENCE.

A CARE LESS participant



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Fig.1 The nut-Method

## THE WHITE WALL - IN-TEAM RESEARCH

### **Punish yourself for new experiences**

Many people go to museums because they are looking for something. In the past, this something was sought more in churches than in museums. The sacred, the aura, the answer to all questions. Has the museum today become a place of contemplation? A quiet place where one can deal with one's own philosophical questions? Exhibitions are not visited by many visitors. But the visitors who do come are constantly monitored. Mostly so that they don't touch the artworks. The auratic objects, the fetish objects of the art world. Guarded as if they are the most sacred and precious.

*Yes, and then I sat there. On this work of art. I was told by the guards of the artwork that I was allowed to sit on the first row of the artwork, the back rows were too dangerous. So I sat there. On a tribune. Watched by two surveillance cameras and looked at the white wall opposite. There was nothing else to see from the point where I was. I set myself the task of remaining motionless until I really couldn't stand it any longer and then moved onto the next seat. A relatively small movement.*

*So I sat. Alone with my thoughts. The three visitors who entered the room during the 45 minutes thought I was part of the artwork since they were conditioned not to touch any artwork, let alone sit on it. Because sitting on a work of art somehow borders on blasphemy, doesn't it?*

*Yes, and then my body. It calmed me to touch the wood on which the seats were mounted. I felt pushed back to my body and my discipline. Self-restrained into finding out something about myself and about the artwork.*

## A KNOWING EXPERT-METHODE

### **Experience expertise**

Method: Go to an exhibition with a group, isolate yourself for half an hour, do this exercise and then rejoin the group and reward them with a speech.

Become knowledgeable. You've read everything about everyone in the art world and every piece of art, and you just know how art works. You know last season's best-selling artwork, you know where the money really comes from and what it takes to make a good piece of art. You know where things stand.

---

THE WORK OF ART IS A TABOOED MYSTERY, IN SOME CASES IT EVEN BECOMES A SANCTUARY WHICH ONLY GAINS IN VALUE AND POWER AND MYSTERY WHEN THE TABOO RITUALS MULTIPLY. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN IT IS DE-TABOOED? IS IT DISCREDITED, DESPISED?

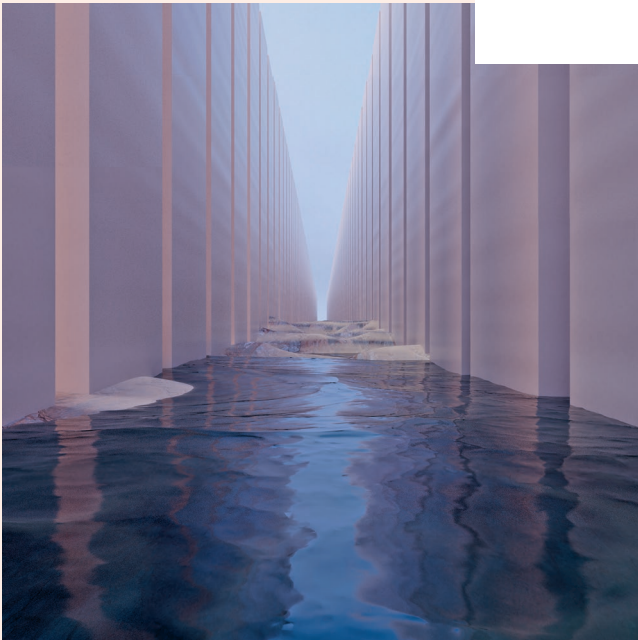
CARE LESS freely adapted from Tabu und Totem, Sigmund Freud

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**Water between white walls**

LET YOURSELF JOIN A SLOW FLOW OF THINGS THROUGH THE WHITE HALLS OF THE NOBLEST ART INSTITUTIONS. WATER IS MYSTERY AND ENERGY.

CARE LESS, Ode to the Louvre in Abu Dhabi



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MINIMIZE YOUR EXPERIENCE TO MAKE IT WORTH, TO HAVE A REAL BONDING MOMENT WITH THE ART, THE OBJECT, THE EXPERIENCE.

CARE LESS, The Minimal Experience

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Fig.2 Water between white walls



## CARE LESS

Every once in a while you get involved with a Duchamp masterpiece. What interests you at the moment? You have this special interest in new Haitian voodoo art and you participate in via Skype sessions. You're a trendsetter and you're the one who decides what's going to be the next new thing and what's not. Now look around and see who shares your level of knowledge and expertise in this room. If you can't spot an equal or higher-level expert, you can feel very good about yourself. Now apply your knowledge to today's exhibition. Take about 20 minutes to do this. Then spend another 20 minutes in the entrance area, where you can have a coffee and chat a bit with the attendants. Feel at ease. You enjoy the grandeur of the historic building. You immediately recognize two of the catalogs lying on the presentation furniture and flip through them a bit. Were you a co-editor of the catalog or a supporter of the artist discussed there? Tell someone in the room a few details about the artist.

Now you want to give a speech about your experience to your group. Draw a connection between what you have seen and the Renaissance. Draw your own conclusions about which tendencies can be expected in future art movements. Support your reflections with attitudes of different philosophers and art theorists. Give a short recap of your awakening experience which brought you to art. Explain again the nature of art in general. You feel comfortable again with your knowledge and how you can now channel it. You come up with new ideas, you have once again contributed something to the current discourse with your speech.

## SHAPE YOUR OWN METHODS AND TOOLS

In the interaction with people and their problem areas, CARE LESS cultivates an individualized approach. We see people as a new case and try to get to know them on several levels. We select the appropriate methods and tools from those we have developed ourselves and apply them. We see which one works and which ones do not. After some time, we change roles and become more of a guide than a leader. We motivate the individual to become active and discover their own methods and tools.

## GET AWAY FROM LONELINESS! EXPERIENCE TOGETHERNESS!

In CARE LESS, a commercially available walker acts as a mediator between two individuals and art. It opens up an in-between. In this in-between - in this transition - there are many possibilities to try out things that previously seemed impossible. As a mediator between generations, a walker offers access to new

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IN THE LATE MODERN AGE, END-OF-LIFE CARE REQUIRES NEW APPROACHES BASED ON PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY, SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND A COMBINATION OF PROFESSIONAL-INSTITUTIONAL AND CIVIC-VOLUNTARY CARE. A PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARD COMMUNALIZED CARE IS EMERGING. THUS, DYING BECOMES AN ISSUE IN THE DISCUSSION ABOUT THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY. Heller/Wegleitner 2017



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Fig. 3 A knowing expert-method



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Fig. 4 Shape your own methods and tools

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BE THE TRUE YOU,  
TRY TO LIVE THE  
TRUE SELF. YOU ARE  
ALREADY IT.

The meaning of life



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Fig. 5 Experiencing togetherness

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IF YOU ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE PERFECTIONISM, IMAGINE THE PERFECT CIRCLE THAT HAS AN END AND A BEGINNING, AND REALIZE THAT TRUE PERFECTION CAN ONLY EXIST IN THE IMAGINATION.

CARE LESS about self-overestimation as a vehicle to one's imagination and how to apply imagination to current art viewing.

## CARE LESS

perspectives that can be tested through a playful approach. In its original function, it is used and acted upon as a self-empowering tool. However, we do not imitate disability in our use, but look for changing ways of moving (as well as walking very slowly or very fast). in everyday use and strive for collective or shared use and reflection. To confront loneliness as a phenomenon in society and in the viewing of art, we integrated this vehicle. CARE LESS staff members provide a viewing unit together with them and the walker.

### **PUNISH ME FOR NEW EXPERIENCES - IN-TEAM RESEARCH**

*Now it was time again: IN-TEAM research was on the agenda. There were two of us in an exhibition. During our conversation, my colleague asked me how I wanted to explore the exhibition. I said that I would wander around and sometimes read the titles but only wanted to read more about the artworks that really interested me.*

*After that, she gave me the task of looking only at writing in the exhibition and reading everything. At first this was uncomfortable because it was against the way I would have normally moved around the exhibition. Then it became exciting because the texts were interesting and we found two works of art whose genuine component was written language. Grains of rice on which something was written and an LED display panel on which a ticker was running. Reading the LED ticker was confusing and uncomfortable because the content was about the mistreatment of transsexuals and sex workers. Although I didn't want to read any further, I couldn't stop looking at the changing characters on the light board. At some point, the dots of light began to change from red to orange and yellow. The writing blurred in front of my eyes because I got tired, but I could still read it. It was like being in a movie with a violent scene and you close your eyes but you can still hear the sound.*

*I stood in front of another work of art for 15 minutes. It was interesting: since my body didn't wander, my mind did. The artwork was sculptures made of saris hanging over a concrete base, dipped in silicone or something similar. They looked very heavy. Like everything about them wanted to go down. The longer I looked at them, the heavier I felt. The sculptures looked like they were bodies and I felt like my body was the artwork body. I wondered how hard it is to be a woman in India and wear a sari. What goes along with that? What tradition? What rules? Since I have a walking disability, I also wondered how heavy I am. So how heavy my weight is on my joints and wearing them out.*



— Fig. 6 EMERALD

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THE\*FLÂNEUR IS A PERSON WHO LOOKS AND ENJOYS HAPHAZARDLY, WANDERING AROUND. IN DOING SO, HE OR SHE TRIES TO OBSERVE SOCIAL EVENTS. AT THE SAME TIME HE TRIES TO OBSERVE SOCIAL EVENTS. HE OCCUPIES HIMSELF WITH ART AND CULTIVATES HIS ART OF LIVING WHILE WANDERING AROUND.

CARE LESS freely after Georg Simmel

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WHILE EVERYTHING AROUND ME SEEMED TO BE MOVING - THE WORLD WAS ENDING.

CARE LESS employee

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THE REGULAR GALLERY VISITOR CAN CONFRONT THE ARTWORKS WITH THEIR EMOTIONS. FOR THE BIENNIAL VISITOR, THEIR MIND MUST BE SUPER-IMPOSED ON THE FORM OF EMOTION AS A KIND OF PROTECTIVE ORGAN AGAINST THEIR OWN ROOTLESSNESS. BECAUSE THE BIENNIAL-VISITOR REFUSES TO BE LIMITED AND CONSUMED BY THE OVERSUPPLY OF THE ART BUSINESS (THEIR WORKLOAD).

CARE LESS freely after Georg Simmel



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Fig.7 SERIOUS SANITY TRIP

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IN THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF AN EXHIBITION, THERE IS AN OFFER OF ACTION FOR THE BEHAVIOR OF THE SUBJECTS STAYING THERE. THIS FRAME SEDUCES, ENTICES AND FACILITATES THE VIEWING OF ART. IT CAN EXPAND THE POSSIBILITIES OF ACTION, BUT ALSO LIMIT THEM, INCREASE OR DECREASE THEM, FORCE OR PREVENT ACTIONS.

CARE LESS freely after Foucault

*Then my colleague asked me to sit in another room for 15 minutes, facing sideways away from the video being shown there. I was not supposed to look at it directly, but devote myself to the artwork by means of the Fix and Floating method. The attendants – apparently tormented by boredom – were very happy to be able to talk to me. They wanted to know if everything was all right with me since I had not moved for 15 minutes and this was untypical for visitors to the museum. I then readily informed them that we were just doing research on art mediation and art viewing.*

*I found it very relaxing to let my gaze glide over the multi-layered architecture. From my vantage point, I could comfortably view the glass roof with lighting as well as the false ceiling. The sunlight, a seating area in the middle of the room with headphones and tablets, visitors and the attendants moving in concentric circles. I heard the sound of the film I was not allowed to watch which had something to do with the Anthropocene. The sounds and music of the film were very spherical and pleasant, so I sat there and relaxed.*

## **SERIOUS SANITY TRIP (FIELD TRIP)**

### **Sense expansion/see art through another eye**

To explore the boundaries of art and self-awareness, we embarked on a journey.

In the context of one day, one car, and one route, participants participated in an individual and intimate small group journey called *Serious Sanity Trip – A Health Art Game Experience*. They had different expectations of the trip. The group leaders anyway. One of them just wanted to have fun, the other hoped to be saved by an anchor that would pull her out of her personal problem situation, another wanted to learn more and more about art and finally there was the one who just wanted to do their job. The day before, the participants received an introduction where they were assigned a CARE LESS role using body scan, dream travel and other physiomental techniques. These newborn characters participated in the *Serious Sanity Trip* experiment.

They should be given the opportunity to step out of their everyday lives and take on a different perspective in order to immerse themselves more intensively in the respective situation. The radius of action changes. The creative potential thus develops into a more active stance. Then they were at the mercy of the situation for twelve hours and slowly became aware of what was happening: They were to see with different eyes, smell with different noses, feel with different hands, and evaluate with different postures.

## CARE LESS

### ROUTINIZED SEEING

*The routinized, biased seeing has become restricted, even limited, before new insights. This has happened through under-stimulation. You have rested on what you have already seen and feel comfortable being fed the same, digestible things over and over again. This is the least stressful. For example, you're used to certain colors and surfaces. For instance, the first look in the morning. Next time, observe where you look first. Maybe you always look at the same place? Remember what you yourself have seen a hundred times or more. Can you reconstruct what exactly it looks like that you have seen so often? For example, your reflection in the mirror or the coffee machine, maybe the lock of your front door? A certain tree in your street? Try to remember how you have stored this sight.*

Do you remember anything new you've seen lately and how much space the new takes up within the things you've already seen?

The eyes see more than the mind can comprehend. The mind seems to want to see something specific. You have misplaced something. A euro. You search and search and never find it. The trained search relies on a certain method, but you often can't get out of it.

Let's venture a step further today. Together, we also long a little for adventure, for the unseen, the unthought of, the unheard of. For those things that fall off the grid. When was the last time something surprised you or really shook you up? How did you react? If you have trouble or no recollection of this, it's high time to look for these dares. Now you have the opportunity to do so. If you currently notice that you might also be plagued by routine eyes, then we invite you: CARE LESS will be happy to be at your disposal to stimulate and feed you with new impulses. Let's face it: the fresh look is the bold look! So for all the routine eyes out there: dare to look!

### EXCERPT OF METHODS

#### **Second order observation**

The second-order observation refers, on the one hand, to the potential of cribbing, to the copying and implementing of behavior. We can look around and be happy: We are not alone! Other visitors are pushing, walking or sneaking through the same rooms, we are probably looking together. And as I always do in real life, I secretly look at other viewers, how they are viewing. Can I learn from them? By adapting their gestures and posture, the length of time they devote to a work? Does something jump out at me? Copy - implement, copy - implement.





— Fig.8 Routinized seeing

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THE MEDITATIVELY SHADED GAZE,  
DIRECTED INTO THE DISTANCE.  
WADING IN THE FOG AND THE EYE  
SWIMS IN THE EYE SOCKET.

CARE LESS, visual nightcap

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A JOYRIDE IS FUN, A JOYRIDE  
IS BEAUTIFUL! IF YOU ARE  
NOT YOURSELF TODAY,  
YOU WILL SEE BETTER  
TOMORROW!

CARE LESS, Tourguide Motivation Jingles





—— Fig. 9 Second order observation

CARE LESS TEST PICTURE:  
A PRELIMINARY STAGE, A TRAINING  
TOOL. THIS TOOL CAN SERVE  
AS A BLUEPRINT FOR NEW  
STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH  
REAL ARTWORKS. THANKS  
TO THE LOOP IT CAN BE WORN  
COMFORTABLY ON THE BODY  
OR HUNG ON DIFFERENT OBJECTS  
TO SPONTANEOUSLY PROVOKE  
A COMMON EXERCISE. WELL-  
SUITED FOR SMALL GROUPS.



—— Fig. 10 CARE LESS test picture



\_\_\_\_\_ Fig. 12 Fix and Floating, FOFN



\_\_\_\_\_ Fig. 14 First Interview



\_\_\_\_\_ Fig. 13 Connect with others, Serious Sanity Trip



\_\_\_\_\_ Fig. 11 Smell with another nose





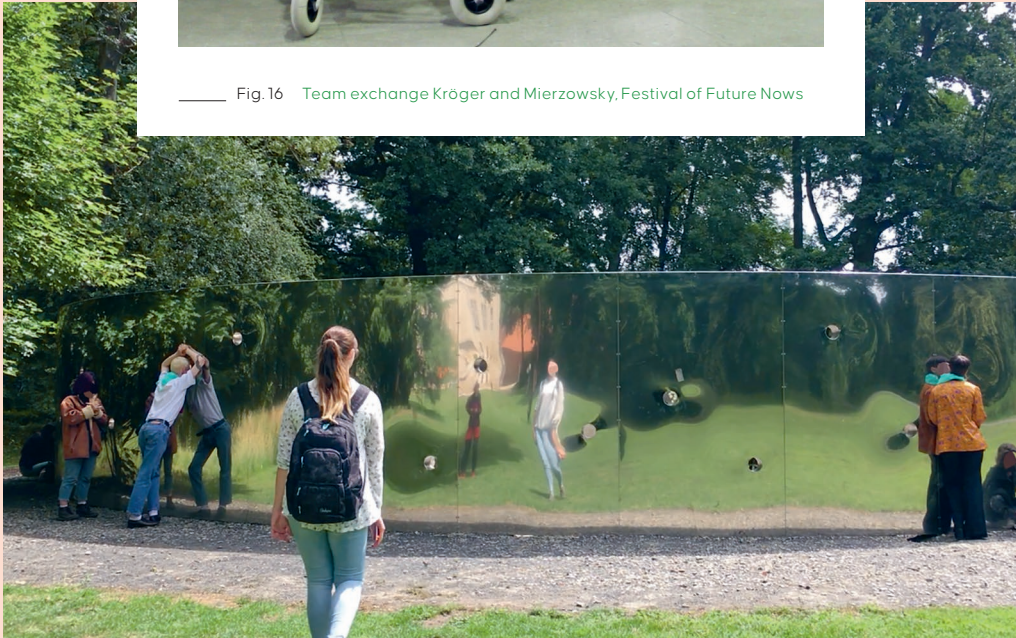
\_\_\_\_\_ Fig. 15 Role finding on the Serious Sanity Trip



\_\_\_\_\_ Fig. 18 Group exercise



\_\_\_\_\_ Fig. 16 Team exchange Kröger and Mierzowsky, Festival of Future Nows



\_\_\_\_\_ Fig. 17 Workshop with students, Wolfsburg

**A CONVERSATION WITH PAULA MIERZOWSKY  
ABOUT THE PRACTICE OF CARE LESS.**

The questions were asked by Mara Ryser (2017) and Gila Kolb (2021)

\_\_\_\_ You are an artist collective that for several years has been developing a training program for supervised art viewing, meaning that you do not make art to be hung on the wall, but rather engage in the reception of art (by others) that is already hanging on the wall (e.g. in a museum). Can you explain your starting point and intention?

**PM** In our approach, especially at the beginning, we first acted as visitors. This meant we were not invited by institutions to work there but we chose an institution or an exhibition and then observed and analyzed how we were accepted there as visitors. Perhaps we are also exposed because every institution usually has its own mediation format and then at some point becomes aware of the fact that we are working there? It was interesting to find out at what point we were actually perceived as disruptive factors by the institution. We then asked ourselves how it could be possible, even as visitors to an institution, to take a certain amount of space that would allow us to approach the exhibition differently.

A performance cannot be bought as a product, the works are ephemeral, fleeting, and perhaps for this reason cannot be purchased by potential art buyers. The realization that behind the idealized, dreamlike world of making art lies a reality of making money, not yet so clear in the safe bubble of art studies made me look for formats in which the art I had made up to that point (installations, participatory performances, etc.) could actually be sustainable in society. I was asked if I wanted to contribute a work for a Kassel art auction. That's when I realized once again that I didn't have that many physically purchasable works available so I tried to come up with something that I could put in the auction. And that's how I came up with the format of participating in the performance.

\_\_\_\_ How do you find out the individual need or interest of a visitor when viewing art in a museum? How exactly do you go about it, how can I imagine it?

**PM** In the introductory talk, the visitors are asked for their self-assessment of their knowledge of art, their interest in art, their good and negative experiences with art, and their exhibition visiting routine. In the course of this, a file of participants was created in which our first suggestions for methods were also noted

## CARE LESS

down. We try to support the visitors or point out to them that they themselves can also help to shape the exhibition. Many of them feel comfortable with this at first. The sessions are then individually adapted to the visitors. A temporary performance space is created in which the assistant and visitor enter to create a mode of discovery and experience with the help of all the senses and various habit-changing interventions.

There are also people for whom you notice relatively quickly that they have a lot planned and want a lot. In this case we are like accessories, we just accompany them a bit and give a few individual impulses. And I find that having a powerful experience of such a hierarchy, in order to then break through it, encourages a different feeling about the situation than if you had realized right from the start that everything is possible, everything is open. Then there is always a two-way process: stabilization – destabilization. We give stability, we set a framework, a narrowed focus, and then we let it go and start again. Then there is either a little stumbling moment or visitors start to find things themselves. This is always a two-step process.

\_\_\_ You use a lot of terms from the health system, where do you see the connection to art and art mediation?

**PM** We asked ourselves where an intimate human interaction can still be found in society? We see this, among other things, in care, in the wellness sector, in the medical field. There, where it is about the human.

The temporary relinquishment of control, feeling taken care of while at the same time empowering oneself, is a moment that we want to create with CARE LESS. To be able to focus on very specific sensory stimuli. When I'm not moving, I can focus more on seeing; when I'm not seeing, I can focus on smelling and feeling. There are research studies in medicine that are based precisely on this principle. We have different perceptions. This is reflected in the core, in the physis, in the very last instance, so to speak.

But the aesthetic and performative analogy to moments from the 'CARE sector' can also evoke unpleasant feelings. It may be that someone associates a negative experience with the fact that things are determined from above and that being cared for has not been experienced. And there is of course a strong hierarchical relationship in which someone has the knowledge and the other is dependent on it. Art institutions are also permeated by hierarchies which can put

the visitor in a powerless situation. We want to make this visible. With CARE LESS there is also a possibility to make people familiar with the topic of protective care and dependency and to understand this as part of everyday life.

\_\_\_ You are dealing with boundaries and interfaces within the CARE LESS sessions. What is a performance for you? A theater play? What references to role-play, psycho-drama, psychological role-therapy and Live Action Roleplays (LARP) does CARE LESS have?

**PM** It is clearly a question: at what point is it performance, at what point is it reality? At the edge of a serious game that develops, to try it out, experience it and see how it is perceived? How is it received? What do people see in it? Or: How can you create a space that is also a serious experience on the one hand, but also a fiction? I have been occupied and fascinated by various formats. Even where it is not so easy to separate which format it is exactly, such as in the film *Idiots* by Lars von Trier or Brody Condon's performance *Level Five*, to give examples.

\_\_\_ And what role do visitors and participants play in this?

**PM** Whether you're just watching the action from a distance, or you're there up close as a participant, or you're already in training after using this service several times, there's a lot of potential to be harnessed in this world.

\_\_\_ What advice would you give to people starting their careers in collectives?

**PM** I think you can learn a lot from other people and their own perspectives. And you can think bigger. If conflicts arise, because they always can, take the time to work through them. Look around at what other collectives have to say after working together for a while. I'm still a fan of working together. After ACAD&C (Agency for Contemporary Artistic Discourse and Collaboration) and CARE LESS, I am now part of a third collective MUDAFI (Mierzowsky and Diel - Agency for Interventions) and a lot of experiences are now flowing into this collaboration.

## CARE LESS

### Credits

Texts by: Paula Mierzowsky, Kerstin Rupprecht \_\_\_\_ Korrektur: Norbert Mierzowsky, Mieke Mierzowsky \_\_\_\_ CARE LESS TEAM: Norgard Kröger, Hannah Lansburgh, Mihan Thorabi, Karoline Achilles, Charlotte Hermann, Annika Nesheim, Tetyana Zolotopupova, Alena Richter, Kerstin Rupprecht, Kai Bannert, Henrik Seidel, Malin Kuth, David Voigt \_\_\_\_ Serious Sanity Trip participants: Christiane Strohbach, Ariella Karatolou, Valeria Abendroth \_\_\_\_ 10 3D-Grafiken: Aljoscha Burtchen/HDGDL \_\_\_\_ Serious Sanity Trip Flyer: Paula Mierzowsky \_\_\_\_ Grafik 2 Hände, Care Less Logo: Jan Mensen \_\_\_\_ Fix and Floating Grafics: Paula Mierzowsky \_\_\_\_ Photos: Wolfsburg Workshop, 2018: Alena Richter \_\_\_\_ Fridericianum Examen 2016: Young Kyun Kim \_\_\_\_ Festival of Future News 2017 → ∞: Kerstin Rupprecht \_\_\_\_ Serious Sanity Trip, 2018: Young Kyun Kim

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\_\_\_\_ KATHARINA KLAPPHECK

HOW TO  
LOOK AT ART  
LIKE A CRIP.

PEOPLE  
WITH DISABILITIES  
ARE DENIED  
ARTISTIC  
EXPRESSION  
AND THIS  
IS NOT A  
CURIOSITY  
OF THE PAST.

KATHARINA KLAPPHECK

I think faster than I write. Under time pressure, my brain sometimes refuses to think at all. My thoughts seem to enter into a battle against neoliberal deadlines, and so all that remains then is a gunk of thoughts. The topics that are really important to me fall by the wayside. Often also the spelling. But, what would this complex world be without employees and strikebreakers to describe me and my environment?

Currently, I am active in so many contexts of art and disability that I have lost count. Upon request, I write on barrier poverty<sup>1</sup> and accessibility. I sit on advisory boards and am the phone prankster for the *abled* public. Therefore, permit me a little introduction of the words I need to describe me and my surroundings. I am *disabled*, *white*, *genderqueer*. I refer to myself as a *Crip*, which I borrow from English. It stands for Krüppel (in German), although Krüppel is also used by people

with disabilities (but never by non-disabled people). People who are not disabled are called *ables*, again using the English word because it sums up something that is still very difficult to grasp in German-language discourse. I would like to elaborate here on the relationship between *crip* and *able*.

The fact that I am allowed and able to play these roles is good and bad at the same time. Something slips through my fingers in the process, and it can hardly be recaptured. What this something could be and why it cannot be pressed into the line specifications and job titles of my institutional work remains a mystery to me. Perhaps it lies in the relationship between art and disability. Perhaps it is structurally conditioned or idealistic, or it is due to my own personal experiences.

The aforementioned something harbors a type of/my politics of speechlessness. Therefore, this text will be about institutions and me, and I would like to proceed in three steps; first, illuminating the exclusion of disability in art, second, outlining *Accessibility* as a bridge between disability and the consideration of art, and third, presenting radically political approaches to *Accessibility* as art.

#### DENIED ACCESS AND CRIPISTEMOLOGY

People with disabilities are denied artistic expression, and this is not a curiosity of the past. Nor is it a supposedly softer power that disciplines or trains people, as Foucault writes in his studies on disciplinary power (cf. Foucault 1993). It is still found in all institutions, including state museums. People with disabilities are shunted off to special schools and kept in workshops. They are allowed to receive art therapy but not to make art. If they do, they display them in places far less prestigious than art museums. They stage inclusion theaters, or they decorate the walls of the homes in which many of us must live. The “WE” here is to be understood as a political ploy. Crips have always been divided. On the one hand, there are those who don’t show it – *the good and productive ones* – and those who are excluded and (have to) live in homes. The “WE” is my hope for a new utopian connection of Crips.

Exclusion of disability is recognized, normalized, and ubiquitous. In doing this, it has an epistemic basis and follows the notion that art depends on abilities to make art and thus excludes disability (Wolbrig 2021). Art historian Tobin Siebers describes this paradigm as inherent in modern art because “low or impaired intelligence

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In contrast to accessibility, the concept of barrier poverty assumes that there will always be barriers in a hierarchically organized society and that there can be no freedom from them, only a reduction.

cannot create art according to this logic, and mental disability represents a complete break with artistic creation" (Siebers 2009: 13) [Translation FP]. Something similar can be seen in the apparent facelessness of disability in that in recent publications, always in the context of disability and art, it is first declared again and again, almost like an invocation that there has always been art by disabled people. Art, it seems, as a cultural practice, always forgets its history and its disabled. Forgetting, however, is here the euphemism for a violent exclusion. These categorical and historical exclusions, however, produce their own epistemic presuppositions and create a body of knowledge that is regularly renewed, but also very physically manifested, by mostly non-disabled artists, curators, directors, and ministry staff. From an abled public, the lack, the omission, is understood as a neutral non-existence of certain people and neatly placed as the last item of the agenda. But for us crips, this is a dangerous fact that makes us second-class people and leaves us without history or subjectivity.

People with disabilities living in care were not eligible to vote until 2019. At the very least, they were considered politically immature. They were denied the right to make their own political decisions. In certain cases, they are still not allowed to marry, to live out their sexuality, let alone to exercise their reproductive rights (which are generally worse in Germany than is assumed), nor are they allowed to accumulate assets.

So how can art as in practice, as aesthetic expression, as politics, as language include precisely these voices? Especially if the state denies them the ability to decide politically, to express themselves or to be represented. There is a paradox! How are the *Crips* supposed to make art if they are fundamentally excluded? The idea of "cripistemology" can help here. The concept, which according to the two disability theorists Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer, is made up of marginalized theoretical traditions such as *queer of color critique* and *queer theory* (cf. Johnson, McRuer 2014: 138). Cripistemology takes into account the exclusion of disability knowledge and the knowledge of disabled people and its roots in hierarchical mechanisms of exclusion; among others, through state sanctions such as being deprived of the right to vote or being prohibited from owning property; at the same time, however, this epistemology is not meant to simply embody a normalization or liberal recognition theory, according to which disabled people only need the same rights as non-disabled people in order to participate in the arts. Rather, exclusion enables an autonomous way of creating worlds that is sensitive to societal inherent power relations because of exclusion. (cf. *ibid.*: 134) Thus, cripistemology points to the necessity and simultaneous local possibility

of creating a utopia. Cripistemology does not interpret disabled people as better people or superior people because disabled people also have internalized power structures and have white as well as male privileges (cf. *ibid.*: 141). Rather, these ways of knowing are meant to lead to a more power-sensitive practice of change. For example, in their reflections at the “Crippling the Arts Symposium”, *disability* theorists Chandler et. al. refer to the utopian potential as part of a larger plot: “cripistemologies invite us to think about disability, and its socio-political and cultural manifestations and subsequent implications, through perspectives of characters not easily legible within the identity-based or nationalist terms that characterize the disability rights movement [...]” (*ibid.*: 172). In this sense, exclusion and the possibility of utopian world-building happen synchronously. The price for a better world is correspondingly high, paid daily by marginalized groups.

With this in mind, disability represents potential. In the further course of this text, I will describe this idea with different concepts of alternative approaches to art and disability.

#### CRIPPING UP

The exclusion of people with disabilities from institutional art is an evolved and historically perpetuating structure that, to make matters worse, found a further decidedly perverse culmination during the Nazi era in Germany. Even today, in 2021, the ideas continue to have an effect. People with disabilities are not able to express themselves or even to participate at all in the sexist, racist and capitalist ordered society. But this does not mean that there are not artistic expressions of disabled people, or that the expression of disability in artistic works does not play a role. Quite the contrary.

This shows another side of the exclusion of disabled people, the so-called *cripping up*. What do I mean by this? The term is relatively new in the German debate about representation, primarily within theater and film, but can also be applied to other forms such as literature or, for example, performance art. One of the first texts on this topic in the German-speaking world was a review by Georg Kasch. In his text *Crippling up – Was problematisch daran ist, wenn Schauspieler ohne Behinderung Rollen mit Behinderung spielen* [Translation FP] (*Crippling up – What is problematic about actors without disabilities playing roles with disabilities*) he explains the consequences of disabled actors not appearing on theater stages. Yet, according to the thesis, disability is a component of literary works and finds its way in again and again, often as a so-called “narrative prosthesis”;

i.e. a characteristic of a character that is expressed through their disability. A prominent example is the portrayal of Anne Hathaway in the film *The Witches* in which she embodies a disabled witch with deformed hands. The disability was meant to represent the uncanny and evil (cf. Zylka 2020).

*Non-disabled* authors obviously created one-dimensional and negative images about disability which do not capture disability in social contexts but as a characteristic of the hero's failings. At the same time, these roles are played by people without disabilities. Disability is distorted and ultimately made into an add-on to non-disabled people. However, people with disabilities do not even find a place on the stages of prestigious theaters. This also means that they are not paid, they are not reviewed or taken seriously in their work. The reality is at least twice as problematic regarding the concept of accessibility. The buildings hardly ever create truly barrier-free environments but leave it at half-hearted attempts to make the auditoriums barrier-free, i.e. equipping the auditorium with access routes. For example, in 2019, for the first time ever, a disabled actor in Austria, Yuria Knoll, obtained her degree. It is extremely difficult for people with disabilities to be artists – regardless of the field.

This absence of crips, as well as the absence of awareness of our needs, consequently leads to a massive invisibilization and further displacement of people with disabilities as artists and contributors in institutional settings.

## BECOMING DISABLED

Now we come to one of the most popular topics between disability and art. Accessibility, or what non-disabled people (want to) understand by it. Mostly, as soon as it comes to disability, the image is conveyed that it is primarily about making art accessible to people with disabilities, bringing it closer to them. In the current debate about accessibility, two premises come to the fore:

- 1) Disability does not exist at all, but only barriers that hinder in the mind/ in societies.
- 2) Accessibility is an individual need.

In the following, I would like to present all three aspects of this very curious statement. One of the absolute favorite mantras of non-disabled people is the sentence: "People are not disabled, they are made disabled." [Translation FP]<sup>2</sup> Behind

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Aktion Mensch's social media campaign #Ortefueralle, online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L66Zz0vixRo>

this is the deeply *ableist* and repellent assumption that disabled is something bad which must not be associated with a person in any way, often accompanied by the insinuation that disability is, after all, socially made, as if people with disabilities do not feel this every day. For example, *Aktion Mensch* recently wrote that there are actually places with disabilities, and once again introduced the old equation “disability equals bad” to a large group of people through a snazzy social media campaign. But even scientists are not immune to this. In a newly published journal explicitly intended for the academic, activist space, Professor of Religious Education, Ulrike Witten, calls disability a negative characteristic of participation. “People are disabled when they are restricted in their opportunities of participation” (Behindert sind Menschen dann, wenn sie in ihren Partizipationsmöglichkeiten beschränkt werden) (Witten 2021: 3) [Translation FP].

Here, the struggle of the disability movement in the German-speaking world is completely suppressed. Since the 1980s, activists have been campaigning for the term “people with disabilities” and “disabled people”. Disability represents a different view of the world which enables those affected to perceive their environment in a certain way, receptive to alternative structures of care work, family affiliation or desire. In this context, disability does not refer to a deficiency per se, but rather, depending on the activist or theoretical interpretation, to social positions, physicality, or relationships with other people. There are also different aspects in the disabled community that make the term complex. For example, in relation to disability and chronic illness, theorists point to the component of pain which does have negative aspects. People with mental disabilities, for example, see the concept of disability as critical to this day and avoid mental disability.

Nevertheless, today in the German-language debate about disability, it is accepted that people use disability for their own benefit. Often, however, this multi-layered debate and the painful arguments associated with it are simply lost in the well-meaning and paternalistic strategies of institutions that are supposed to “take care” of people with disabilities. In the process, dis\*ability disappears as a political self-designation and becomes a regrettable fate that people are supposed to survive or be cured of. The other way round, it would be unimaginable nowadays and fortunately in many societies, for example, to mark and treat, even to frame being a woman as a regrettable fate or a condition to be healed.

At the same time, I ask myself who in our society is actually not disabled and who is allowed to participate at all. Aren't queers, BiPoC and people with low incomes

and without housing just as seriously disabled? Are these characteristics also understood as disabilities?<sup>3</sup>

But social reality and academic discourse are even less congruent on this issue than my examples here convey. In the meantime, even in the German-speaking academic discourse on disability, it has leaked out that disability, no matter in which abbreviated reading, is socially conditioned, just like gender, race and class, by the way, any person who, like me, has already applied for compensation for disadvantages or has wanted to get a disability certificate, knows about the official authorities' refusal to accept reality. Because here all promises of the social conditionality of handicap affirmed by *Aktion Mensch* are of no value. Here, every disabled person fights for themselves (YES!). Doctors have to be visited, lecturers have to be approached, regulations have to be studied and medical services have to be involved. Questions are asked that not even my chosen family knows about me. Disability, when it comes to scarce resources, again becomes an individual struggle that depends heavily on one's own abilities (see Aquino 2018). This commitment to individual effort is then expressed in failed struggles and is reflected in the high unemployment rates of people with disabilities as well as the low number of college-educated people with disabilities. A summation of uncertainty: here, accessibility becomes an individual cost question that no one person can answer alone.

A fitting example of this is the platform of "Kubinaut für kulturelle Bildung" and the online symposium it organized called "Zukunft Personal! Conditions for diverse cultural education". There is no information on the topic of low barriers, only under the point "Special" one learns that there is DGS (German Sign Language).<sup>4</sup> For me (*crip*) this means concretely that I either have to contact people and reveal everything possible about myself or not participate at all. The latter is more economical because there are really more sensible things to do than to struggle with undiscerning people or to give spontaneous free courses. The specificity of DGS reduces disabled people to the position of beggars.

Accessibility is not, as stated in the UN Convention on Human Rights, which Germany has ratified, a right per se. No, accessibility responds to a wide range of physical conditions. Online, also includes barrier poverty, for example, that people announce breaks in lectures, that the possibility of turning off the camera is offered

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See the website of the association "Mensch zuerst - Netzwerk People First Deutschland e.V." [30.08.2021].

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See: <https://www.kubinaut.de/de/termine/zukunft-personal/> [30.08.2021].



or that openings are provided to be able to contribute these and other questions in writing. Writing this in advance in the event announcement can also help people with disabilities to be active participants in the first place and take the needs of disabled people seriously. Yes, to consider them as fundamental for the dialogue.

#### ACCESS INTIMACY

But disability can be so much more than a barrier or an object that *ables* appropriate. Disability can be a utopia and thus a possibility to fundamentally change aesthetic practices and create space for different forms of being. For despite all the attempts of this society to be hostile to people with disabilities, *Crips*, like us, always manage to confront and fight back against this hostility.

An example: the autistic and presumably deaf sculptor Judith Scott, who spent the first 40 years isolated and institutionalized in homes, made thread sculptures in a community and cultural center for people with disabilities, which were shown at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art or at the Berlinale in Venice 2017 (see Art21 2021). This part deals with the ideas and concepts that are without Inspiration Prono. In this context, inspiration prono is the notion of people with disabilities as great heroines simply by virtue of their mere existence. Thus, gallery visits are interpreted as a sign of unconditional courage to face life and the interest in cubism as an escape from disability, all under the motto that man has made it DESPITE disability. Ideas of disabled artists and theorists refer to access and disability as a form of art creation. In the concepts presented here, access represents the central place of making disability visible and also the creative potential of barrier poverty. I would therefore like to present the following ideas in more detail: *Radical Access*, *Access intimacy* and *Access aesthetics*.

All three concepts, *Radical Access*, *Access Intimicy*, and *Acces Aesthetics*, share the premise that access is in itself an artistic practice that transforms the work and erases the boundary between creator and observer. In doing so, artistic practices are altered by these concepts. Artwork and Access are no longer understood as separate from each other, but as belonging together. Access thus becomes a relationship. In this way, the question of accessibility becomes one that requires political practices as an answer, since it refers to social structures. The curator Taraneh Fazeli thus describes the connection between art and access as a process that affects institutions and the understanding of art as such: "Access so to address these problems, institutional action on access must go further and include systemic reform of the art that is commissioned and shown,

reconsider what type of funding is accepted considering the 'strings attached', and change the temporal expectations of production and hierarchical working structures" (Fazeli 2019: 20). In this context, human needs are understood as collective needs, within the concepts I have presented, which are never fought for alone, but always in the community and implemented in social groups (cf. *ibid.*).

*Access intimacy*, according to activist Mia Mingus, describes the connection you feel when people meet your needs. Just as with physical erotic needs, accessing something and being presented with it can create a relationship and generate intimacy. Thus, the relationship to accessibility itself becomes an intimate moment that is not preceded by art but inscribed in it. In this context, the articulation of needs and their fulfillment is a relationship between the respective persons that should not be characterized by hierarchies but by cooperation and egalitarianism. Here the disabled person becomes an active part in the creation of accessibility. At the same time, access is understood as a political practice, which is not only reflected in constructional measures, but also in questions of socio-economic conditions. *Access Intimacy* understands this relationship as an ongoing process that does not end when the disabled person enters the exhibition or experiences the performance; rather, there should be constant communication. Moreover, *Access Intimacy* always refers to collective practices that never address only individuals, but involve communities and their preconditions as collectives.

According to Tobi Scheibert, art itself is thereby dependent on disability; for him, disability has been the premise of aesthetics and modern art. The body that deviates from the norms, according to Scheibert, represents the beautiful (cf. Scheibert 2015). Disability promises movement and transformation, a possibility of temporality that allows one to engage with art. For example, artist Nina Mühleman explores this theme in her performance *Clinic for Critical Care* (2018/2019) and *Criptonite* (2021). In both performances, access needs are used as aesthetic means, such as bilingualism as a dramaturgical device. In the process, says Mühleman, the needs for art change. For example, people do not understand English due to cognitive disability, and at the same time, people who do not speak German need programs that take this into account (cf. Mühleman 2020: 280-283). Access aesthetics are thus always conflicting and not static. They move with the viewers and artists and are never unambiguous. There is no simple resolution of conflicting needs, but always only partial solutions for the moment. The fundamental question remains whether these concepts and ideas can be implemented in state museums and institutions at all?

In his reflections on *Radical Access*, artist Carmen Papalia explains this conflict as follows, citing interweavings with other markers of inequality, such as race: “The museum’s hierarchical structure and its ongoing tradition of cultural violence – such as the numerous examples of museums holding the belongings of various Indigenous communities in collections – wouldn’t allow it” (Papalia 2019: 38). *Radical Access*, as a concept of self-managed and community-supported processuality, opens up a political opportunity. This is central, as here accessibility becomes a question of social justice and transformation, and not just a matter of superficiality. Accessibility thus becomes a possibility of radical politics that, not only critically questions access to art, but also questions the institutions that declare art to be art and mediate access. Perhaps this is where the real potential of disability lies? There is a good chance that strategies of *Radical Access* will open up the possibility of a collective practice of reinterpreting existing political conditions.

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\_\_\_\_ JELENA TOOPEEKOFF

EPISTEMIC  
INJUSTICE AND  
CONTEMPORARY  
ART MEDIATION.

THE LOSS OF  
KNOWLEDGE  
OCCURS WHEN  
THE (INAPPROPRIATE)  
ATTRIBUTION OF  
A CREDIBILITY  
DEFICIT EXCEEDS  
THE THRESHOLD  
FOR A BELIEF  
OR ACCEPTANCE  
OF A STATEMENT.

JELENA TOOPEEKOFF

This paper describes the workshop *Zeitgenössische Kunstvermittlung und soziale Erkenntnistheorie* (Contemporary Art Mediation and Social Epistemology) realized within the framework of the Volkswagen Group Fellowship 2018/19. The workshop aimed to bring together experts from art mediation and philosophy to jointly discuss the occurrence and treatment of epistemic injustice in contemporary art mediation (mediation formats and theories). *Epistemic injustice* is an injustice that occurs or is inflicted upon individuals during testimony. The basic thesis of the event was that epistemic injustice is a phenomenon relevant to the practice of

art mediation as well as to theorizing about contemporary art mediation. For example, with the knowledge of epistemic injustice, mediators can better analyze or actively confront certain situations and conflicts arising in art mediation.

## 1 EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE AT DOCUMENTA 14

The idea of locating epistemic injustice in art mediation emerged from my observations as an art mediator at documenta 14.<sup>1</sup> As a member of the Chorus (art mediator), I took walks (d14's mediation format) with visitors almost every day over the course of 100 days. Previously, within my philosophy studies, I came across the philosopher Miranda Fricker, whose influential book *Epistemic Injustice / Power & Ethics of Knowing* (2007) has put epistemic injustice in the focus of (social) epistemology, especially recently. During my walks, it occurred to me that it could be precisely the phenomenon described by Fricker that happens to different agents in mediation situations.

Fricker distinguishes between two forms of epistemic injustice: **testimonial injustice (TI) and hermeneutic injustice (HI)**.

**Testimonial Injustice** occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word. (Fricker 2007: 1)

**Hermeneutical Injustice** occurs as a consequence of a gap in collective and interpretative resources (terms and concepts). Whereby the individuals or members of a group who are most disadvantaged by the gap are unable to categorize their own experiences and/or communicate intelligibly to others due to the lack of conceptual resources (cf. *ibid.*: 1, 6).

Examples of TI are when the police does not believe a witness because he/she is black (cf. Fricker 2007: 1) or when the suggestions of a young, female, blond manager are not listened to at a business conference (cf. Fricker 2012: 67). According to Fricker, credibility assessments are not an exact science, yet there can be more or less clear misjudgments upwards (credibility access) and downwards (credibility deficit) when assessing the credibility of a speaker (cf. Fricker 2007: 18). The loss of knowledge takes place when the (inappropriate) attribution of a

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documenta is a exhibition of contemporary art that takes place in the city of Kassel, Germany every five years. To describe the history and the influence of the documenta on the international art scene, the art market, and its contribution to the development of groundbreaking exhibition and mediation concepts would far exceed the scope of this article (for this, see: Kolb/Sternfeld 2019).

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### **Testimonial Injustice**

OCCURS WHEN PREJUDICE  
CAUSES A HEARER TO  
GIVE A DEFLATED LEVEL  
OF CREDIBILITY TO A  
SPEAKER'S WORD.

Fricker 2007:1

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### **Hermeneutical Injustice**

OCCURS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF A GAP  
IN COLLECTIVE AND INTERPRETATIVE  
RESOURCES (TERMS AND CONCEPTS),  
WHEREBY THE INDIVIDUALS OR MEMBERS  
OF A GROUP WHO ARE MOST DISAD-  
VANTAGED BY THE GAP ARE UNABLE TO  
CATEGORIZE THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES  
AND/OR COMMUNICATE INTELLIGIBLY  
TO OTHERS DUE TO THE LACK OF CON-  
CEPTUAL RESOURCES

Fricker 2007:1, 6



credibility deficit exceeds the threshold for a belief or acceptance of a statement (cf. *ibid.*: 17). Moreover, TI does not only refer to obvious prejudices (e.g., racism or sexism), but also to cases in which a listener ascribes less credibility to a speaker

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In Fricker's description of the phenomenon, there are not only prejudiced stereotypes; rather, she assumes that stereotypes are a normal and important part of testimonial exchanges, since hearers use them as heuristics in their credibility judgments (cf. Fricker 2007: 16f., 30ff.).

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Of course, there are not only sexist and racist stereotypes, but also many others, e.g. ageist, ableist, classist or further intersectional stereotypes.

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These are also the three examples of hermeneutical gaps Fricker uses to explain HI (cf. *ibid.*: 147ff.).

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Considering that it is only in recent years that #MeToo has focused so much attention on the issue, this is probably true for most societies and times.

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More specifically, Fricker writes: "Let us say that when there is unequal hermeneutical participation with respect to some significant area(s) of social experience, members of the disadvantaged group are hermeneutically marginalized." (Fricker 2007: 153) It is helpful to additionally point out that in Fricker's account of the phenomenon, hermeneutical marginalization is not a static condition because, first, she assumes that individuals have complex social identities, consequently one can be marginalized by belonging to a certain group (woman) but not in another respect (white, affluent educated citizen). Second, she assumes that due to constant socio-social change, social experiences are constantly added which are inevitably not immediately conceptualized (cf. *ibid.*: 152ff.).

due to prejudiced stereotypes. Prejudiced stereotypes do not have to be intentional, i.e., due to beliefs of the judging subject, but rather, according to Fricker, can exert subtle or even surreptitious influence on our credibility judgments in our everyday testimonial practice (cf. *ibid.*: 36ff.).<sup>2</sup> This means that one does not have to be a sexist or racist, but still may not be impervious to sexist, racist stereotypes<sup>3</sup> influencing one's assessment of the credibility of speakers.

Examples of gaps in collective and interpretive resources include *sexual harassment* and *stalking* before they became criminal offenses or *postnatal depression* before it was recognized as a medical condition.<sup>4</sup> As a central case of HI, Fricker describes the sexual harassment of a woman who is not able to explain the assault to herself and/or to communicate it to others in an intelligible way because she lives in a society or at a time in which *sexual harassment* is not understood as a concept or as a fact (cf. Fricker 2007: 6, 149ff.).<sup>5</sup>

However, it is no coincidence that certain individuals or groups are disproportionately disadvantaged by those gaps in collective and interpretive resources. Rather, according to Fricker, the disadvantage is due to the hermeneutic marginalization of those individuals as a condition of HI. To be *hermeneutically marginalized* is to belong to a group of people who do not equally or sufficiently participate in practices in which social meanings are generated (e.g., juridical, political, scientific/academic professions) (cf. Fricker 2007: 152).<sup>6</sup> Hermeneutic marginal-

ization can thus lead to collective understanding (in terms of social scope) being structurally prejudiced, as the (social) experiences of certain members of society are not or insufficiently conceptualized (cf. *ibid.*: 6f.).<sup>7</sup> Interestingly Fricker relates this, not only to terms or concepts, but also to the expressive style of what is said, for example, when certain remarks by women or young people are heard as “irrational” (cf. Fricker 2007: 160, Fricker 2016:19).

During my walks at d14, I thought that it is exactly the phenomena described by Fricker (TI&HI) occurring in mediation situations: Consequently, I asked myself how often I have committed TI, whether it has happened to me personally or how often visitors have not actually communicated something incomprehensible to me, but rather HI has occurred.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.1 Volkswagen Group Fellowship

With the idea of connecting this phenomenon of social epistemology with the field of art mediation, I started the Volkswagen Group Fellowship at the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg in 2018/2019.<sup>9</sup> I assumed that epistemic injustice is an everyday phenomenon, but I wanted to examine whether and to what extent it occurs in the specific context of art mediation, particularly in relation to contemporary methods and theories of critical art mediation.<sup>10</sup>

In the course of the Fellowship, in cooperation with the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg and the advice of the *agency art education*, the project took more and more shape and resulted in a two-day workshop with experts from art mediation and from philosophy/epistemology.<sup>11</sup> In the

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In Fricker’s central example of a woman experiencing sexual harassment, in a time and society that does not have the critical concept, Fricker points to the social-societal background conditions that have hermeneutically marginalized women. That is, women have been prevented from participating equally in practices in which collective social meanings are produced because of the unequal power relations vis-à-vis men (cf. *ibid.*: 152ff.). In the example, sexual harassment did not turn out to be a systematic phenomenon because the entire machinery of collective social meanings was designed to obscure it. This means, among other things, that women struggled to classify their experiences in isolation and/or that more dominant misinterpretations prevailed, such as it was just “harmless flirting” or “unwarranted discomfort due to a lack of humor,” in the case above (cf. *ibid.*: 153).

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The extent to which HI occurs in the context of art mediation will be discussed in more detail in 2.2.

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The project outline in my application was initially much broader, referring to several possible points of reference between epistemology and art mediation. During the fellowship, I decided to focus on epistemic injustice.

— 10

For example, unlearning, the (radical) democratization of the museum, and the deconstructive and transformative discourses of art mediation, to name a few. Carmen Mörsch names the criteria for critical art mediation in her essay *Am Kreuzungspunkt von vier Diskursen* (cf. Mörsch 2015: 236f.).

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For the suggestion to create a workshop, I would like to thank Linus Lutz, who also participated in the CAMSE workshop.

beginning of the planning of the project, it was my intention to discuss more topics and theories of (social) epistemology in the workshop, the reason why I chose the title Contemporary Art Mediation and Social Epistemology (short: CAMSE-Workshop) for the event.<sup>12</sup> The conception was based on my *prima facie* assumption that epistemic injustice could be a phenomenon relevant to the practice and theorization of art mediation, and I wanted to discuss this idea together with experts from both fields and make it available to contemporary discourses on pedagogy and mediation. Parallel to the conception of the workshop, an exchange with various groups of visitors of the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg took place.

In order to get an impression of the expectations of art mediation on the part of visitors of the Städtische Galerie, I worked with two resonance groups: A group of preschool children art researchers of the AWO Kindergarten Centre and different groups of visitors of the Galerie. The latter either received questionnaires or reflected on my project and the contents of the CAMSE workshop in informal conversations with me. Without any claim to empirically meaningful data, it became apparent in both resonance groups that there are certain expectations regarding the authorized speaker position in art education situations. Following are just a few of the questions and answers from visitors to the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg as examples. To the question: "How should a guided tour or a comparable format proceed so that your expectations of the mediation service are fulfilled?" the visitors responded: "I would like to have information about the artist!"; "Of course, in such a way that I understand the meaning"; "I expect from the Guide, that he/she helps me understand the artworks".<sup>13</sup> These quotes give

the impression that visitors have clear ideas about art mediation. They describe their expectations of information, hierarchies, and services, influencing mediation situations in advance.

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In light of what the workshop was actually about, I have changed the title of this paper accordingly.

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Concerning the work with the young art researchers at the AWO Kindergarten, it should also be noted that there is inevitably a hierarchy of knowledge regarding children. If one were to always speak of TI in dealing with children, however, it would no longer be clear what one actually wants to designate with the phenomenon (TI). Therefore, I would assume epistemically innocent assessments here and not TI, although TI towards children may undoubtedly occur.

## 2 CONTEMPORARY ART MEDIATION AND SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY (CAMSE)

The CAMSE workshop was prepared by selecting the participants and compiling a reader with key texts from each of the two disciplines.

In the following, the workshop is illustrated in three steps: First, the basic texts of the event and the participants of the workshop are men-

tioned (2.1, 2.2). Then, on the basis of three selected questions discussed in the workshop, the most central theses and discussion points are noted (2.3). Finally, followed by a conclusion (3).

## 2.1 Participants

These were the experts who participated in the workshop on June 15 and 16, 2019 at the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg.

### Experts in art mediation:

- *Ayşe Güleç*: Educator, curator, art mediator and research-based anti-racism activist, currently member of the artistic team of documenta fifteen.
- *Prof. Dr. Bärbel Schlüter*: Künstlerin, Artist, administrator of the professorship for art education HBK Braunschweig, currently professor of sculpture University of Osnabrück.
- *Dr. Christa Sturm*: Art educator, artist, art historian, administrator for the professorship art education in the course of studies art teaching at HBK Braunschweig.
- *agency art education: Dr. Gila Kolb*<sup>2</sup>: Research-based art educator and art mediator, head of the professorship for didactics for the arts PH Schwyz, lecturer of art education HKB Bern and *Junior Prof Dr. Konstanze Schütze*: curator and art educator, junior professor for art media education University of Cologne.
- *Maximilian Gallo*: Art mediator, graduate of cultural studies and architecture, chorist (documenta 14), member of the working group of the independent publication *Dating the Chorus* by the art mediators of documenta 14.
- *Prof. Dr. Nora Sternfeld*: Art mediator and curator, professor of art education at the HFBK Hamburg, from 2018 to 2020 documenta professor Kunsthochschule Kassel.
- *Prof. Dr. Susanne Pflieger*: Director of the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg, Professor of Art Education and Art Management Burg Giebichenstein Kunsthochschule Halle.

### Experts in (social) epistemology/philosophy:

- *M.A. Linus Lutz*: Studied philosophy and German language and literature in Tübingen and Berlin, co-initiator of the Berlin workshop stage Flugwerk, dramaturg of PROTEST4 (Theater Erlangen), currently assistant to the management of Fonds Darstellende Künste in Berlin.

- PD Dr. Matthias Neuber: Private lecturer Philosophy Department University of Tübingen. Foci of Research: Philosophy of knowledge and science, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of culture.
- PD Dr. Nicola Mößner: Substitute Professor in the Department of Philosophy Leibniz University in Hannover, Lecturer in Philosophy Sankt Georgen Philosophical-Theological University. Foci of Research: Philosophy of science, social epistemology, image theory and media philosophy.
- Dr. Peter Remmers: Research associate in the BMBF-funded accompanying research project: ethical and legal aspects of service robotics. Foci of Research: Philosophy of technology, robot ethics, philosophy of film, philosophy of perception, philosophy of science and epistemology.

## 2.2 Workshop reader

The table<sup>14</sup> on the following double page shows the texts that were discussed and contrasted in the CAMSE workshop, whereby all texts were prepared by all participants. The goal, but also the challenge of the event was, to bring together experts from both fields, art mediation and philosophy. The fact that all participants were able to read into the respective other discipline by means of the texts and that I specifically compared texts was intended to ensure productive theses, results, reflections, and a mutual approach to both fields.

## 2.3 Three questions

Based on the three questions which structured the workshop, the most central theses and discussion points will now be outlined.<sup>15</sup>

- I Does epistemic injustice (TI & HI) occur in art mediation?
- II Who does epistemic injustice happen to in art mediation?
- III How can epistemic injustice be met in art mediation?

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For exact references, see source reference.

\_\_\_ 15  
A detailed presentation and evaluation of the transcript of two days of conversations, discussions, and approaches as well as content details of the textual basis of the workshop would far exceed the capacity of this paper.

### *I Does epistemic injustice occur in art mediation?*

Regarding the first question, two aspects were ostensibly discussed in the workshop. First, all selected texts deal exclusively with out-of-school art mediation or with mediation situations in museums or in large exhibitions. By limiting the workshop to museums and large exhibitions (e.g.

# ART MEDIATION EPISTEMOLOGY

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## INTRODUCTORY TEXTS

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— Carmen Mörsch: At a Cross-roads of Four Discourses  
documenta 12 Gallery Education  
in between Affirmation,  
Reproduction, Deconstruction,  
and Transformation

— Axel Gelfert: Gallery Education  
and Visitor Services at  
documenta 12

— Ulrich Schötker: Gallery  
Education and Visitor Services  
at documenta 12

## TESTIMONIAL INJUSTICE

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— Inka Gressel: About Spaces,  
Interaction, and Memory

— Miranda Fricker: Testimonial  
Injustice, Prejudice in the  
Credibility Economy

## HERMENEUTIC INJUSTICE

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— Nora Sternfeld: Der Taxi-  
spielertrick. Vermittlung zwischen  
Selbstregulierung und Selbst-  
ermächtigung

— Miranda Fricker: Hermeneutical  
Injustice (1)

— Oliver Marchart: Die Institution  
spricht. Kunstvermittlung  
als Herrschafts- und als  
Emanzipationstechnologie

## OPTIONAL TEXTS

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— Nora Sternfeld: Wie kann ich dann in meinem Unterricht "lehrend verlernen?" Ein Gespräch mit Nora Sternfeld

— Nora Sternfeld: Im postrepräsentativen Museum, um die Spielregeln spielen! Partizipation im postrepräsentativen Museum

— José Medina: Active Ignorance, Epistemic Others and Epistemic Friction

— José Medina: The Epistemology of Resistance. Resistance as Epistemic Vice and Epistemic Virtue

## METHODS OF CRITICAL ART MEDIATION AND THE VIRTUES OF TESTIMONIAL AND HERMENEUTIC JUSTICE

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— Hansel Sato: Performing Essentialism at documenta 12

— Ayşe Güleç and Wanda Wiczorek: documenta 12 advisory board. On the Local Mediation of an Art Exhibition

— Miranda Fricker: The Virtue of Testimonial Justice

— Miranda Fricker: Hermeneutical Injustice (2)

— José Medina: Imposed Silence and Shared Hermeneutical Responsibilities

biennials and documenta exhibition), the workshop clearly referred to art, but museums of cultural history were not excluded in principle from the workshop's considerations.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, and probably primarily due to the introductory texts by Axel Gelfert, Carmen Mörsch, and Ulrich Schötker, the workshop also brought up the problem of knowledge transmission in art mediation. More precisely, the objection discussed can be formulated as follows: One of the aims of the workshop was to discuss the possible occurrence of TI in art mediation. However, before this task could even begin, the objection that TI cannot occur in art mediation was discussed because aesthetic testimonial knowledge might not be possible.<sup>17</sup>

Within the framework of this paper, neither the objection nor possible counter-arguments can be described at length. With regard to the first question of the workshop, I would like to note that especially the texts by Inka Gressel (*Interviews mit Besucher\*innen der documenta 12, Die Räume, der Austausch und die Erinnerung* (Interviews with documenta 12 visitors, the spaces, the exchange and the memory)) allowed for a more realistic impression of the conversations that actually take place in art mediation situations.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, there was no claim to be able to resolve several major debates within the two days of the workshop. For this reason, it was possible to agree on assuming the occurrence of epistemic injustice in art mediation for the time being and to discuss it on the basis of the textual foundations and the experience reports of the art mediation experts present.

## *II To whom does epistemic injustice happen to in art mediation?*

Most relevant for the discussion within the workshop about whom TI happens to in art mediation were Fricker's distinction between systematic and incidental TI and Carmen Mörsch's remarks on the four prevailing discourses of art mediation (affirmative, reproductive, deconstructive, and transformative). The latter denote the four discourses (i.e., mediation tendencies and functions) that are prevalent in many institutions today. In the affirmative discourse, according to Mörsch, "art [...] is understood as a specialized domain in which primarily a specialized public takes interest" (Mörsch 2015: 231). Formats of mediation are for example, lectures

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Only extracurricular text foundations were selected by me because I do not have a pedagogical background.

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In the relevant literature, this position is referred to as pessimism (cf. Robson 2012: 2; Meskin 2004: 66ff.). Pessimists and optimists about aesthetic testimonial knowledge are debating the question of whether and to what extent we can acquire aesthetic knowledge through the testimony of others (cf. Robson 2012: 2).

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This mainly concerned the notion that art mediators predominantly make aesthetic judgments and/or are only there to clarify the artists' intentions.



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SHE [THE FEMALE ART MEDIATOR] HAD JUST HAD TO DEAL WITH SEXIST STATEMENTS UTTERED BY WOMEN: "MAYBE THEY SAY TO THEMSELVES: 'NOW I'M STUCK WITH THIS YOUNG BLONDE; NOT VERY PROMISING.'" THEY HAVE A HARDER TIME LETTING GO OF THEIR PRECONCEPTIONS. I HAD TO FIGHT TO ATTAIN AUTHORITY, AND THIS I DID BY WAY OF ARGUMENTATION, KNOWLEDGE, PRECISION, AS WELL AS BEHAVIOR. AT THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS MUCH TALK ABOUT QUESTIONING THE AUTHORIZED SPEAKER POSITION.

Gressel b 2009: 142

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SOME COMMENTS I RECEIVED—  
THOUGH THESE ARE IN THE MINORITY—  
ILLUSTRATE MY POINT: “I’M WAITING  
FOR A GERMAN NATIVE-SPEAKER TO  
CONDUCT THIS TOUR” (WHITE GERMAN  
MALE VISITOR). OR: “YOU SHOULD  
BE PROUD OF YOURSELF, SEEING THAT  
YOU’RE ALLOWED TO CONDUCT  
TOURS AT DOCUMENTA 12” (WHITE  
GERMAN FEMALE VISITOR). SOME CAME  
THE FORM OF “JOKES”: “WE’LL GO  
FOR YOUR TOUR; BUT MAKE IT CHEAPER”  
(WHITE GERMAN FEMALE VISITOR).

Sato 2009: 64 ff.<sup>19</sup>

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Central to Sato’s elaborations above is his origin, or rather the different reactions of visitors, depending on whether he “introduced himself as Peruvian, Peruvian with Japanese roots, or simply Austrian” (Sato 2009: 65).

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"I DIDN'T EXPECT THE GALLERY EDUCATOR TO EXPLAIN EVERYTHING, BUT I CERTAINLY EXPECTED TO ENCOUNTER SOME KIND OF DEFINITE STRUCTURE IN THE TOUR. SHE EITHER AVOIDED OR DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HOW TO EXERCISE AUTHORITY AS AN EXPERT IN HER FIELD. IT FELT AS IF SHE WERE JUST FUNCTIONING LIKE AN "AUTOMATIC QUESTION MACHINE."

(Visitor 9, Gressel a 2009: 98)

or expert tours with speakers authorized by the institution (cf. *ibid.*: 232). The reproductive discourse understands the institution museum as a place where access is to be guaranteed to as broad an audience as possible. In this context, special emphasis is placed on removing obstacles or fear of contact with artistic practice and art *per se* (cf. *ibid.*: 232). For this reason, the mediation formats of the reproductive discourse are primarily directed at so-called target groups, such as children, families, pensioners, or “people with special needs and dispositions” (*ibid.*: 232). Within the deconstructive discourse, the task of mediation is understood as making visible and critically questioning the existing power relations of the institution of the museum or of society in general. The reference to art should not be lost, but rather explicitly presented and implicitly existing values should be addressed and exposed so that museums are no longer understood as value-neutral institutions. Finally, the transformative discourse raises the question of the extent to which active co-design by visitors (in a direct-democratic sense) can lead to an expansion of the museum and exhibition practice. Institutions are, thereby, “transformed” from places that are oriented towards a certain public to an expression of the public that constitutes them (cf. *ibid.*: 232f.).<sup>20</sup>

The distinction between systematic and accidental TI refers to the type of prejudices that are essential for TI. Systematic TI is caused by prejudices that are very likely to make the individuals concerned vulnerable to other types of (social) injustice as well, e.g., racial, or sexual prejudices. Incidental TI, on the other hand, occurs when prejudices do not refer to such broad identity categories but, for example, to individuals because of their affiliation to a particular discipline or as advocates of a particular scientific method (cf. *ibid.*: 27).<sup>21</sup> With regard to art mediation situations, the workshop first recognized the background of Fricker’s distinction that systematic TI certainly occurs in art mediation in the context of guided tours or other conversation-based formats. Concrete examples of systematic TI can be found in Inka Gressel’s and Hansel Sato’s texts, among others (pages 99, 100).

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Mörsch explicitly points out that “[t]he four discourses [are] neither hierarchical in the sense of different stages of development nor strictly historically chronological” and “[i]n mediation practice, several of them are usually happening at the same time” (*ibid.*: 232).

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Fricker uses the example of a large academic conference, where mainly applied scientists and historians are present, but only a few philosophers of science. During the conference, it becomes clear that the applied scientists and the historians see the philosophers as less credible because of the prejudice that philosophy is not a life-oriented (chair) discipline. Consequently, philosophers are also given less credibility because of a prejudice (TI). As philosophers however, they are very unlikely to be discriminated against in other life spheres and the TI that happens to them therefore only occurs in a very localized (cf. Fricker 2007: 28f.).

Both quotations and shared experiences from the art mediators present suggest that the question of whether art mediators are believed can depend on their appearance, age, nationality, and also gender. Another consideration was that incidental TI towards mediators can often occur in art mediation situations. Consequently, prejudices are directed towards art mediators qua their activity, their skills and competences in this field are questioned, as a quote from a visitor (visitor 9) at documenta 12 shows (Gressel 2009a: 102). Against this background, there was additional discussion about a possible connection between TI vis-à-vis mediators and the four discourses of art mediation formulated by Carmen Mörsch and outlined above. More precisely, the consideration was that mediators authorized by the institution in affirmative mediation formats are not or much less often questioned due to their status. However, as soon as the relationship to the institution is dismantled or even challenged by experimenting more with deconstructive and transformative formats, this seems to lead to an intensified epistemic assessment of the mediators as individuals and TI.<sup>22</sup>

I would like to add at this point that the discussion of TI in art mediation in the workshop focused very much on TI towards art mediators, but the reverse case, in my opinion, occurs just as often. Because I am sure that I have already committed TI towards visitors in mediation situations, when they have put forward theses, made value judgments and asked questions.<sup>23</sup>

Who HI happens to in art mediation, or at all, is difficult to identify because of injustice *per se*. Fricker uses only examples of former hermeneutic gaps for which terms have since been found and established (postnatal depression, sexual harassment, stalking). Thus, in a sense, she explains the phenomenon retroactively.

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I thank Nora Sternfeld for this comment, which she derived from her own experience as a mediator at Wehrmachtsausstellung (an exhibition about the crimes of the Wehrmacht during the Nazi era) in Austria.

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It is helpful to point out, based on the mentioned speech actions of visitors that Fricker herself, despite the focus on testimony, did not intend the phenomenon of TI to be exclusively about telling. In her 2007 book, she already writes that it can also occur when a speaker shares a personal opinion or hypothesizes (cf. Fricker 2007: 60).

My first assumption regarding the occurrence of HI in mediation and exhibition contexts was that HI occurs when visitors in mediation formats try to share experiences or make comments that are difficult to understand or comprehend. This assumption (that this is how HI occurs in art mediation situations) is perhaps based primarily on the rather controversial tendency of many museums or large exhibitions to gear mediation programs specifically toward engaging marginalized – i.e., in this case, hard-to-reach – groups of visitors (cf. reproductive

discourse/Sternfeld 2005: 15/Doppelbauer 2019: 19ff.) The question (to whom does HI happen?) could even be sharpened in the art and exhibition context, since in my view this belongs to the set of practices within which social meanings are produced (cf. section 1 on page 92). Accordingly, we could speak of hermeneutic marginalization here as well, since unequal participation of certain individuals and groups of individuals in art and exhibition contexts can be assumed.

The objection raised at this point, however, was that the unequal participation of some groups of people and members of society in museum and exhibition contexts happens almost inevitably (e.g., due to expertise). However, the mere fact that no equal participation takes place or can take place does not mean that one can simultaneously speak of hermeneutic marginalization and HI.<sup>24</sup>

Another possibility that was discussed in the workshop was that it is again the mediators for whom there is an analogy to Fricker's examples of HI. In this case, it is art mediators or those working in the art field who can understand and share their own terms and concepts among themselves but have limited ability to communicate intelligibly beyond their group. Examples of hermeneutic gaps in this variant might be technical terms in art studies or a certain way of talking about art (cf. section 3 on the following page).<sup>25</sup>

### III *How to meet epistemic injustice in art mediation?*

The third and final question raised in this paper concerns how to deal with epistemic injustice in art mediation. In the workshop itself, there was much discussion about the interpretation of the third question. If one understands it as a question about how epistemic injustice can be specifically reduced by methods of art mediation, there is a danger of imposing too much responsibility on the field and, moreover, of mak-

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My reflections on who HI happens to in art mediation have evolved after the workshop and are primarily related to how the virtue of hermeneutic justice and hermeneutic responsibility are understood and interpreted (cf. Medina 2017). However, with the intention of representing the discussion that took place in the CAMSE workshop as faithfully as possible, I will leave it as above for the purposes of this paper.

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I would like to thank Peter Remmers for this extremely feasible comment. I think many examples of this can be found in art mediation or from my own experience as an art mediator.

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Concerning the reduction of epistemic injustice, in the CAMSE workshop the two virtues (testimonial justice and hermeneutic justice) according to Fricker were ostensibly discussed, as well as José Medina's numerous criticisms of Fricker's account of the phenomenon. Concerning the two virtues, it is also useful to point out that they are supposed to be explicitly reflexive virtues. That is, to avoid testimonial or hermeneutical injustice, one should be increasingly aware of one's own speaker position. For example, thinking of my own mediation situations where I myself am white and have a certain educational background and am in a privileged position vis-à-vis other speakers, etc. (Fricker 2007: 91 ff.)

ing too many (social) premises oneself.<sup>26</sup> If one understands the question, however, as a productive way of dealing with the phenomenon in art mediation practice, many methods<sup>27</sup> can be found, especially in critical art mediation that refer to epistemic injustice or comparable or interrelated phenomena, and thus, if necessary, can also contribute to the dismantling of epistemic injustice (in art mediation).<sup>28</sup> One such method, which was addressed and discussed in the workshop, was, for example, to play with the credibility assessments of the visitors in the role of the mediator, comparable to the example of Columbo (the policeman) cited by Fricker, who, through his manner, causes criminals to underestimate him and thus give themselves away (cf. Fricker 2007: 19). A perhaps comparable strategy is addressed in the text *Performing Essentialism auf der documenta 12* (Performing Essentialism at documenta 12) by Hansel Sato (Sato 2009), in which Sato found the following way of dealing with persistent TI as a mediator: He was so often confronted with questions and comments concerning his origins and competence that he began to claim to be of different nationalities (e.g., Uro-Indian, Spanish, Japanese, and Austrian). Sato not only observed that visitors reacted differently to him, but also that they considered different information about the artworks relevant depending on his claimed origin (cf. Sato 2009: 67ff.). Furthermore, the text by Ayşe Güleç and Wanda Wiczorek *documenta 12 Beirat zur lokalen Vermittlung einer Kunstaustellung* (documenta 12 on the local mediation of an art exhibition) was discussed. The text explains how it can succeed in producing an audience: It does not mean curating and developing an exhibition that is subsequently received and judged by an audience. On the contrary, local experts are involved from the beginning in the process of creating the exhibition and even the artworks. By bringing together local groups,

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It also depends on what one wants to call a 'method of art mediation'. It can include individual strategies of art mediators as well as different formats of art mediation, such as classical guided tours, dialogue-based conversations, discussion rounds, workshops, etc., as well as theories about art mediation and exhibition practice.

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I am grateful to Linus Lutz for this comment, which, among other things, drew attention to the fact that a productive approach to HI in art mediation may simply be a matter of allowing different ways of speaking.

associations, and local residents with artists at documenta 12, it was possible to conceive an exhibition that focused on issues, problems, and social meanings and was therefore actually relevant to local people. What this can reduce is hermeneutic marginalization.

### 3. CONCLUSION & OUTLOOK

One of the most interesting results of the workshop is that it could be shown that there are definitely similar discourses and debates in both disciplines that have not been related in this way before. Many discourses in contemporary

(critical) art mediation point to epistemic injustice or interrelated phenomena: for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who, in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) uses the term epistemic violence (Spivak 2008: 42); the 'affirmative sabotage' based on Spivak which Ayşe Güleç advises art mediators to practice in order to deal with conflict situations in their work (cf. Güleç 2018); Nora Sternfeld's remarks on the potential of a (radical) democratization of the museum (cf. Sternfeld 2018); or Gila Kolb's diverse mediation techniques to deal with and/or manipulate stereotypes and credibility judgments in teaching and research (cf. Kolb 2020, 2014).

Against the backdrop of the question of how to deal productively with epistemic injustice in art mediation, the workshop could perhaps above all contribute to the phenomenon of 'epistemic injustice' taking the place of a 'hermeneutic gap' for mediators and influencing their practice: for example, just my knowledge of the TI & HI described by Fricker has changed my attitude and activity as an art mediator as I am now able to classify and evaluate certain situations differently. I have already formulated elsewhere (cf. Stolba/Toopeekoff 2020) that my hope is that other mediators who feel similarly will be enabled to analyze and/or defuse certain situations and conflicts that arise in art mediation with the knowledge of epistemic injustice and that they will be able to listen with less prejudice and ultimately lose less knowledge. Finally, given the publication date of this volume, it should be noted that even though the pandemic has resulted in a significant shift in all art mediation practices to the digital, addressing the topic (of epistemic injustice in contemporary art mediation) has by no means become redundant. Last semester (summer semester 2021), for example, I had the opportunity in the context of this year's network week<sup>29</sup> to discuss and develop together with students of Swiss-German art academies in a block seminar within the framework of this year's network week whether and to what extent epistemic injustice also occurs in digital mediation formats and how it can be dealt with productively (cf. MA Art Education 2021).<sup>30</sup>

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The so-called network weeks originate from a cooperation of the four Swiss-German art academies that has existed since 2007 (see <https://paradise-park.de/netzwerkwoche-bern/> [16.08.21]), where it is stated more precisely: "In so-called network weeks, students come together, exchange ideas on topics and questions concerning art mediation and network with each other" (ibid.).

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The students' results and findings are documented in the publication *Dokumentation Netzwerkwoche Digitale Didaktik. A translocal network week documented at different points in time* (Berne University of the Arts).



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— NORA STERNFELD

SUBJECTS WHO  
ARE PRESUMED  
TO BE IGNORANT.  
SOME  
REFLECTIONS  
ON ART  
MEDIATION AS  
A SERVICE.

WE ASK  
OURSELVES  
WHY SOME  
TESTIMONIES  
ARE BELIEVED  
AND OTHERS  
ARE NOT - AND  
WITH WHAT  
INJUSTICE THIS IS  
CONNECTED.

NORA STERNFELD

Let me start with a story: In September 2021, I was at a conference on museums in Copenhagen. Looking for a way to end the day, I found myself in a gin bar with some colleagues on a cool late summer evening. The range of different gin cocktails on offer there was impressively large and summarized in a thick book, on the basis of which we decided what we could choose. But even more remarkable was that the bartender not only arrived with the fancy cocktails and gin and tonics, but also explained to us, "Every gin has a story." Immediately, he began telling sensational stories about each of our orders, the biographical and historical details of which were obviously meant to elevate the value of the mixed drink. I didn't notice much, probably didn't listen that attentively, but at one

point I did start to wonder. We heard about a gin made by a man who had to flee from a “guy named Franco” in Spain, who fortunately died in 1941, so that the Spanish story could have a good ending after all.<sup>1</sup> I asked briefly, because I was not sure if I had understood correctly. The bartender stressed it again: “Yes, Franco had died in 1941.” But there was actually no time because the stories were already moving on to the next cocktail and I – especially since I speak German – didn’t necessarily want to lecture the young man about the year 1941.

Since then, I have been preoccupied with the question of what kind of speech that was which obviously has no factual validity and yet is supported by an apparent connection between narration and facts, between history and stories. Why is it important in this gin bar, with its stylishly cozy hygge wood paneling, to tell stories that are constructed like true stories when, at the same time, these stories themselves are quite obviously neither true nor important?

I am telling all this here because this question is connected to an examination of the testimonial attributions that visitors to exhibitions make towards mediators which Jelena Toppeekoff initiated in me: In a workshop she organized as part of the 2018/19 *Volkswagen Group Fellowship*, we explored epistemic injustice and credibility judgments at the intersection of analytical philosophy and art mediation. In this context, together with Jelena Toppeekoff, we ask ourselves why some testimonies are believed and others are not – and what injustices this entails. On the basis of her own experiences as a mediator at the last two documenta exhibitions and against the background of relevant texts, Jelena Toppeekoff reflects on the relationship of visitors to mediators and notes that their speech often contains much less authority and agency than might be expected: thus it happens in mediation situations that mediators are sometimes denied credibility.

So what do the waiter in a gin bar in Copenhagen and a documenta mediator have in common? They work in insecure jobs where telling stories is part of the business. And they are not always believed – sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly. So who do we believe? And what is the social function of the fact that we believe anyone at all, or possibly no one at all anymore? So it is against this background that I would like to ask here how much authority and agency factual speech in general, and the speech of mediators still have in concrete terms in the 21st century.

\_\_\_\_ 1  
Franco ruled Spain dictatorially from 1939 after the Spanish Civil War (sparked by his military coup) until his death in 1975.

In her research, Jelena Toppeekoff identifies two unfortunately true reasons why some mediators

and some forms of speaking at exhibitions are given less credence than others. First, social attributions such as origin, age, and gender are at work among listeners which can lead to unfair differences in trust. Second, monological, affirmative mediation is apparently more likely to be assumed to be grounded in knowledge than a discursive, open form of engagement. In addition to these two powerful and unjust distinctions, I would like to ask here about further economic and structural conditions that could lead to the fact that mediation in the 21st century may no longer have only the essential task of sharing, generating, and discussing knowledge, but may also take on a different, contradictory function which may even originate in the fact that it is no longer about referring to facts at all.

#### KNOWLEDGE AS A SERVICE

Museum theorist Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), published in the 1990s, provided an examination of the politics of knowledge and power in the 19th century museum. He recounts the exhibition complex and the national educational function of the public museum from its beginnings, pointing to documents that attest to the role of "instructors," "guides," and "demonstrators." These guides, important to the education of the nation, were to learn to position themselves in relation to objects in such a way that they could be easily seen and to speak in such a way that they would be believed. For this purpose, the institution provided means and techniques, formed its own educational departments. What are the conditions, means and techniques that organize the work of mediators today? First of all, they are insecure jobs with a degree of fluctuation, so that in all likelihood – perhaps it is similar in the gin bar mentioned at the beginning – new students will always be doing these jobs. In addition, most of the preparation is unpaid. At best, a curator tour is offered to the mediators; more often than not, they have to fight to be allowed to receive a catalog. So what is left for them but to make up their own minds about what is being shown in the shortest possible time?

The work of mediation must therefore cost the institution as little as possible. Ideally – according to the self-image of most institutions – the mediation is self-supporting, possibly it should even alleviate the other budgets a little. There is no question then that most of the mediation services offered to visitors are not infrequently subject to a fee. We like to say in this context: "What costs nothing, is worth nothing." And so for many visitors, the mediation offers do indeed often represent a certain value. In a way mediation promises "the full program," and so

visitors who can afford it are often happy to pay for their guided tours, walks – whatever the exhibition tours are called that are supported by narratives – because with the appropriate mediation program, the visit to the exhibition seems to become a better experience. However, this does not mean that the paying visitors, as mature consumers, believe the mediators.

### THE LOST TRANSFERENCE

For Sigmund Freud, imputing knowledge is an essential prerequisite for transference – that is, for establishing the relationship that makes psychoanalysis possible in the first place. Jacques Lacan, in turn, made it even clearer that psychoanalysis consists, not only of the production of the assumption of knowledge, but essentially of the rejection of this assumption: Thus the power of transference that never rises becomes that of its own analysis.

Similar to psychoanalytical self-reflection, learning also needs such transference: The transference relation drives learning precisely when and because it is not rigid, and precisely when and because there is no total authorization. Eva Sturm also refers to deconstruction, already laid out by Freud and which Lacan makes explicit when she locates art mediation “in the bottleneck of words” [Im Engpass der Worte] (Sturm 1996). The assumption of knowledge, in turn, to reject critically, to keep it open and productive, but not to abolish it, is thereby essential for what happens with each other in a situation in which learning occurs.

In this sense, the negotiation of authority and authorship has become an essential question of critical art mediation since the 1990s. We were dealing with a threefold negotiation. We asked: how can the subordination of knowledge and the attribution of knowledge be reflected? But also: what knowledge is set as seemingly neutral and objective in exhibitions, what is left out? And thirdly: Why is the knowledge of the mediators devalued? And since the 1990s based on all these negotiations, the question of “who is speaking?” in museums and exhibitions has become particularly acute. Now this question has been accompanied by social struggles in and against the representative regime: it has been related to the interpretive power of museums, to the authority of institutional authorship, to what was told and what, in contrast, did not become part of representation, to who was heard and who was silenced. And all this happened not as an end in itself, but as a form of wrestling with the representative regime.

## WHO CARES WHO IS SPEAKING?

Basically, the question “who is speaking?” was about a “talking back” (hooks 1989) against the canon. With Eva Sturm, Carmen Mörsch, and critical art mediation, we have learned to question authorized speech with regard to its naturalizations of power – not in order to abolish it, but precisely in order to make it productive, i.e. radically democratically negotiable. Nora Landkammer shows in her important and reflective study “Mediation in Ethnological Museums as a Field of Conflicting Orders of Knowledge” [Vermittlung in ethnologischen Museen als Feld widerstreitender Wissensordnungen] (Landkammer 2021) that different discourses are involved when mediators speak. The struggle has not been without consequences: 21st century museum and exhibition discourses have literally boomed with conferences, texts, and funding criteria that have included buzzwords such as “polyphony,” “inclusion,” and “participation.”

But what would happen now if we found ourselves in a situation where not only a particular authorization was called into question, but the factuality of knowledge itself was rendered irrelevant? For what has happened since then is that the representative regime as a form of government has been supplemented by other mechanisms that no longer need representation: with mathematics, logistics, technologies, and data processing that rely more on immediate clicks than on comprehensible identification. The violence of discriminating representation plays an even more sinister role in the world of Big Data than it used to, but it works better when we see everything playfully, when we don't argue about it or believe in it.

“Who cares who is speaking?” (Foucault 1969). This question, with which Michel Foucault introduces his famous essay on authorship, today sounds, on the one hand, uncanny and, on the other, almost blasphemous – after all, it seems as if from a critical mediation perspective, hardly anything would concern us so much as this very question. What did Foucault mean? According to him, authorship as an act of speaking was firstly a courageous action: “Speech at the origin of our culture (and probably in others as well) was not a product, not a thing, not a good, it was essentially an act – an act that had its place in the bipolarity of the sacred and the profane, the permitted and the forbidden, the religious and the blasphemous. Historically, it had been a perilous act before it became a commodity in the catchment area of property”<sup>2</sup> (ibid.: 211f). And what happens to this speech when it can no longer be a dangerous act because no

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Translation: Frieda Pattenden



one hears it? Or because no one believes it, or because it merely seems to belong to a qualitative experience as a status symbol, and when it is constantly evaluated precisely according to this and competes against others? So what if everything could be said, critically and uncritically, one issue and its opposite – as long as it generates feedback and attention? What if an evaluation were more valid than a counterargument? Wouldn't this be accompanied by an uncanny disempowerment to argue about knowledge? Wouldn't this de-authorization of speech at the same time be its most authoritarian form?

And how can this then be countered? If we want to understand mediation in an increasingly post-factual world as the counter-factual courage to speak – and not simply somehow, but in the sense of parrhesia true-to-speak – then it also needs structures and settings in which speaking can again take place at all, and epistemic conditions in which justice can be argued and struggled for.

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\_\_\_\_ SOPPA/BLECK

WHAT WE  
CAN DO ONLINE  
WHAT WE CAN'T  
DO ALONE.  
SETTINGS OF  
DIGITAL ART  
MEDIATION.

SO THE WORD  
“MEDIATION” SEEMS  
TO IMPLY THAT  
THERE IS SOMETHING  
CONCRETE, PRE-  
EXISTING, CLEARLY  
COMPREHENSIBLE  
THAT COULD BE  
MEDIATED.

STERNFELD 2014:9

When we are asked about our work as art mediators, the two most common questions are usually:

*“What does that still have  
- or even have at all -  
to do with art?”*

Where is the art in all this?

While we initially took these questions as a sign of inadequacy in our work, in the meantime we are only satisfied when they are asked.

We are interested in the spaces of art. Their context in the sense of structure, in terms of their location, in terms of their administration and hierarchies, in terms of their storage of knowledge. We are interested in art institutions as apparatuses of inclusion and exclusion, of labor relations and pathfinders. As mysterious places and as powerful places. We are interested in how one becomes part of an art institution. How do you get in? As a member of the public or as a mediator, with a research question, with an anxious look, with an assignment or as a pastime?

We take a shortcut into the spaces of art by going digital. We explore the art institutions without having to be physically present. We gather the questions we would otherwise never ask the curator in a shared document. We sleep in the park in front of the institution, we drink coffee there, we read the posters until a new question arises, we observe a family having a picnic there and taking a selfie. We mistake the Pokemon Go players in the park in front of the institution for the participants of a workshop. We work as we walk, as far as the public WIFI will take us.

We, that is soppa/bleck, that is Laura Bleck and Josefine Soppa. We have been working together in art mediation since 2014. We design workshops as settings and give online lectures on digital mediation for among others the Art Association Hildesheim, institutions of civic education in rural areas, for the DGTL FMNSM Festival, the University of Hildesheim, the HGB Leipzig and for the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg as part of the *Volkswagen Group Fellowship*.

Our works are always digital and analog at the same time. The respective context, the materialities and preconditions of encounters in places of art are in the foreground. We use the digital primarily as a possibility to be in and out of situations and their places at the same time.

In this text we try to give an insight into our work and our approach in digital art mediation. This text is similar to our practical projects in art mediation: an attempt to emerge from a constant rethinking that has to be completed at some point, even though we claim to be committed to the process. An attempt to comment on and challenge ourselves in what we do. An attempt to create more dimensions or tabs in a confined area. An attempt to be sometimes performative and then still reflective. An attempt to leave something in the poetic and still be clear in some instances. A concurrence of doubting and asserting. These forms of attempts are our art mediation.

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## \*playing

Our mediation approach consists not only of work and concept, but also of the possibility that we play, try out, overturn, experiment and speculate. This is important for us to state: We enjoy collaborating and sharing our ideas with others.

Art mediation is also nonsense.

Through a DIY relationship with digital media and its devices, in which we are less experts and more bullshitters, we can be open and playful. In this playfulness we try to meet participants in the situations we provide with an openness that we want to adopt towards ourselves and others in our "counter-expertness": It should be more about trying out a situation together than about a possible prior knowledge or outcome.

In collaboration with other artists, art mediators and the audience, various playful formats have emerged: Online karaoke, online meditation, online walks through parks or through artists' archives, excursions into artists' unlocked tabs, workshops in chat groups, pep-talks-to-go during vernissages and discussions in Twitter format, jointly inserted comments on social media accounts of art institutions, and excursions via Google Maps.

### 1. OWN EXPERIENCES AND INSECURITIES AS AN APPROACH

Since the beginning of our collaborative work, we have been asking questions – conceptually and practically rather than in terms of educational theory – from the digital into the theory and practice and processes of mediation itself. We ask about the preconditions and spaces of mediation. We ask about the relationships between knowledge and power that operate as a matter of course in the distribution of mediation as the thing to be mediated about (art-knowledge), the mediating instance (knowledgeable mediator), and the recipient of the thing to be mediated about (unknowing public):

"Thus the word 'mediation' seems to imply that there is something concrete, pre-existing, clearly delineable that could be mediated about. In doing so, it also seems to be narrating that there is someone who knows beforehand what is to be conveyed – the mediators – and that this knowledge is then to be passed on in as precise and comprehensible a form as possible to someone else who did not have it before." (Sternfeld 2014: 9) [Translation FP].

One reason to interrogate these knowledge-power relations in the context of mediation was our own experiences with formats in academic and artistic spaces: the feeling of being in art institutions with the wrong or too little knowledge. The feeling of being sneaked in. The feeling of not having the 'right' knowledge for these spaces. The insecurity of speaking in a group. Not knowing the 'real' goal. Saying the wrong thing. The experience of knowing something or wanting to know something but not daring to share it in that specific group context. The insecurity of being in a group where the same people – primarily white, cis-male players – always speak and dictate the discourse.

Our work in art mediation began with the desire to undermine these habitual settings and to give space to the experiences of uncertainty. To this end, we see our own position as mediators in relation to the spaces of art, its objects, collaborators, and the audiences as a moment through which we can counter a formal redistribution of power. Playing with our own position is motivation for our mode of working.

One form of this playing with our own position and positionings within mediation situations was initially to emphasize absence. We tried to withdraw ourselves as mediators: Not to be there and to make room in absence. With the help of an empty space, to open up other forms of presence. Not to be there in order to be there in another way, through other people, through objects, through both set and changeable spaces, through media.

We developed situations in which we ourselves, as mediators, could be physically absent and communicate with the audience via the framing, the equipment of the spatial conditions and via digital media such as smartphones.

As mediators, we always remain the ones who prepare a situation, who provide a framework and invite the audience into it.

Nevertheless, we notice a change in the structure that a workshop, for example, takes on when we don't use pronounceable language or are not physically present ourselves. What happens or can happen in the moment this is up for negotiation by all participants and is acted out over the time of being together.

The mediating in the moment is that which withdraws itself in its functioning, effect, and intention. That can become noticeable in that very withdrawal and disappearance. When it is noticed, it can become an object that is viewed and

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WHAT DOES ART  
MEDIATION DO WITHOUT ART?

WHAT DOES ART  
MEDIATION DO WITHOUT  
ART MEDIATORS?

WHAT DOES ART  
MEDIATION DO WITHOUT  
AN AUDIENCE?

WHAT DOES ART MEDIATION  
DO WITHOUT WHAT IS TO  
BE MEDIATED?

WHAT DOES ART  
MEDIATION DO WITHOUT  
AN INSTITUTION?

WHAT DOES ART  
MEDIATION DO WITHOUT  
A PHYSICAL ENCOUNTER?



examined differently and no longer remains a discreet, quiet, flowing mediator. In other words: we notice our smartphone as a medium for something when the battery is empty or the WIFI breaks down. We notice the workshop leader as a mediator for the situation we find ourselves in when she arrives late, and we wait silently in the unknown group. We notice the mediator in his absence, in his resistance.

## 2. DIGITALITY AS A CIRCUMSTANCE

For our approach, digital media are mediators to create shared situations together with the institution and its staff, with audience and participants, which in the play of presences and absences put the conditions of coming together in the art context to task. In our projects, we mainly use smartphones as devices that are close to and mobile with our own bodies and digital applications such as messenger, social media and open-source writing documents that are close to our everyday life, although different barriers exist here for different target groups and different introductions to the situations are needed.

Our approaches to a critical reflection of the situations in the art context find a correspondence and form in mediality and digitality. It is the condition of coming together itself that we want to scrutinize and mediate on. It is the spaces that we do not enter, that we look at from a distance. It is the new spaces and niches that we find in a chat or a comment in a digital document.

In the digital, we can subvert habitual settings and make the settings, rules, and parameters of a shared situation with audience or participants noticeable.

We have tried out this experimentation with digital media as mediators of a shared situation in various projects. On the one hand, we work with digital means, on the other hand, in the digital, as a simultaneity of a digital and analog experience. In the digital state, simultaneities, absences, and connectivity are always active. The direction we aim for with this way of working is to treat the digital not as a tool of mediation but as its condition. A form of de-location of mediation which at the same time makes the concrete and physical places and their limitations and pre-conditions first noticeable and thus negotiable.

### \_\_\_\_\_ \*material

The material of mediation itself is not primarily a work of art or its materiality. The material of mediation is the references of the situation and the context in which

mediation takes place. It is the precious metals that are built into a smart phone which makes the digital workshop possible. It is the paths, conditions, and localities of the individual parts of the smartphone.

The material is a participant's refusal to continue participating in our online workshop because, as a large group continually sending files in chat, we consume a lot of data and resources. The material is the question of how we respond to this criticism. The material is the objects we use to equip a situation. The blue oversized terrycloth towel that our accomplices brought into our project with which we in turn equip other accomplices for another project who will take up the story of the towel in their project and pass it on again. The material is our own experience of insecurities in art institutions, in which we still feel like impostors. It also consists of our fear of not understanding and not being able to speak. The material becomes the content of our mediation.

### **3. SETTINGS IN PROGRESS**

In the digital, we have found a form that lets us ask questions about positionings, absences, and the parameters of coming together, collaborating, and sharing knowledge from somewhere else. It is clear that a shift in presences does not yet subvert these positionings. It first only directs the perception of the situation towards its context. It makes the parameters of the situation the content of the situation. This way of working developed into a form we call setting: A situation that we, as mediators, specify and into which we invite the audience. A situation the structure and conditions of which are open to the questioning and processing of all participants and which, at least at the moment of being together, also makes us participants in the situation.

So far, we have presented different settings in different contexts for negotiation. Settings in which no person was physically present. Settings in which we were not present as mediators. Settings in which all participants in the situation were present, but only interacted digitally. Settings that were dispersed and staggered in both location and time. Settings that took place only in shared online documents with anonymous participants.

In these different settings, we always face the problem of claiming that the situation at hand can be negotiated by everyone, yet it is never available to everyone in equal measure. We are still the mediators who produce the situation, equip and open and invite into the situation. Even if, for example, the unfamiliar



— Fig.1 soppa/bleck: Setting-Variante 2019, Stage Design of OMSK SOCIAL CLUB, Festivals DGTL FMNSM, Festspielhaus Hellerau.

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SETTING: 50 PEOPLE //  
A DEFINED PHYSICAL SPACE //  
VERBAL/AUDIBLE COMMUNICATION  
ABANDONED// IN PHYSICAL  
SPACE // SEMI-PUBLIC, SHARED  
TELEGRAM CHAT // 50 SMART-  
DEVICES // 3 SCREENS //  
WIFI/MOBILE DATA // SEATING //  
LINKS // QUESTIONS

form of digital gathering and the possibility of anonymity that comes with it open up the possibility of further discussion and negotiation, we are still the entities that define the situation.

The participants are not our accomplices. They may be for a moment or for an instance. For a moment we are accomplices together when we can discuss the claims of the situation together. When then a completely different situation arises that we as mediators could not have foreseen. When we as mediators have to get involved in the situation, we have invited ourselves into. When a week later we send out a text that we talked about and the chat group in which we took a break together is still being used.

### \_\_\_\_\_ \*proliferation

We are always working in collaboration, in complicity. We are always in discussion about which word best describes the forms of collaboration. We are still unsure about it. There are two of us, soppa/ bleck, and we bring in other players. Our concepts are based on invitation and giving space. For each project we invite other people to bring something to our concept with their ideas and perspectives and approaches or to process it.

*We want to support each other. We want to share something and give something away. We want to be challenged. We want further perspectives. We want to be hosts. We want to connect here and there. We want to be hosts in the institutions where we ourselves are guests. We need to multiply more. We make the connections, inspirations, the enquiries, the feedback the intention of our intentions. We mark the path we walk together, the route we think together, the overlapping of our ideas and questions.*

*(Excerpt notes soppa/bleck Volkswagen Group Fellowship 2019-2020)*

The practice of collaboration and complicity offers a structure against isolation and for mutual support and solidarity in the art context. But it is also a form for thinking and conceptualizing as a shared situation, as exchange and mutual questioning. We have also invited some of our accomplices, with whom we have collaborated in various projects so far, into this text. They have brought something (\*scores) to expand its texture and cross our descriptions (\*multiplication).

---

WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?  
WHAT ASSUMPTIONS, EXPECTATIONS  
AND PREREQUISITES ACTUALLY  
EXIST IN THIS COMING TOGETHER?  
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS  
COMMON SITUATION? IS IT EVEN A  
SHARED SITUATION? WHAT IS ITS  
GOAL? WHO DETERMINES THE GOAL?  
AND WHO DETERMINES THE RULES  
OF THIS JOINT COMING TOGETHER?  
WHO GIVES THE INPUT? WHO HAS  
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THIS SITUATION  
AND THIS GATHERING? WHO HAS  
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ITS CONTENTS?  
FROM WHERE ARE WE SPEAKING?  
FROM WHAT PERSPECTIVE ARE WE  
SPEAKING? AND WHAT KIND OF WE  
ARE WE ACTUALLY ASSUMING HERE?

---

**WE, ACCOMPLICES – an imagination exercise**

WE BREATHE IN DEEPLY.

WE BREATHE OUT DEEPLY. (GONG/ OR RINGING)

WE FEEL OUR BODIES IN SPACE.

WE ARE TOGETHER IN A ROOM OR DIGITALLY  
CONNECTED. WE IMAGINE HOW WE ARE  
TOGETHER AND WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER?

OUR INTEREST IN EACH OTHER, IN HEARING  
EACH OTHER'S PRESENCE. OUR CAPABILITY TO  
CREATE AND BE PRESENT TO EACH OTHER  
IS RECOGNIZED; THEREFORE, ACCORDING TO  
BELL HOOKS, THE PRESENCE OF ALL BODIES  
IN SPACE SHOULD CONSTITUTE ANY RADICAL  
PAEDAGOGY. cf. hooks 1995: 8.

WE IMAGINE THE TEXTURE OF OUR TOGETHER-  
NESS. HOW IS IT WOVEN TOGETHER? HOW  
DO THE DIFFERENT THREADS FEEL TOGETHER?  
WE IMAGINE BEING TOGETHER WHILE ACKNOWLEDG-  
ING OUR DIFFERENCES. WHAT ATTITUDE  
DO WE WANT TO ADOPT IN DOING SO?

HOW DO WE SHARE OUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES  
AND SEE WHAT THEY HAVE TO DO WITH SOCIAL  
POWERSTRUCTURES? HOW DO WE STRENGTHEN  
EACH OTHER AS DIVERSELY AS WE NEED TO?

HOW CAN WE FEEL AS ACCOMPLICES IN ALL OUR  
IMPERFECTION SO THAT, AS FRED MOTEN AND  
STEFANO HARNEY WRITE, IT IS REVOLUTIONARY?

*"BUT TO FEEL COMPLICIT IN ALL OUR INCOM-  
PLETENESS IS TO BE REVOLUTIONARY-SO MUCH  
SO THAT YOU MIGHT EVEN CALL IT OTHER  
THAN BEING."* Moten/Harney 2019: 23

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CHRISTINA HARLES IS AN ARTIST, CULTURAL SCIENTIST AND MEDIATOR. SHE STUDIED CULTURAL STUDIES AND AESTHETIC PRACTICE AND ART AND POLITICS IN HILDESHEIM AND LONDON AND IS CURRENTLY DOING A MASTER'S DEGREE IN ART IN CONTEXT IN BERLIN. SHE PREFERS TO WORK WITH FILM, PERFORMANCE, TEXTILE, ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGY AND ARTISTIC (DIY) PUBLICATIONS. RECURRING THEMES IN HER WORK ARE THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF FEELINGS, AFFECTS AND RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR CONNECTION TO INTERSECTIONAL-FEMINIST AND DECOLONIAL APPROACHES, ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. SHE IS A FAN OF VISIONARY FICTION AND FEMINIST SPECULATION AS WELL AS FEMINIST AND ALTERNATIVE ARCHIVES AND NARRATIVES.

#### 4. REACTING

##### \_\_\_\_\_ \*simultaneities

The self-evident simultaneity of hybrid connections that overlap and subvert is the goal and structure of our work. The digital is not a tool, it is not a means of *getting somewhere*. The digital is the state and world reference in which we act. The devices are on our bodies, the smartphone is an agent that is constantly close to us.

Since the Covid pandemic, art and mediation have necessarily taken place digitally. The place of mediation is the Internet and thus at the same time the respective private or public space of all participants. Digital mediation formats have become normalized and more commonplace as a result of the pandemic. The need to explain the necessity or feasibility of digital formats, which we were still dealing with before the pandemic, has become superfluous. Digital mediation in general is no longer questioned because it is needed.

We observe the workshops we attend during the weeks of lockdown: Mediation happens on the second or on the third screen.<sup>1</sup> It occurs with a delay and at the same time as other everyday processes. The mediators noticeably become learners, they share ignorance about the forms and possibilities of coming together. Participants locate themselves between digital and analog interactions that no longer need to be constantly distinguished. Between their body here, the echo of their voice there in the feedback, deciding to turn off the video, take a walk, and listen in passing through headphones. Noticing their body after a long online session at their desk. We notice ourselves as well:

*We are busy in parks and on forest paths, not being online, recovering from video conferences, stretching our limbs that have been sitting in a chair for so long, but our devices are with us, receiving messages, installing updates, recording routes and locations, we are never not online. Our devices experience the walk in the park, they feel our hand making sure we have them with us. We forget the materiality of our devices as much as we suddenly become aware of them. We had forgotten our bodies in front of the screens. But we also didn't find them again when we went for a walk.*

*(Excerpt notes soppa/bleck Volkswagen Group Fellowship 2019-2020)*

\_\_\_\_\_ 1

Second Screen is a term for the parallel use of two devices, for example: Streaming a movie on the laptop while chatting on the smartphone.



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**\*institution internet**

Neither 'the internet' nor 'the art institutions' have been able to fulfill the promise of being places of emancipation, participation, and justice. Just as discriminatory, racist, sexist, ableist, classist social structures are perpetuated in art institutions, they operate on the internet. In each case in their composition, in their performativity, in their structure and in their content. Acknowledging this also means realizing that art institutions and the internet are part of and an expression of society, that they are society and make society. They are not detached places, not afterthoughts, not counter-designs.

Nevertheless, and precisely because of this, 'the internet' and 'the art institutions' have the possibility to provide other spaces: To welcome counter-designs and niches within themselves. To let something be brought inside, to keep the doors open to this. To also keep the doors open for something to falter.

Due to the normalization of digital formats in the course of the pandemic, related questions of content have become topical, questions that arise from the newly structured everyday life. Questions that are not new but within the collective experience of spatial limitation and self-reflexivity in the pandemic everyday life can once again be newly posed or more specifically linked to individual experiences: Questions about the dimensions and relations of proximity and distance, about the possibility and nature of gathering and coming together, about negotiating public space and claiming private space. Questions about physicality in the digital and the materiality of devices. Questions about the closedness and exclusion of art institutions and their possible accessibility or existing barriers in the digital. Thematically, these are the questions we always deal with at the same time in our projects: They are questions about the situation, the context, the actors, and the institution. In our mediation work, it has become increasingly important in the pandemic to convey a shared present as a circumstance and make impossibilities, flexibilities, and exhaustion visible and discussable. In the collective experiences of the pandemic and the simultaneous very individual experiences of precariousness, we have understood our work above all as the creation of digital situations in which a common exchange of experiences could become possible. We have understood mediation as an exchange platform and appointment within a threatening everyday life. Mediation was the possibility to exchange about this present while meeting under the conditions of this present.

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NORA BRÜNGER WORKS AS A CURATOR AND ART MEDIATOR. HER WORK FOCUSES ON QUESTIONS OF CARE IN THE VISUAL ARTS AND POWER-CRITICAL CURATORIAL PRACTICE, (QUEER) FEMINIST THEORIES AND ARTISTIC PRACTICES AS WELL AS SCIENCE FICTION, VISIONARY FICTION AND CYBERFEMINISM IN VISUAL ART. STUDIES SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND APPLIED LINGUISTICS AT THE LEIBNIZ UNIVERSITY HANNOVER, CULTURAL STUDIES AND AESTHETIC PRACTICE AS WELL AS STAGING OF THE ARTS AND MEDIA AT THE FOUNDATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HILDESHEIM. SINCE 2020, SHE IS THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE ART ASSOCIATION HILDESHEIM WHICH HAS ITS PREMISES IN A MEDIEVAL TOWER WITH TOO MANY STAIRS. CURATORIAL COLLABORATION THERE SINCE 2014. TEACHING POSITIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HILDESHEIM AND AT THE HFG KARLSRUHE.

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**Mediating and curating in complicity**

WHO TAKES THE FIRST STEP?

WHO BRINGS THE TEXT? WHO GIVES THE SPACE?

WHO OCCUPIES THE SPACE FOR HOW LONG?

WITH WHAT? WHO KNOWS THE NEIGHBORS?

WHO INVITES WHOM?

DO WE WANT TO LEAVE THE ROOMS TOGETHER

IF THERE ARE TOO MANY STAIRS?

WHO KNOWS WHERE THE EMERGENCY EXITS ARE?

IS THERE AN ACCESSIBLE TOILET? WHO

REGISTERS AN EVENT TO THE CITY? WHO HAS

THE FREE SPACES? WHO CAN, WHO WANTS

TO PARTICIPATE AT ALL?

IF WE DO EVERYTHING TOGETHER, WHO TELLS

US WHEN WE'RE DONE?

HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN TO TAKE A BREAK?

HOW DO WE MAKE THE EFFORT TO CONSTANTLY

QUESTION OUR OWN WORK?

WHAT IS IN THE HANDS OF THE VISITORS?

WHY SHOULD THEY WANT TO BECOME OUR

ACCOMPLICES? WHY SHOULD THEY ALSO WANT

TO QUESTION THEMSELVES?

CLOSE THE ROOMS OF YOUR INSTITUTION

TONIGHT. DO NOT UPDATE YOUR EMAIL ACCOUNT

AGAIN. SIT ON THE COMMUNITY BENCHES IN

FRONT AND LOOK AT THE ROOMS FROM THE

OUTSIDE.

Nora Brünger

## 5. OUTSIDE.OFFICE: WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL PROJECT AT THE STÄDTISCHE GALERIE WOLFSBURG, (SUMMER 2020).

*When proximity is both promise and prohibition, when institutions are abandoned, we move close to the institution and re-question its environment, the public space and its changing analog and digital conditions. Focusing our gaze on the institution, seeking its proximity, working visibly outdoors. Our research, our networking, our breaks, our work, and our questions become public and viewable.*

*(Excerpt notes soppa/bleck Volkswagen Group Fellowship 2019-2020)*

For the practical mediation project at the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg, we linked our working methods and experiences. First, we started again with ourselves, the circumstances and current impossibilities that surrounded and limited us, and asked: What kind of mediation, what form of work do we need, especially in times of contact restrictions and pandemic? What situations and places are we missing?

In the summer of 2020, from our desks, kitchen tables, beds, from our theory and research, from the endless video conferences and constantly updated and annotated online documents, we were drawn outside, into the open, into the public space, which suddenly had completely different parameters, conditions, and prerequisites.

We moved our workplace and built ourselves an office outside, placed in front of the Städtische Galerie, located in Wolfsburg Castle. This outside.office was a contrast to the permanent building of the castle with its thick walls, heavy doors, and rambling rooms. Our outside.office had a movable base frame, open to wind and sight, without walls to lean against and screen, instead equipped with movable fixtures to flexibly attach material, texts, devices, technology, and office tools. The *outside.office* was deliberately a connecting point for time and in motion. Mounted on castors, it was mobile, but always dependent on people to push or turn it, to react to changes in the weather and, depending on the situation, to throw over a protective rain cover or to adjust the reclining areas to the warming sun.

For the design of the outside.office, we commissioned the duo *die Blaue Distanz* [the blue distance]. This collaboration was itself already part of a mediation from a distance since we could not meet in one place. We wanted to work *in* the



— Fig. 2 Janina Snatzke: outside.office, Wolfsburg 2020

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IN TIMES OF EXIT RESTRICTIONS,  
QUARANTINE AND HOME OFFICE, WHERE  
ARE THE BOUNDARIES OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC  
SPACE? OF WORK AND NON-WORK?  
HOW MUCH SPACE CAN BE COMPRESSED  
INTO ONE PLACE? HOW DO WE OVERCOME THE  
BOUNDARIES OF ART INSTITUTIONS THAT  
SEEM FAR AWAY? HOW DO WE CREATE AN  
ENCOUNTER WHEN ONE CAN ONLY APPROXIMATE?  
HOW DO WE CROSS THE DEMANDS OF STREAMS,  
OFFERS, CARE WORK, EXISTENTIAL NEEDS,  
TO DO NOTHING TOGETHER FOR A WHILE, FOR  
EXAMPLE? OR DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT?  
DO THESE QUESTIONS APPLY TO ART MEDIA-  
TORS? DO THEY APPLY TO AN AUDIENCE?  
DO THEY APPLY TO EMPLOYEES IN INSTITUTIONS?

design and on the ideas and interpretations of our accomplices. The communication at a distance in the form of concept and revision of the concept was to be visible in the mobile office and then again used quite pragmatically. The outside office was to become a practical and pragmatic space for negotiation and the material of a multi-level collaboration: a collaboration in the concept.

By moving our work location into the public space, we also made our mediation work more publicly visible. Our work thus also became a performance and our appearance an invitation to talk to people passing by – about what is happening here and especially about the statement “we can’t go back to normal”, which was clearly visible on the flag above our office.

In addition, we continued our usual work together in a pair and continued to work on texts, questions, and research. We pursued targeted exchange with two program points that we carried out from the outside office: the online discussion event: *Digital Tools for the Critique of Art Institutions* with Miriam M’Barek, which took place twice semi-publicly, as well as the *public digitized Parkwalk* for the public who had registered in advance.

## DIGITAL TOOLS FOR THE CRITIQUE OF ART INSTITUTIONS WITH MIRIAM M’BAREK

Led by Miriam M’Barek, we exchanged ideas with other stakeholders from art mediation, political education, and curatorial practice in two online sessions on possible tools for critical mediation in and at art institutions. Based on hashtags such as #changethemuseum<sup>2</sup>, we explored the potential of institutional critique as expressed by staff, audiences, and a digital public on social media. Posts and profiles published by art institutions themselves also became venues for audience critique, feedback, and exchange in the comments section.

Based on these examples of public criticism on social media, we made the working hypothesis that the comment sections on social media are used as a platform for discussion in a reversed logic of mediation: This reversal consists of the fact that it is no longer the institution that activates an audience to engage and participate in discourse but rather a critical audience approaches the institution with comments in

\_\_\_ 2

Under the profile [changethemuseum](#) on Instagram and the hashtag of the same name, reports of experienced racism at US museums are collected and published. Among them are experiences of employees as well as visitors (see the profile of [@changethemuseum: instagram.com/changethemuseum/](#)).



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SETTING: THREE DAYS IN PUBLIC, OUTSIDE, IN THE OPEN, IN THE CASTLE PARK IN FRONT OF THE STÄDTISCHE GALERIE WOLFSBURG // OUR HOME OFFICE IN THE OPEN BECOMES A SHARED STATION // VISIBILITY OF OUR WORK, RESEARCH, TALKS, CONFERENCES, BREAKS // MATERIALS: OVERSIZED TERRY TOWEL, SMARTPHONES, BLUETOOTH KEYBOARDS, MOBILE SPEAKERS, WHITEBOARD, SCAFFOLDING, BRACKETS, WIFI-CUBE, POWERBANKS, FLAG WITH INSCRIPTION: "WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL," TEXTS, WATER, DISINFECTANT, FACE MASKS, SUNSCREEN, RAIN CAPES // ACCOMPLICES INVOLVED: DIE BLAUE DISTANZ, MIRIAM M'BAREK, CASTLE PARK VISITORS // PROGRAM: OFFICE BUILDING (+ DIE BLAUE DISTANZ). // DISCUSSION (+ MIRIAM M'BAREK A.O.) // PARK WALKS (+ PARK WALKERS)



— Fig. 3 Janina Snatzke: building outside.office, Wolfsburg 2020

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SINCE THE BEGINNING OF 2016, ADAM ERDMANN AND FRANZI GORALSKI HAVE BEEN WORKING TOGETHER ARTISTICALLY UNDER THE NAME DIE BLAUE DISTANZ AND UNDERSTAND THIS COLLABORATION AS AN ACTIVE STEP AGAINST ISOLATION IN THE PROFESSIONAL FIELD OF ART AND CULTURE. THEY DEAL WITH IDENTITY FORMATION, FEMALE ROLE MODELS, DIGITAL FEMINISM, QUEER LIFESTYLES, SELF-REPRESENTATION AS AN ARTISTIC INTERVENTION AND THE VISUALIZATION OF UNDERREPRESENTED DECISIONS. THEIR IN-DEPTH RESEARCH-BASED APPROACHES LEAD TO CONCEPTUALLY CONDITIONED, CROSS-MEDIA WORKS AND INVOLVING SETTINGS. CURRENT FORMS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR ARTISTIC PRACTICE ARE THE DESIGN OF LOW HIERARCHY SPACES, THE INVENTION OF PARTICIPATORY CEREMONIES AND EXERCISES AND THE CONCEPTION OF A FUTURE QUEER-FEMINIST COMMUNITY SPACE. INSPIRED BY A DAAD-FUNDED RESEARCH STAY IN LOS ANGELES, WHERE THEY RESEARCHED THE EMANCIPATORY POWER OF PLACE – ESPECIALLY FOR MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN SOCIETY – THEY ARE STUDYING FUTURE VISIONS AND COMMONING – THE ACTIVE PRACTICE OF COMMON PROPERTY AND COMMUNITY – FROM QUEER-FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN A MASTER'S PROGRAM AT THE SANDBERG INSTITUTE IN AMSTERDAM. THEIR MANY YEARS OF RESEARCH ON LESBIAN AND QUEER SPACES IS PUT UNDER THE WORKING TITLE "LILA-X-BASE". IN 2020 THIS RESULTED IN A BAR TAKE-OVER AND THE WORK "LILA-X-BATH – VISIONS FOR A QUEER COMMUNITY PLACE". ADAM ERDMANN AND FRANZI GORALSKI INVESTIGATED A FORMER BATHHOUSE AND WOVE VISIONS FROM PAST HISTORIES. SPATIAL IDEAS OF QUEER ENCOUNTER AND THE LIVING OUT OF CORPOREALITY AS FLINTA\* WERE ALSO IMPORTANT MARKERS IN THEIR WORK. FOR THE KUNSTHALLE ...



... OSNABRÜCK DIE BLAUE DISTANZ 2021 CONCEIVES "WE CANNOT SKIP THIS PART" - AN IMMERSIVE FILM SPACE CONCEPT WITH A FOCUS ON BARRIER REMOVAL AND ACCESSIBILITY. SOMETIMES ROSES ARE DISTRIBUTED, SOMETIMES THE WALLS HOLD MONOLOGUES, SOMETIMES VISITORS TAKE OFF THEIR SHOES; THIS TIME THE WORK IS REMINISCENT OF AN UNDERGROUND CAR PARK WITH A LOUNGE CHARACTER.

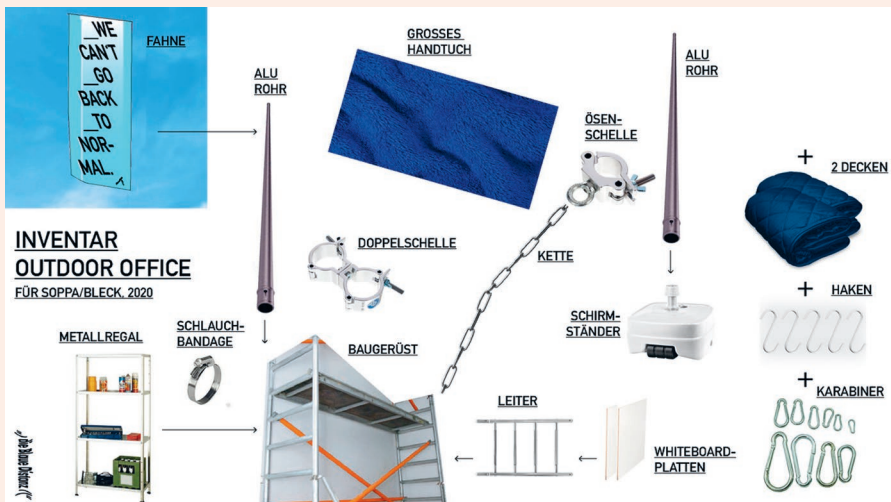


Fig. 4 die Blaue Distanz: inventory outside.office // construction instructions Wolfsburg, 2020

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AGAIN: HAS SOMETHING  
BEEN ROBBED?

COME AS AN UNSOLICITED WITNESS  
INTRODUCE NEW CATEGORIES  
OF EVIDENCEWRITE THE SAME  
MESSAGE AGAIN SOMEWHERE ELSE  
DON'T HIDE DOUBTS, LET THEM  
BECOME PART OF THE ACCUSATION  
AND AGAIN: HAS SOMETHING  
BEEN ROBBED?

Miriam M'Barek

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MIRIAM M'BAREK WORKS AT THE  
INTERFACE OF ART, ITS CRITIQUE AND  
POLITICAL REFERENCES. HER  
FOCUS IS ON THE INTERSECTIONALITY  
OF RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY.  
USING FORMS OF INSTITUTIONAL  
CRITIQUE AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH,  
SHE INVESTIGATES POST-MIGRATORY  
IDENTITY POLITICS. HER TEXT HYPO-  
CRISIS (2020), PUBLISHED BY CON-  
TEMPORARY&, NEGOTIATES RACISM IN  
(GERMAN) ART INSTITUTIONS AND  
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN IT IS EXPOSED  
WITHIN THE INSTITUTION.

the form of questions, comments, accusations, demands, links, and thus invites the institution to participate, negotiate, and engage in discourse.

We observed this particularly in the context of postings by black squares via social media channels that were used as expressions of solidarity to the Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd in the USA. Art institutions also participated. In the respective comment sections on their postings, we were able to follow entire threads of discussion in which the institutions were called upon to engage in more self-reflection. Some followers complained about the purely performative gesture and drew attention to the institutions' lack of engagement with everyday racism. Critical followers linked to educational materials, training opportunities, and/or other accounts that illustrated this educational work in Instagram formats, etc.

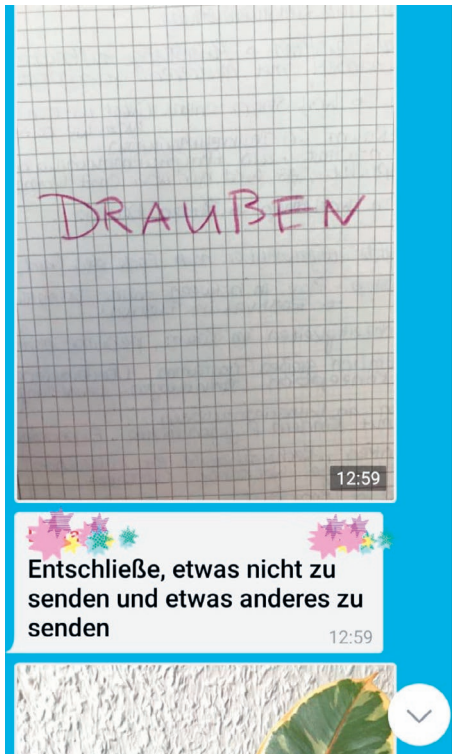
From these observations, we made the following demands in the context of arts mediation and social media commentary:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Criticism and demands voiced by audiences should be taken seriously by institutions as constructive feedback and should find their way into internal design and structuring processes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The social media profiles of art institutions should be recognized as a platform that goes beyond marketing, documentation, and participatory actions: Because, as the examples make clear, an informed and critical audience that wants something from and challenges the institution is already there.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Responses via comments on social media are a mediation strategy that is reversed, turning from the audience to the institution.

An audience makes itself known as an inevitable discussion partner. Calling attention to, for example, racist or sexist projections in the institution which can stimulate processes that can reach inside the institution. These processes can be art mediation in reverse. They can represent a radicalization of the concept of participation. They address the institution from the outside.

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13:01

Leg dich hin, wenn du magst,  
veranschauliche dir die Situation  
halte dein device gut fest

13:01



GIF

13:02



GIF

22:59



GIF

23:10



16:31



lehne an kunst

16:31





zeitpunkt: 11.07.2020 um 16:00  
space: dieser Chat/Außengelände  
Schloss Wolfsburg/verschiedene Orte  
im öffentlichen Raum  
spaces: Wenn du nicht vor Ort in  
Wolfsburg teilnimmst, begib dich  
für den Walk nach Draußen in einen  
öffentlichen Raum. Im besten Fall  
in einen Park.

>>Wenn ihr eure Telefonnummern  
verbergen möchtet, müsst ihr einen  
Benutzer\*innennamen anlegen, der  
statt eurer Nummer angezeigt wird.  
(-> siehe Einstellungen). Nur eure  
gespeicherten Kontakte können dann  
noch wie gewohnt eure Nummer sehen.

>>Dies ist ein geteilter Raum  
zwischen Teilnehmenden  
des Parkwalks in Wolfsburg/  
soppa\_bleck/Teilnehmenden an  
unterschiedlichen Orten. Dies ist kein  
öffentlicher Chat. Eine Anmeldung ist  
notwendig. Screenshots dürfen nicht  
veröffentlicht werden.

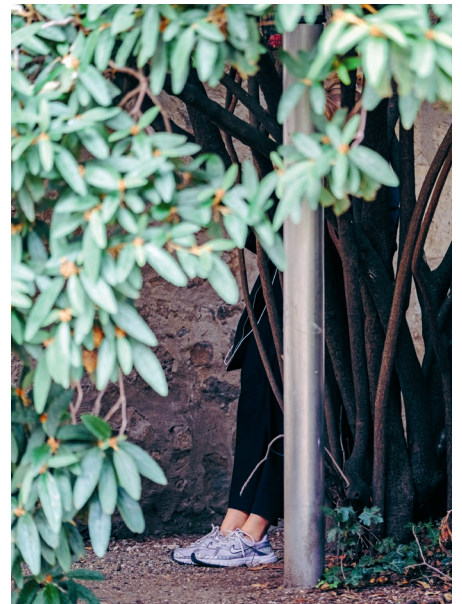
>>Du kannst alles in deinem Tempo  
machen. Du kannst Anweisungen  
überlesen oder verweigern oder  
ignorieren. Du kannst jederzeit  
Fragen stellen, Kommentare und  
Eindrücke senden.

>>Wir eröffnen innerhalb des geteilten  
Raums hier weitere mögliche Räume  
und Routen, die ihr online betreten  
könnt. Diese Links könnt ihr jederzeit  
besuchen. Sie sind zusätzliche Räume  
aber keine notwendigen Räume.  
Ihr müsst keinesfalls die Links  
chronologisch durchgehen. Ihr könnt  
sie verfolgen, wenn euch der Park zu  
langweilig wird.

>>Schalte deinen Smartphone-Ton für  
die Zeit des Walks aus.

Wo\_bist\_du\_nicht?  
Was\_bedeutet\_ein\_Spaziergang?  
Wo\_bist\_du\_auch\_noch?  
Welche\_Route\_teilst\_du?

bearbeitet 13:12 ✓



---

## OUTSIDE.OFFICE NOTES

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS AN ASSURANCE AND AN UNCERTAINTY,  
A MESSAGE, A DEMAND, A STATEMENT  
AND A WISH.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS THE NECESSITY TO QUESTION WHAT  
IS ALREADY THERE.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS THE NECESSITY TO EXPOSE PROCESSES.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS THE NEED TO OVERTURN CONCEPTS.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS ADDRESSING MEDIATION TO INSTITUTIONS  
THEMSELVES. THE MEDIATION TURNS  
AROUND AND HAS THE IMPOSSIBLE AUDIENCE  
AT ITS BACK AND THE INSTITUTION  
IN FRONT OF ITS EYES. TOGETHER WITH  
THE AUDIENCE, IT APPROACHES THE  
INSTITUTION. THE AUDIENCE ITSELF IS THE  
MEDIATION WE NEED.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS THE NEED TO TAKE A STAND.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS THE NEED TO CREATE INTIMACY.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS THE WISH OF A SCHOLARSHIP THAT  
DOES NOT END AND IS GRANTED TO MANY.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS THE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS THE FEAR OF ACTUALLY NOT BEING ABLE  
TO GO BACK.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS THE SUPPORT WE GIVE EACH OTHER.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS A REMINDER TO OURSELVES WHEN WE  
GET COMFORTABLE.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS A REMINDER OF A COMFORT WE HAVE LOST.

// WE CAN'T GO BACK TO NORMAL  
IS THE POSSIBILITY TO QUESTION OUR  
OWN STRUCTURES. NOT ONLY ELSEWHERE,  
BUT IN YOUR OWN WORK, IN YOUR OWN  
INSTITUTION, IN YOURSELF.





---

**SILKE BALLATH**

WEAVING IN:  
RESPONSIBILITY  
AS A PRACTICE  
OF JOINING  
TOGETHER.

RESPONSIBILITY,  
FOR ME, [...] HAS  
TO DO WITH MAKING  
CONNECTIONS  
AMONG OURSELVES,  
HOW WE PUT  
OURSELVES  
TOGETHER, AND  
HOW WE ARE  
PUT TOGETHER.<sup>1</sup>

HARAWAY 1995: 110

With this sentence, feminist philosopher of science, literary scholar, and biologist Donna Haraway opens up three dimensions in relation to responsibility<sup>2</sup> – a collaborative, a reflexive and a historical. She also addresses the situatedness of each individual actor who moves within a collective context, a community, and describes this situatedness as a relation between the present, the past, and the future. Based on the figure of thought of weaving in (cf. Spivak 2008: 44), introduced by the literary scholar, feminist, pedagogue, and theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, these relations of historically grown power structures and colonial relations of inequality become reflectable. I place responsibility as a practice of assembling in direct relation to the figure of thought of weaving in. Based on

my experiences as an art mediator, cultural agent, and academic researcher<sup>3</sup> I would like to take Haraway's statement and Spivak's figure of thought of weaving in as a starting point for thinking about responsibility as a practice of assembling in the context of art mediation through collaboration, reflection, historical context and situatedness. I understand responsibility as a practice of assembling

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This and the following quotes were published in German and translated by Frieda Pattenden [FP].

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In the following I will continue with the concept of responsibility. Responsibility denotes the duty in itself to take care of something. Responsibility is the object of responsibility. (cf. Duden 2021).

\_\_\_ 3

As a cultural agent, I have accompanied artistic-educational school development processes for ten years and have conceived, carried out, and reflected on the process of building an artistic profile in collaboration with cultural institutions and artists in six schools and their stakeholders. As an art mediator, I am interested in the intersections between discourse, institution, actors, and urban society (such as documenta12, Lokale Liaison/Kunstverein Wolfsburg, sideviews/Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlinische Galerie, Jüdisches Museum Berlin, KW-Institute for Contemporary Art, and others) along a discrimination-critical artistic-educational practice. As a teacher and academic researcher, I explore on the one hand, the field between school and art as well as their actors and the historical (colonial) entanglements and inscriptions in their social contexts as well as my position as a white person identifying myself as female. On the other hand, I am interested in the conditions and possibilities that the relation between practice and theory opens up for the formation of a reflexive practice in this field.

in terms of a figure of thought that, starting from the social context from which I speak, must incorporate colonial entanglements and a critical perspective on racism into an artistic-educational practice (and art mediation).

My reflection is divided into four sections, each of which takes up one or more of the dimensions (collaborative, reflexive, historical, and situated) and asks how existing conditions can be set into motion. In this respect, this text itself is also to be understood as a reflection in progress which claims neither completeness nor closure. Rather, I understand the threads that I weave together here as possibilities that can be linked to all reading and every practice.

## REFLECTING COMMUNITY - IMAGINING COMMUNITY

The postcolonial theorists María do Mar Castro Varela and Nikita Dhawan formulate, similarly to Haraway in the preceding quotation, that "looking forward [...] can only succeed if it remains directed simultaneously to the here and now as well as to yesterday" (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2009: 324) [Translation FP]. With the art mediator and curator Nora Sternfeld, I read this statement as meaning that a communal future can only be imagined if historical and colonial entanglements are not faded out and ignored in the process. As Sternfeld states in a lecture, "an idea of what a better future would be can be shaken by an actual better

future. [...] almost certainly it can't be done alone. I can't imagine now what I can't imagine. But I think together with others it is possible, in small steps" (Sternfeld 2020: n.d.) [Translation FP].

I would like to describe this collective dimension, imagining a possible future together with others as an essential basic prerequisite for creating a diverse community. The feminist literary scholar, author, educator, and activist bell hooks also addresses this collective dimension and emphasizes that a 'willingness for reciprocity' is important for this: "To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination" (hooks 2003: 36)<sup>4</sup>. hooks explains that community building requires an awareness of one's own and collective socialization processes that maintain the respective relations of domination.<sup>5</sup> The willingness for reciprocity is therefore not only closely linked to an awareness of relations of inequality and dominance, it also seeks to uncover the reproduction of these relations of domination, which only become reflectable with this awareness, as well as one's own entanglements in the historical context out of which they arise. Spivak identifies the metaphor of fabric for these reproductive relations. She emphasizes that the "woven text-ile [must be] seen as a torn cultural fabric that was removed from the dominant loom at a particular historical moment. For that is what it means to be subaltern" (Spivak 2008: 44) [Translation FP]. The result of her image is that existing, hegemonic discourses have been woven without incorporating "torn cultural fabrics" (Spivak 2008: 44) [Translation FP] or renewing the texture.

The reversal makes clear that hegemonic discourse necessarily only reproduces what has been woven into it, and that the figure of thought of weaving in involves epistemic violence. For the dynamics between bodies, spaces, objects, and language only reproduce what has already been woven into the dominant fabric. In other words, the relation of production of concepts and practices is not brought into view and this relation is not redefined or, in Spivak's words, unlearned: if only what exists in the dominant discourse is recognized. Concepts and their associated practices are interdependent, interrelated. If both, as well as their relation, are not

\_\_\_ 4

In the following, I will repeatedly insert English quotations, but translate them into German in the context of the text. The text uses two languages, but the meaning of the text is also understandable if the English quotations are not read.

\_\_\_ 5

Socialization processes (re)produce one's own position as well as societal inscriptions of values and norms, power, dominance, and inequality relations, etc.

explicitly put up for debate (cf. Spivak 1990: 1-9), practices reproduce what is inscribed in the concept and vice versa. It's a designation practice. "Terms can be understood as a component of discourses within which they receive their meaning and thus their (effective) power. Consequently, conceptual practices deserve special attention, especially if we assume that concepts – not least under media and knowledge society conditions of the increase in the power of symbols [...] – are not only accurate or less accurate expressions and images of social reality but produce social reality" (Mecheril 2016: 12) [Translation FP], as educationalist Paul Mecheril states. He specifies that "terms and designation practices [...] are tools of perception. They are instruments that enable a certain view of reality because they accentuate certain aspects and nuances while hiding others" (ibid.) [Translation FP]. Mecheril's explanation, on the one hand, echoes Spivak's idea of considering the production of theory as a practice that essentially participates in shaping the world.<sup>6</sup>In addition, Mecheril's implementation

shows impressively that, starting from concepts, practices of inclusion and exclusion as well as orders of affiliation<sup>7</sup> are (re)produced. This means that the mere naming of structures of domination and relations of dominance is not sufficient to make another, possible future negotiable and imaginable.

Both Spivak and hooks emphasize in their theories and approaches that living in a diverse community requires engaged reflection on complex contexts. Any simplification stands in the way of understanding and multiplicity of different perspectives and bodies of knowledge<sup>8</sup>, which is why it must be a conscious act of unlearning these relations and prevailing structures. Spivak speaks of an "unlearning of privileges"<sup>9</sup> and understands unlearning as an active process in which form, content, and protagonists must be involved. The struggle for positions is an immanent part of this process: it takes place when the existing texture, considered universal or woven, is to be supplemented and can trigger a crisis or conflict because habits are questioned and possibly overturned, familiar rules

\_\_\_ 6

E.g. "[...] no practice takes place without presupposing itself as an example of some more or less powerful theory" (Spivak 1990: 2).

\_\_\_ 7

"The term order of belonging refers to the powerful contexts that productively influence individuals through a complex form of enabling and regulating, symbolic, cultural, political, and biographical inclusion and exclusion. The order of belonging can be described as a structured and structuring context in which individuals become subjects" (Mecheril 2016: 16).

\_\_\_ 8

"Segregation simplifies; integration requires that we come to terms with multiple ways of knowledge, of interaction" (hooks 2003: 78).

\_\_\_ 9

"My project is the careful project of un-learning our privilege as our loss. I think it is impossible to forget that anyone who is able to speak in the interests of the privileging of practice against the privileging of theory has been enabled by a certain kind of production" (Spivak 1990: 9).

are traversed and possibly rearranged. The process of adding is arduous and violent because the renewal of the “torn cultural fabric” (Spivak 2008: 44) [Translation FP] succeeds only through a weaving in, an addition of missing textures. Castro Varela explains that “over centuries [...] Eurocentric views [were] canonized, granting Europeans a central position in the knowledge universe and ensuring the reproduction of imperialist subjects” (Castro Varela 2015: 17) [Translation FP]. The concept of unlearning privilege is based on the idea of questioning, reviewing, and changing hegemonic habits of teaching and learning (e.g., everyone would have equal opportunities to participate in education) through a self-reflexive, -critical, and interventive practice. Thus, “it is a matter of learning how what constitutes the here and now can be experienced from within the specific logic of the marginalized. There is a need for invisible mending. [Spivak] describes this form of education as “weaving invisible threads into the texture that is already there” (Castro Varela 2007: n.p.) [Translation FP].

This is accompanied by a reversal of the direction of binary oppositions, exposing the violence that is (re)produced in the prevailing fabric (cf. Spivak 1990: 8). Accordingly, it is not only an active and conflicting process, but also a painful one, without which a future society cannot be imagined: “When we only name the problem, when we state complaint without a constructive focus on resolution, we take away hope. In this way critique can become merely an expression of profound cynicism, which then works to sustain dominator culture” (hooks 2003: XIV). hooks emphasizes that critique without a constructive focus or naming of relations of inequality merely contributes to the maintenance of dominant culture. Conflict and pain are based on the recognition of social reproductions of relations and social spaces, historical updates of distinctions and past(s), and awareness of privilege. Awareness of this is the starting point for unlearning dominant positions and situatedness. This also includes the recognition of different knowledge in any interaction with each other as well as the constructive focus on how a possible future might look like although one does not know it.

## **EXPERIMENTING WITH CONSTRUCTIVE SPACES OF NEGOTIATION**

Starting from a constructive focus, how can the relation of production between concepts and practices be unlearned? The relation between bodies, spaces, language, and things has been described as a dynamic, an interaction between bodies and things, a moving fabric of relations. Unlearning would therefore mean an interruption of this hegemonic-reproduced dynamic of relations. What might such an interruption look like? If form, content, and protagonists are included in

this process, it could be a matter of producing a space for negotiation and experimenting with interactions within it. If hooks were involved, it would have to be a *constructive* negotiation space in which a possible future can be imagined in interaction and collectively experimented on, negotiated, and tested. How might a constructive negotiation space be imagined and experimented within the context of art mediation?

Spivak's concept of unlearning privilege has shown that negotiating a possible future is tied to more than issuing an invitation to collaborate in a context of belonging (school, museum, classroom, and so on) or making it available, for example, in the context of an artistic project or art mediation situation. Consequently, it is not enough to merely name a space of negotiation because this space remains attached to the fabric, structures, and (hierarchical) encodings offered by the institutional framework which are known before especially to those who work in this space. Mecheril explains the relationship between belonging and exclusion as follows: "[Belonging] becomes contexts of clear boundaries and rules of membership, an imagined space of one or more cultural lifestyles, and a context of imagined togetherness and biographical connectedness" (Mecheril 2003: 18) [Translation FP]. Schools, classrooms, and museums can be conceptualized as these imagined spaces. In them, belonging is reproduced. They are based on a familiar context of commonality and suggest assignment and belonging. These spaces are based on learned practices that have an underlying action-relevant understanding of a corpus of rules. In other words, they are cultural spaces of action that reproduce binary orders of belonging of an "us/non-us schematic" (Mecheril 2003: 21) [Translation FP] by means of symbolic mechanisms of distinction. However, a common, constructive space of negotiation, in which a possible future is imagined, can only emerge when an awareness has been formed that these imagined spaces reproduce exclusions.

The invitation or demand<sup>10</sup> to move in these spaces is so far not connected to reflecting on the different positions of all those who reside in the spaces and to jointly developing an awareness of the respective historical entanglements and reproductions in exchange. Instead, the existing fabric is supplemented in in-

teraction with each other, possibly even criticized, but still reproduced without constructive focus: social, economic, and political inequalities are perpetuated. So how does unlearning privilege become a prerequisite for producing a constructive space for negotiation that can

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I see it as a demand to have to go to school and not to be there voluntarily. That is, here we can speak of a demand rather than an invitation.

become a collective space? In which the existing rules are negotiable, in which points of view are in motion<sup>11</sup> and in which an awareness of power relations and contradictions can be developed – a space that the participants know how to use and for which they take responsibility for their own and common concerns and questions as well as historical entanglements?

### WEAVING WEBS: TRANSCENDING, IMAGINING, EXPERIMENTING

According to hooks, the conceptualization of knowledge and the ways in which that knowledge is transmitted manifests relations of domination and produces institutions. Institutions legitimize and reproduce themselves starting from the conceptualization of knowledge, at the same time this canon of knowledge legitimizes itself with the help of the institution, as Spivak also states. She highlights that the canon can be completed based on institutional contradictions: “Canons are the condition of institutions and the effect of institutions. Canons secure institutions as institutions secure canons. [...] Since it is indubitable the case that there is no expansion without contradiction, [...w]e must make room for the coordinated teaching of new entries into the canon [...]” (Spivak 1993/2009: 304-305). That is, contradictions potentially mark a rift in the fabric. If, as hooks also suggests, a conscious approach to institutional contradictions is developed, coupled with the possibility of the unexpected, contradictions open up a possibility of disruption in the prevailing fabric, a collective space for negotiation and imagination, and for transgression. The institutional space, “with all its limitations, [will be] a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress” (hooks 1994: 207). “To transgress” here means both a process of unlearning and transgressing boundaries as well as imagining these transgressions (cf. Diallo/Faradjollah 2020: n. p.).

This process begins with developing a constructive consciousness so that an alternative social reality becomes imaginable, different languages are used, different perspectives are included, and traditional images, metaphors, and symbols are deconstructed (cf. Namulundah 1998). The dialogue becomes a central element in renewing the fabric and questioning categories

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I refer here to Donna Haraway (Haraway 1995) and specifically to the project “Hey Siril What is a Curator?” in which such a space of negotiation has been negotiated, experimented with, and tested (Ballath 2020: n. p.).



such as race, gender, and class critically in terms of discrimination: "To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, and class, professional standing, and a host of other differences" (hooks 1994: 130). Furthermore, hooks emphasizes that each situation must be perceived differently by the mediating actors, and strategies must be constantly changed, reinvented, and reconceptualized in order to re-encounter each situation, respect differences, and honor multiplicity. She is concerned that everyone can become an active part of a learning process based on their own stories and experiences, and that when this process begins, the roles and positions of teachers/learners, facilitators/participants can be set in motion, reflected upon and questioned. This goes hand in hand with the change of perspectives and the granting of (the) learning of different positions, "to illuminate and counteract the cultural hegemony characteristic of many school environments [and art institutions]" (Namulundah 1998: 91). hooks consciously opposes the rehearsal and disciplining of the body as well as the hegemonic transmission of knowledge in institutional spaces, among others, with teaching as a performative act (cf. hooks 1994: 191). She is explicitly concerned with disrupting the normative separation of body and mind or theory and practice.

Similar to Spivak, she sees the linking of theory and practice as an opportunity for change, interruptions, inventions, and spontaneous shifts through which the particular emerges in each space: on the one hand, the linking of theory and practice, as well as a conscious interaction between body and mind, allows for the interrogation of the one on the basis of the other, "[...] while avoiding a reification of the teaching/learning process from contentious issues of racial, gender, and class biases in school and society" (Namulundah 1998: 101). Thus, for example, issues such as race, gender, and class can be addressed in learning and teaching processes, and contradictions between assumption and experience can be named and negotiated. On the other hand, it is about revealing (inequality in) relations as well as social inclusions and exclusions and the violence associated with them: reversing the direction of supposed binary oppositions. Theory and practice, body and mind are in a reciprocal process in which one enables the other and "where our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice" (hooks 1994: 61). If theory is understood as an analysis of daily experience, then theories can be used along the lines of experience in order to test their applicability and to promote an awareness of

anti-racist practice (cf. hooks 2003: 36). hooks emphasizes that a practice of unlearning racism must be accompanied by a recognition of various uncertainties, “[...] the value of risk, honoring the fact that we may learn and grow in circumstances where we do not feel safe, that the presence of conflict is not necessarily negative but rather its meaning is determined by how we cope with that conflict” (hooks 2003: 64). In addition to acknowledging uncertainties, a constructive approach to conflicts and contradictions is the starting point for imagining a future community together, critical of racism.

### A MOVING FABRIC OF RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS

In the context of art mediation, what does weaving invisible threads into the prevailing, visible, reproducing fabric look like? And how can a self-reflexive, -critical, interventive and conflictual practice be tested and established together with others in the process? How can habits and familiar rules be overturned, traversed, and perhaps even reordered? hooks formulates that the formation of a critical consciousness is the first step in setting institutional space in motion: “When the [institutional space] is truly engaged, it’s dynamic. It’s fluid. It’s always changing” (hooks, 1994: 158). This would be accompanied by a reconceptualization of knowledge, the interplay of theory and practice or mind and body (Diallo/Faradjollah 2020: n. p.), the self-empowerment of learners and participants, a concept of learning and mediation that is based on culturality, and a new approach to learning<sup>12</sup> as well as the inclusion of passion/love in teaching and mediation practice (cf. hooks 2003: 131). Only on these foundations could interventions and movements take place in the existing hegemonic structures (cf. hooks 2020: 119).

Weaving the missing, invisible texture into the prevailing fabric implies not only a linking of partial perspectives, but also the normative knowledge of a community, its rules and appointments, as well as the interplay of theory and practice or mind and body (Diallo/Faradjollah 2020: n.p.) would have to be experimented with and analyzed, reconsidered and reconceptualized along interactions as well as

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hooks speaks of “multiculturalism” (hooks 1994: 28-44; 173.). Her understanding of multiculturalism corresponds to the approach that educationalist Hakan Gürses (Gürses 2016) describes as culturalism. I understand multiculturalism as a Eurocentric concept that emphasizes a universally valid concept of culture. With culturality, culture is understood as a conflictual practice that emphasizes the articulation of different perspectives and marginalizations. The concept of culturality draws attention to historical constellations, power relations, knowledge, and options for action, in order to reflect on one’s own position in the process. It complements the approach of unlearning privilege and makes the political, the social and the economic articulable and analyzable starting from the field of the cultural.

passion/love.<sup>13</sup> For an artistic-educational practice this could mean offering a mobile framework to make existing constructions, positions and contexts questionable, experimentable and experienceable. A framework that includes and does not reject joint search movements and compromises between all project participants, that makes contradictions negotiable, seeks cracks in the fabric and provokes interruptions. It opens up temporary complicity in order to remain permeable in the construction of a diverse community and to open up body positions and self-understanding. This constantly re-sorting framework of the encounter of different perspectives can be described using Haraway's figure of viewpoints in motion as a blurring of boundaries and the desire to play with changeability as the result and prerequisite of all cognition. Bodies (people and things) play an essential role in this. Haraway understands them as deposits of interactions and relations (cf. Haraway 1995: 109). On the one hand, it follows that bodies are interconnected and collectively produced and constructed. On the other hand, they can be considered changeable and hybrid constructs. Each position describes a point of view, a particular point of view, and a perspective. Every interaction causes a movement. Connecting different points of view opens up the possibility of "weaving a web capable of transforming power-organized positionings without simultaneously dissolving all differences into a central point of view or perspective" (Haraway 1995: 24) [Translation FP]. Such a network of movable standpoints could be the starting point for understanding responsibility as a practice of assembling, in order to open up temporary spaces of negotiation of social togetherness, in which existing positions (museums, work, people, ...) and the meanings that go with them become questioned, negotiable, experimentable, and thus also temporarily changeable. Constructive spaces of negotiation in which a possible future is imagined. I imagine such a constructive negotiation space as a place where a practice of unlearning dominant discourses and power relations takes place and the construction of a diverse community can be imagined and experimented with for which the actors feel responsible, develop a mutual willingness to listen to each other, to argue and to contradict.

\_\_\_ 13

The concept of love is described by hooks as a combination of caring, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust, and as the foundation of any interaction (cf. hooks 2003: 131).

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# BIOGRAPHIES

### **Silke Ballath**

is a research associate at the HBK Braunschweig. She researches the space between school and art in the context of collaborative practices as well as the relation between theory and practice in art mediation. From 2011 to 2021 she accompanied six Berlin schools as a cultural agent and in 2018 she was co-founder of the youth committee Schattenmuseum ([www.schattenmuseum.de](http://www.schattenmuseum.de)) with ten young people. From 2014 to 2016, she was co-moderator of kontextschule ([www.kontextschule.org](http://www.kontextschule.org)). Actually she is finishing her dissertation on the collaboration of teachers and artists with the title "Kontextspezifische (Aushandlungs-)Räume pluraler Beziehungsweisen". Current projects and publications include the research project situating in between ([www.situierungzwischen.net](http://www.situierungzwischen.net)) and *Wie viel(e) Geschichte(n) hat ein Klang? Spielräume schaffen für ein Sowohl-als-auch polyphoner Experimente*, in: Erni, Danja (Hg.): RE-VISIONEN N° 1. KontextSchule 2014-2021, Berlin: Verlag der Universität der Künste Berlin, S. 106-119.

### **CARE LESS**

**Paula Mierzowsky** works in a multidisciplinary way with references to care, perception and transformation processes. She develops 'self-' experiential spaces, participatory performances, as well as stage and costume designs. Many works have been created in collectives: MUDAFI with Johann Diel (since 2019), CARE LESS (2015-2018, Volkswagen Group Fellowship 2017/18), ACAD&C – Agency for Contemporary Artistic Discourse and Collaboration (2015-2017). She studied at the Kunsthochschule Kassel, worked parallel to and subsequently at the theater (Kassel & Freiburg) in costume and set design. She has shown work at E-Werk, Freiburg, Theater Freiburg, documenta-Halle, Kassel, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, Weltkunstzimmer, Düsseldorf, Dock 4 Kassel, Museum Arnhem, among others. Kerstin Rupprecht is an artist and cultural scientist who works mainly in the media of video installation, film and performance. Her artistic works often have a playful seeming experimental structure with a media-critical approach. In the presentation, content and form enter into a sensual unity. In many of her artistic works, power relations are thematized. Since 2016, she has been represented with her short films at numerous film festivals, including Musrara Mix Festival Jerusalem, Dokfest Kassel and Stuttgarter Filmwinter. Her artistic works have been part of group exhibitions at Hamburger Bahnhof Berlin, Fluc in Vienna, documenta-Halle Kassel, Monitoring Dokfest Kassel and Kunstverein Wolfsburg.



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### **Katharina Klappheck**

M. A., is a disabled political scientist. She works on disability, queerness and AI, as well as design as politics. Katharina Klappheck has worked at the Technical University of Dresden and the German Parliament. Currently, Katharina Klappheck is Head of Feminist Internet Policy at the Gunda Werner Institute of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

### **Gila Kolb**

is a research-based art educator and art mediator. She is head of the research professorship for didactics of the arts at the University of Education Schwyz. She has been involved as an external expert in the Volkswagen Group Fellowship for Art Mediation at the Municipal Gallery Wolfsburg with agency art education since 2017. (<https://aligblok.de>; [agencyart.education](https://agencyart.education); [arteducatorstalk.net](https://arteducatorstalk.net))

### **Elke Krasny**

PhD, professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Krasny researches and curates on social and environmental justice in architecture, urbanism, art, reproductive labor, transnational feminisms, and memory politics. In 2019, she and Angelika Fitz published *Critical Care. Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet* (MIT Press). She is currently working on the book *Living with an Infected Planet. Covid-19 Feminism and the Global Frontline of Care* (transcript, 2022).

### **Susanne Pflieger**

is a curator and art historian. She studied at the Universities of Heidelberg, Reims and Florence. She has been director of the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg since 1997. Before that, she worked as a freelance curator and at the Wilhelm Hack Museum in Ludwigshafen. From 1991 to 1993 she was a postdoctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute of Art History in Florence. Since 2002 she has been an honorary professor at Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design Halle.

### **Mara Ryser**

studied Art Education with teaching qualification for secondary level II in Bern. She worked as an art mediator at various museums in Bremen and currently works as a teacher. In her teaching, she concentrates on strategies of current art education, works with the students on process-oriented and artistic-practical formats of mediation, always in the exploration of a critical media education in the post-digital age.

### **Konstanze Schütze**

Dr. phil., Professor for Aesthetic Education and Art Mediation at University of Education Karlsruhe, researches in art education and art pedagogy on questions of image-based media theory as well as transdisciplinary research settings and cross-institutional approaches to art education. Current projects and publications on e.g.: Algorithmic Literacy Lab\* (<http://kunst.uni-koeln.de/algorithmic-literacy-lab/>), Critical Procedures (<http://kunst.uni-koeln.de/criticalfutures-possible-procedures/>), Workbook Arts Education ([myow.org](http://myow.org)), Doing Research (2022), After Humans (2024), Cultural Reader Pizza is God (2018).

### **soppa/bleck**

is an art mediation collective that has been collaborating in the field of critical and digital art mediation since 2014. They have designed multi-level mediation programs for the DGTL FMNSM festival and Kunstverein Hildesheim, among others. In 2019–2020, they received the Volkswagen Group Fellowship at the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg where they implemented the hands-on research project “we can’t go back to normal.” Currently, they are working on a project about pausing and refusing. In joint texts they reflect on the part-time jobs of art mediators. **Laura Bleck** works as an art mediator and artist. In her filmic works, she relates the collective process of creation to narration. **Josefine Soppa** works as an art mediator and author. Her debut novel MIRMAR was published by Aufbau Verlag 2023.

### **Nora Sternfeld**

is an art educator, curator, and professor of Art Education at the HFBK Hamburg. From 2018 to 2020 she was documenta professor at the Kunsthochschule Kassel. From 2012 to 2018, she was Professor of Curating and Mediating Art at Aalto University in Helsinki. She is also co-director of the /ecm-master’s program in exhibition theory and practice at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, part of the core team of schnittpunkt. exhibition theory & practice, co-founder and partner of trafo.K, office for education, art and critical knowledge production (Vienna) and since 2011 part of freethought, platform for research, education and production (London). In this context she was one of the artistic directors of the Bergen Assembly 2016 and worked from 2020–2022 on “Spectral Infrastructure” a research trajectory in collaboration with basis voor actuele kunst (BAK, Utrecht). She publishes on contemporary art, educational theory, exhibitions, politics of history and antiracism.

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RATHER THAN THE ACCUMULATION  
OF THEORETICAL TOOLS AND  
MATERIALS, MODELS OF ANALYSIS,  
PERSPECTIVES AND POSITIONS,  
THE WORK OF THEORY IS TO  
UNRAVEL THE VERY GROUND ON  
WHICH IT STANDS.

**IRIT ROGOFF** (What is a theorist? 2003)





THIS PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS THE  
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FELLOWSHIP FOR ART MEDIATION AT  
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IN ART MEDIATION AROUND THE  
THEMES OF "CARE AND RESPONSIBILITY,"  
"KNOWLEDGE AND EPISTEMIC IN-  
JUSTICE," "DEALING WITH HIERARCHIES,"  
AND "CONDITIONS OF DIGITALITY."

WITH TEXTS BY SILKE BALLATH,  
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AND JELENA TOOPEEKOFF.

