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Ordered Bodies, Embodied Orders – about visual and linguistic representational patterns in gallery education

«At this point I ask myself whether there are any images of art mediators in action representing the atmosphere in an authentic way, images that move beyond current stereotypes.» (Gavranić 2012: 181)

Conventional or typical gallery education often works by re-presenting what repeatedly has been presented to be viewed in the gallery – as if this was self evident or automatic. This repeated showing of someone or something goes hand in hand with the shaping of representational patterns and traditions currently forming modes of representation and conceptual images of gallery education. Particular moments of gallery education are selected and shown in the same way over and over again, unfolding processes of fixation and naturalization of meanings. Many other aspects of gallery education remain invisible as a consequence. Bringing to the foreground visibility and invisibility is a creative and powerful moment of representational labor. The often unreflected practices of repetition in the form of representational patterns were studied more in depth within the context of the research project *Showing Gallery Education (Kunstvermittlung zeigen)*¹, and are intended to focus this article onto the figure of the art mediator² and their relation to the public. The question, which dominant images of art mediators and the public are depicted in the examined representations – especially



Image 1: «Public tours», Website of the Fondation Beyeler, viewed: 04/2012.

how this functions within the overall concept³ of gallery education – and what orders as well as representational traditions are manifest, is pursued.

VISIBILITIES

An important observation in light of the representational materials of gallery education is that art mediators are seldom visible and that the focus lies instead on the representation of the public. Nonetheless the diverse representations of art mediators and their specific

¹ *Kunstvermittlung zeigen* was a collaborative project between the *Institute for Art Education* and the *Institute for Cultural Studies in the Arts* at the *Zürcher Hochschule der Künste*, sponsored by the Swiss National Fonds (2011-2013). For the collaboration and constructive criticism I want to at this point thank my colleagues Nanna Lüth and microsillons (Oliver Desvoignes/Marianne Guarino-Huet) as well as Prof. Carmen Mörsch and Prof. Sigrid Schade.

² Concerns the German version: I am using an underscore before the female ending of the word in order to mark all genders and gender identities linguistically. The idea and the political interest behind this is to create alternatives to the binary man/woman scheme and to interrupt the self-evident representation and reproduction of binary genders of the level of language.

³ **Mission statements of gallery education produce a quantitatively small but significant excerpt from within the spectrum of representations of gallery education, which were analyzed in greater depth by me in a case study.** Twenty-one examples of mission statements could be found publicized on websites, which together comprises approximately 2/3 of the houses examined. The degree of representativity of mission statements is high here, since they usually provide the opener for the online presentation. Texts are usually kept very short with very few visualizations added, which reminds one of a sort of «calling card» of gallery education departments. The transition between mission statements and description of the program remains fluid in many cases, making an outline difficult. In terms of content, the purpose is not representing a specific event in the mission statements but to speak about gallery education in general. Represented are the approaches, goals and ways of working as well as the addressees of gallery education.



Image 2:
Website of the Kunsthalle St. Gallen, viewed: 04/2012.



Image 3:
Website of the Kunstmuseum Chur, viewed: 04/2012.

in/visibilities take on an important function in the representation of gallery education where the issue is the production of meaning and the construction of subjects (comp. Fürstenberg 2012).

A typical form of making art mediators visible is the position of showing and speaking as it can be found, for example, in representations which are explicitly aligned with the gallery education format *guided tours* (image 1) But what does this pose represent?

First off, it is helpful to observe the position of the mediators in space⁴ in these typical representations. These find themselves mostly in a – sometimes larger, sometimes smaller – space between the artwork and the public, so that an imaginary triangle becomes manifest and the mediator thereby functions as interface between artwork and public.⁵ The simultaneous orientation or attention of the mediators to the two reference points – public and artwork – is significant. This gesture of attention is mediated via body posture. For example, when the upper body of the mediator is directed towards the group, while arm and hand including indicating hand point to the artwork. In this position, mediators appear to collect gazes and attention and to direct these. The orientation towards the public can in this connection function as a form of address, but also as a form of control and reassurance on the part of the mediators in the back and forth between the two poles. It is remarkable how explicitly and self-evidently the work of art mediators appears to be represented with this pose and how often it can be found in many institutional designs of gallery education – that is according to the aspiration of doing justice to both the art and the individual visitors.

In view of the general orientation of gallery education, it is striking that no representation of leadership of this type are given and that the central element in this representational type – the explicit setting within the image of the directive gesture on the part of the mediators is

absent. Instead, increasingly, persons are shown in a circular formation (Image 2 + 3), which can be interpreted as communicative setting, as a sign for exchange and inclusion. In addition, these circular formations can be interpreted as an *exhibition talk* – a talk about art and the exhibition – due to their obvious placement within an exhibition or due to the visible proximity to the arranged art works.⁶ But what meaning is produced by the nonrepresented indication of art works in current concepts of gallery education?

THE (NON-)REPRESENTED INDICATIVE GESTURE

In connection with educational writings at the end of the 18th or at beginning of the 19th century, a series of examples wherein students explicitly are shown artworks in teaching situations can be found, as for example in the illustration «teaching in front of paintings» (circa 1816) from the publications series «Neue Bilder-Schule, Ein nützliches Lesebuch für die erwachsene Jugend» («New Images-School: a useful reader for adult youth») (image 4) During these times, pedagogical image tableaux for adolescents were the rage whereby the compilation of selected images for individual study were intended to unfold processes of education and upbringing (comp. Heesen 1997). One type of image tableau is provided for viewing here by Daniel Chodowiecki's print (image 5) This illustration published in a magazine visualizes the presentation of ballad-mongers, whereby the showing and explaining of images concerning, for example, marriage and thievery is intended to contribute to «The Improvement of Customs» - as the title («Zur Verbesserung der Sitten») of 1786 lets on.

Aside from pointing in connection to objects such as artworks, there are gestures of abstract pointing, whereby the *lifted index finger* with its function of signaling «attention,» is manifest. However, within the framework of representation of gallery education, the lifted index finger is not shown and at the end of the 20th century it

⁴ Comp. to the contribution by microsillons in this edition.

⁵ We should mention the hint by Sigrid Schade of pointing out the invisible photographer as additional important acteur in these representations

⁶ Comp. to the contribution of Nanna Lüth in this edition.



Image 4: «Class in front of paintings», about 1816, online at: http://www.bbf.djpf.de/cgi-opac/bil.pl?t_direct=x&f_IDN=b002258berl, viewed: 07/2013.

disappeared from school curricula as well – as has been determined by Ulrike Pilarczyk and Ulrike Mietzner. These sketch the historical background for the disappearance of the lifted index finger in the following way:

«The abstract indexing gesture is known as teaching gesture in Christian Iconography (...) That the former classical teaching gesture has become so rare that it must be connected to a change in pedagogical approach, wherein a teacher no longer possesses the authority to direct attention towards abstract teaching without simultaneously questioning it: one no longer starts with the presumption of a certain truth. The upwardly lifted index finger signals the place of the one truth that formerly lay in God (above) or in the holy scripture: the book of books» (Pilarczyk/Mietzner 2005: 173)

With these historical examples as a foil to contemporary approaches, from my point of view, not showing mediators indicating artworks can be interpreted as a possible weakening of an intention to train. Coming to a head, not showing a pointing gesture in the visible approach



Image 5: „The Improvement of Customs“ (1786) by Daniel N. Chodowiecki, online at: <http://commons.wikimedia.org>, viewed: 07/2013.

can be interpreted as a desire for an *apparently*⁷ neutral mediation of knowledge without educational intention, whereby the mediators are not supposed to be shown as authoritative educators. However, this image is simultaneously ruptured by speaking gestures shown only on the part of the mediators (image 2 + 3). This is because the «speaking» – just like the «showing» – hands can be read as evident teaching gestures (comp. Pilarczyk/Mietzner 2005: 172f) The distinction between the public and the mediator is weakened in the representations of indoctrination in front of artistic works (image 1) but still, the mediators have at their command the authority of the speaker position including the power of directing the gaze and collecting attention. In historical visualizations a book is often shown in connection with speaking and showing gestures, which can be interpreted as a sign of education and knowledge (image 4).

Interestingly this reference to education and knowledge can be found in representations of gallery education as well in weakened form, whereby mediators often hold notepapers or brochures in their hands. This makes the difference in status between public and mediator «evident» once again.

In representations of exhibition talks as well as instructional situations the recognition of a *complementary posture* on the side of the public is significant, who, through a pose of *following* – with gaze and posture⁸ – making it possible to imagine the positions of directing, pointing and teaching on the part of the mediators.

The medium of the book also appears in connection with the rewriting of the term «instructional knowledge», according to Eva Sturm, describing knowledge that «can be ‘gleaned’ from books, archives and libraries etc.» in

⁷ Apparently because the demanding and promotion of participation and personal initiative represents just one more instrument of instruction – or, in the words of Michel Foucault – another technique for governing (comp. for example Dzierzbicka 2006).

⁸ Barbara Pasquinelli interprets arms crossed in front of the chest as a pure listening pose and interlaced hands as a sign for pensiveness within the framework of her iconographic analysis of body language based on historical works (comp. Pasquinelli 2007). Both are body postures that repeatedly occur in current representations of the public.

reference to Hinrich Lühmann (Sturm 2005: no page.) According to Sturm and Lühmann instruction or informing has the following function:

«A generation wants to bind the following one to that which it presumes to be worth knowing. This functions best in relation to what can be labeled, that which is known, that which can be catalogued.» (Lühmann cited according to Sturm 2005, no page.)

Handing down this knowledge appears to be embodied in a special way from my point of view in a mediator's pointing to artworks, which is why I want to term this facet of mediation work «instructional situations».

EXHIBITION OF BODIES

Directed by a question critical of representation, who or what is represented and *how*, it is noticeable that art mediation and especially the figures of the art mediators and public are represented and created through images of bodies. The represented body thereby functions as «place, medium or materialization» (Schade 2002: 84) where the production of meaning and processes of subjectivation take place or can be (made) visible. The figures of mediator and public are marked by visible differences or markings of identity⁹, pointing to the category of gender, age or ethnicity. A significant uniformity can be detected in representations of mediators. Starting from the examined representations, persons who would «pass» as «normal» can be identified as white, western European, without special needs and belonging to the middle class. Differences in represented mediators can be detected only in the categories of age and gender¹⁰. This interplay of categories can be read – together with the gestures and postures of presenting pointing out – as a type of «normalized embodiment» of mediators.

In contrast to this, there is an intention to show diversity and «breadth» on the part of the public. The motif «broad public» is a representational pattern repeated at different places, which indicates the diversity of a public that exists or should be produced. A «broad public» counts as directional line and quality indicator of museum mediation work and is brought into position as a sign for openness and social engagement. Representations of this «broad public» are not about showing just any differences between people, representers of different milieus, different ethnicities, with specific social status, or economic capital are to be made visible with the means of «normal» and «special» identity markers.

In this connection it is important to point to the performative aspect of repetition within the framework of

representations. The repetition of constantly identical body configurations does not mean that these represent real relationships, but rather that representations construct realities accompanied by processes of normalization and naturalization. This means that the repeated showing of this embodiment educates the (individual and collective) gaze in terms of what is usual, normal and apparent in light of the figures mediator and public as well as what is perceived to be a difference. The representation as well as the absorption of bodies thereby always stands in relation to framed *visibility field*¹¹ in which specific marks of identity are counted as normal and a matter of course, and others, by contrast, are made to be special. Omnipresent *Whiteness* is considered to be normal in the Swiss context; however, it usually remains unseen and unknown by the hegemonic gaze. The reason for this is a blind spot, because the hegemonic gaze sees and orders everything around it but does not see itself and consequently its comprehension and partitioning of the world as a matter of course (comp. Hall 1994: 45).

Not every difference, not every mark of identity contains the same seminal influence within the framework of a visibility field. There are numerous representations where differences between the represented persons can be identified, but this interplay of differences is not considered to be a sign of deviance or diversity – because the «special» identity markers are missing. An example of such a foregrounding of «special» differences can be found in a brochure of the Bundesverband Museumspädagogik e.V., wherein «people with special needs», «people with migration background» and «(Not-) yet visitors» are mentioned as «special target groups» (German Museum Alliance 2008: 13). The recognition of differentiation or ordering of markers, such as special needs and migratory background is conducted by dominant imaginations, perceptual patterns and stereotypical representations. That which is innate or foreign, what is different or normal, what is elevated or depreciated, is not fixed, but is instead negotiated in relation to other categories.

The «normal» modes of representing mediators makes permanent – probably unintentionally – a powerful politics of visibility carrying classicist, paternalistic and racist inscriptions and characterized the beginnings of gallery education in the newly opened museums and collections made available to the public in Europe from the beginning of the 19th century. It was (and is) a common idea and practice, to convey education, good breeding, morality and cultivatedness to the «uneducated» or «uncivilized» through contact with the institution of the museum, the visit of an exhibition and the study of exhibited art works (comp. Mörsch 2004; Borzello 1987).

⁹ I speak of identity markers in order to express the essentializing effect of the ascription that goes hand in hand with the recognition of certain differences.

¹⁰ Concerning the historical emergence of a gendered division in the field of gallery education or a gendering in the field of gallery education, see for example Dalton 2001 or Mörsch 2004.

¹¹ Schade/Wenk in connection to psychoanalytic concepts of cultural image repertoire or as the case may be a field of the visible, which as a limited pool of predicted images can be understood, in which gaze and desire orient themselves and the possibility to become a subject is regulated (comp. Schade/Wenk 2011: 138f.).



Image 6: Flyer «Young art at the Center» (Detail), Zentrum Paul Klee, no date.

These «uneducated» or «uncivilized,» for example, belonged to the proletarian workers class in the country one is in or the exploited population of colonized countries. These then were additionally the «others» and those who were «made special» who were *visibly* did not belong to the white bourgeois middle class.¹² In this connection the possession of «culture» always signifies *bourgeois culture*, whose values and norms were always co-represented precisely through the European museums and through the art mediators (comp. also Sturm 2002).

«THOSE UNUSED TO ART»

On the level of written text within the framework of the visible gallery education approach a distinction between mediators and public is also made.

The dominant proposition about the work of gallery education is that of leading the public to art, connected to the often-repeated key word «access» to art. In terms of symbolic image, this is about a reduction of the distance between public and art – described in the form of an *encounter*, *approximation* or *closer contact*. Art mediation thereby designates a specific image of the public that can be reconstructed in terms of expressions about goals and effects of what gallery education is intended to achieve. The figure of the public is thereby designated as a group of individuals that are to be educated, who, for example, are to become political subjects¹³ as well as those knowledgeable about art¹⁴ with a schooled, examining or open gaze¹⁵. It therefore follows that aside from children, youths and adults, school classes and teaching persons in particular are addressed, who within the

¹² For example a worker was prohibited from entering the Museum in Breslau, since he was wearing his blouse – that is, workers' clothes (comp. Kuntz 1976: 145).

¹³ A subject who asks questions, criticizes, develops an opinion and a judgment.

¹⁴ Meaning people with an improved art knowledge.

¹⁵ Whereby the new is discovered, more is seen and perception is sharpened.

context of school are involved in comparable educational or processes or upbringing, where students are given the status of those to be educated.

In addition, the way the methods of mediation are described is significant. Terms such as collectively, dialogical, participatory, interactive¹⁶ are employed to counteract the image of a one-sided educational process as well as against the transmission of purely factual knowledge and expertise and foregrounding instead the person in question as an individual with his or her own knowledge, personal experience and questions. In this way, the public is designated not only as one *to be educated* but also as *knowledgeable*, without, however, sufficient knowledge in terms of art, museum and art institutions. In one place the term «those unused to art» (Kunstmuseum Thun) is used, meaning, a public «distant» from art.

Closely connected to this construction of a «handicapped» public is an identifiable assertion designating contemporary art as *particular*, *puzzling* and *encoded*. Counterimage to this concept of the public are art experts and lovers, to whom contemporary art is not closed and unapproachable in this way, but rather is «discussed, commented upon and celebrated» (Fondation Beyeler) by them.

ASCRPTIONS, INVISIBILITY, TRANSFORMATION

What becomes apparent is – and this quite explicitly in the mission statements – the desire or intention to show exchanges with the public, to show an activation and stronger integration into gallery education processes of the individual in both visual as well as written materials. At the same time, the figure of the art mediator can only be shown in a conventional way, such as can be seen in the inclusion of the incompletely developed analysis concerning representational patterns here. These are the historically shaped and interconnected practices of a *teaching-caring-representing* (comp. also Dalton 2001). A role or job, where on the part of the mediator authority, expertise, ability as well as support, care, empathy with the representation and surrogacy of the institution museum are interconnected. The variously repeated image of this «ideal subject» as complementary to the designation of a knowledgeable, yet to be educated public – can be described as a representational regime,¹⁷ which codifies an unequal relationship between the mediators and the public and reproduces an implicit hierarchisation.

At the same time, this predominant image of mediators foregrounds specific moments of invisibility. It can be observed that art mediators are invisible then when individual art viewers and those knowledgeable on art are

¹⁶ Gallery education is however also described to be *factually informative*, which is set in place as complementary to and delimitating activation and interconnecting the public.

¹⁷ «The entire repertoire of images and visual effects through which 'difference' is represented in a moment in history is described as representational regime» (Hall 2004: 115).

made to be visible, where authority, caring and knowledgeability of the art mediators appears to be in the wrong place. An additional example for this is presented in the representational modus of the child creating autonomously, whereby young adults are portrayed as «little artists» (image 6).

In general, it is striking that only few representations can be found where habitual representational patterns of gallery education are broken apart or shifted and the relationship between the mediators and the public are made to be visible in other forms. In light of representational practices that are yet to be developed it is therefore possible to formulate the following challenge that mediators and the public should not (only) be represented in this way, not only in these typical ways.

In 2005 Carmen Mörsch had already sketched the idea of also applying images of gallery education within the framework of museum education projects, to reflect on these and to experiment in terms of design (comp. Mörsch 2005). In this way, exciting discussions about representational patterns of gallery education can certainly be led and transformed modes of representation can be developed together. However, whether these representations will be publicized in places such as on websites or publications is also dependent on the entire museum institution's will to change.

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