



Cultural Mediation: Creativity, Performance, Display. Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context", University of Heidelberg, 08.10.2014—10.10.2014.

Reviewed by Marlène Harles

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (June, 2015)

Cultural Mediation: Creativity, Performance, Display

From 8 to 10 October 2014, the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context" held its 6th Annual Conference "Cultural Mediation: Creativity, Performance, Display" at Heidelberg University. The conference was organized by the Cluster's Research Area B "Public Spheres", and revolved around the topic of "Cultural Mediation". Two keynote lectures and twelve panels, comprising 45 senior and junior researchers, explored the various ways in which cultural practice is transculturally communicated, negotiated, and contested. While established concepts such as "contact", "relation", and "influence" risk a depersonalized approach to cultural mediation, the conference endeavored to apply a frame of reference that would do justice to both the position of individual mediators and the material and political conditions from which they operate. Case-studies from a variety of disciplines, such as history, art history, literary studies, and social sciences, drew attention to the morphology of cultural mediation in different times and places. In her introductory talk, CHRISTIANE BROSIUS (Heidelberg) raised questions that became central focus points throughout the conference. How did/do individuals, collectives or institutions constitute, appropriate, alter, and circulate cultural goods and processes? How do cultural agents, as mediators or brokers, create in-between-spaces that are characterized by tension, difference and negotiation? And what are the risks of and stakes in mediation?

In line with the Cluster's objective to establish the concept of transculturality as a basic approach in the humanities and social sciences, the opening keynote lecture

by ERIKA FISCHER-LICHTE (Berlin) aimed at a better understanding of cultural dynamics in the field of theatre studies through the introduction of the term "interweaving performance cultures". Fischer-Lichte thereby distanced herself from "intercultural theatre", a term coined in the 1970s and 1980s as a way of reinterpreting the concept of "culture" in the context of postcolonialism. "Intercultural theatre", she critically argued, refers exclusively to the transfer between West and Non-West, often resonating with an underlying distinction between the modern and the traditional. By exemplifying and criticizing the rigidity of thinking in binaries such as West and Non-West, self and other, performer and audience, tradition and modernity, Erika Fischer-Lichte set the stage for the specific case studies presented by the speakers throughout the conference.

A pivotal question that rose from the abundant variety of cultural mediators examined during the conference (artists, performers, passengers, preachers, etc.), concerned the advantages and disadvantages of the two related terms, "mediator" and "broker". How do we create workable distinctions between different types of cultural mediators, and what distinguishes the term from other related concepts, such as broker or go-between? How do we analyze the interplay between textual, oral, and visual forms of mediation? What are the peculiarities and specific contextual characteristics of these mediators and the media they employ? What are their common traits, and how do their practices connect to wider spheres of cultural exchange?

Drawing on examples of Christian writings, Buddhist temple histories in medieval Japan, and translations in early modern India and Japan, the panel "Translating Concepts in a Religious Context" focused on the different aspects of translation as a process of cultural mediation. ANTJE FLÄCHTER (Bielefeld/Heidelberg) stressed that the term "translation" is often used carelessly, and frequently reduced to mere metaphor. She thus emphasized the need for an analysis of the specific conditions of translation. Religious translators, for instance, first required an understanding of the local concepts and beliefs; they needed to draw on extant textual traditions and other practices of religious experts, to find the points of connection to the central aspects of the religious dogmas and concepts they wished to convey. The distinctive conditions of mediation and the lack of systematic research on these topics were common features in the panels, which brought unexpected and often neglected mediators and processes of mediation to the fore. In the panel "Detecting Performance Brokers: Theatrical Agents, Managers, and Impressarios in Global Theatre Histories (1850-1920)", for instance, the speakers emphasized that theater cannot function as an art form nor as a business without the patronage of professional cultural mediators. Yet their practices, connections, and circuits have been under-researched. These brokers did not leave many material traces, as their work took place primarily backstage. A lack of interest in or even recognition of the performative arts as a business might be another reason for this neglect. The panel "Mediating Asian Christianities: Agents, Practices, Concepts" addressed the need to challenge uni-directional approaches towards mediation. The spread of Evangelical and Charismatic forms of Christianity throughout Asia has not only been under-represented in the study of global Christianities, but was mainly approached as a Western phenomenon migrating to the East. A focus on border-crossing images and individuals allowed the speakers of the panel "Transcultural Sartorial Mediations: Performing Identity, Nation, and Modernity through Fashion" to explore the dynamics of fashion in 21st-century China and India. By showing fashion in its moving configurations of gender, economics, politics, and identity, the panelists revealed how fashion editors, designers, and fashion photographers are not just mediators in their own right, but also provide the opportunities and parameters for others to explore, negotiate, and perform "to mediate" status or national identity.

In the second Keynote Lecture, NIKOLAS JASPERT (Heidelberg) identified specific characteristics of media-

tion by differentiating between manifest and latent brokerage. The Medieval Mediterranean, as the meeting point between Asia, Europe, and Africa, offers a vast array of examples for these processes. Cultural brokers, mediators or "omini virtuosi", whether intentionally or unintentionally, have always been key figures in matters of trade, diplomacy and war. Elaborating on Medieval lordship as a process inherently based on reaching a consensus, Jaspert further argued that brokerage is often a very pragmatic undertaking that can leave its authors in a vulnerable position.

In conjunction with nuances between manifest and latent brokers and messy endeavors for consensus, the media and places in which cultural brokers operate revealed their often unexpected, unintentional, and ambiguous disposition. Fischer-Lichte, located performance within a liminal space; it comes into being only during its course and thus is unable to transmit meanings inscribed in the text. This repositioning reduces claims of authenticity and enables the theatre performance "as in-between space" to test and experience interwoven cultural diversity. In the panel "Social Orders in Transit: Passenger Communities during Long-Distance Ship Passages, c. 1770-1945", ships were taken as exemplary historical in-between spaces, where passengers would find themselves in a liminal phase of partial social suspension, faced with unprecedented challenges, such as the mixing of classes and sexes, unthinkable on land.

Several panels stressed the importance of distinguishing between particular forms of mediation. The panel "The Display of Words and Narratives in Museum Space: a Transcultural Reading" took author museums and contemporary art galleries as fields where the visual narratives and gallery texts function as underestimated yet crucial media. Writers of such museum texts are unknown, latent brokers who hoist the artist or the novelist on stage as manifest mediator, (re)creating "the artist" and "the author" in the process. In the panel "Auditive Mediation of Cultures: Sermon, Prayers, and Recitation", attention turned towards the vocal recitations of poets and preachers, and the way they create emotional responses through the effect of speech. The panelists showed how the wide range of genres of Islamic sermons and the mediating and framing of text through vocal practice are influenced by the introduction of new rhetorical styles and revolutions in media technology. The role of locality and the bodily presence of the performers, which were emphasized by the speakers, were put to a practical experiment in the panel "Life-Action Roleplay; or the Performance of Realities". BJÄRN-OLE KAMM

(Heidelberg) and JULIA BECKER (Dortmund) guided the conference participants through a 90-minute collaborative performance ethnography. The "Life Action Role-Play", entitled "Staying Alive", served as a tool to step outside the conference environment and to play with collateral realities. It thus established the audience/players as cultural mediators between these different cultural realities. The Panel "Heidelberg Research Architecture (HRA): Digital Resources and Scientific Annotations" introduced the means, tools, and objectives of The Hachiman Digital Handscrolls Project (HDH) to enhance the digital presentation of movable text-image formats. The main objective of the project is to mediate historical artifacts for contemporary viewers and facilitate access to historical, literary, and visual knowledge. The HDH Project, serving as an example of the possibilities of such new digital methods for both analyzing and presenting vulnerable, delicate objects, involves the digitization of six sets of handscrolls.

The conference also addressed the political circumstances that might limit the roles mediators want or are asked to play. Violence and friction, as Nikolas Jaspert argued, is an often-neglected part of mediation. More often than not, it is a pragmatic undertaking, contrasted with notions of harmony and tolerance generally associated with mediating practices. What if artists, curators and art critics act as cultural mediators in moments of political tension, like imminent warfare? Which strategies do they pursue, and how do they employ their mediative skills for their own artistic or intellectual objectives? The panel "Mediating Art and Art Criticism in Times of Crises: Japan, China, and Europe in the Mid-Twentieth Century" highlighted the vast distribution and translations of German philosophers and leftist writings and analyzed their importance for the resistance movement in Kyoto, Japan as shown by MICHAEL LUCKEN (Paris). MELANIE TREDE (Heidelberg) by using the example of curator and museum director Otto Kömmel and the 1939 exhibition of Japanese pre-modern art in the Deutsches Museum in Berlin, looked at the relation between colonial/political interests and the accumulation and exhibition of art and artefacts. The panel also offered an insight into the transcultural situation of China's art production after 1937; SARAH E. FRASER (Heidelberg) demonstrated how artists' works were shaped by the concentration of academic life in the center, related ethnographic encounters, the rediscovery of folklore, archeology, and ethnic minorities. The panel "Building the City Image: Culture, Creativity, and Contemporary Art" focused on notions of global urbanism, "city image

building processes" as part of urban development programs, and the related promotion of creative clusters and a creative class. Artists hereby become in-between, latent and sometimes manifest mediators between the public and the city's less-fortunate inhabitants. Art hubs can themselves be seen as in-between spaces, a location for the negotiation of autonomous space for experiments and city politics of urbanization, state control, and profitability. Examples from China, Japan, and South Africa underlined the slippery nature of similarity across global cities that "brand" creative industries which need to be studied in their particular emplacements. In the panel "Migrating Images as Transcultural Mediators", CATHRINE BUBLATZKY (Heidelberg) focused on moving images and their relation to political agendas. In the context of the "Indian Highway" travelling exhibition's arrival in China, Indian artist Tejal Shah's artwork "I love my India" faced censorship, turning the exhibition into a contested space. In the same panel, visual artist ANGELIKA BÄCK (Munich) presented 5 ongoing projects, in which she promotes a dialogical strategy of framing the artist as a subject to be studied by other contributors. The role of the artist as the sole performer and the status of the researcher as an outside observer were called into question.

This critical reflection resonated with concerns about the position of academics, addressed during the final discussion. Focusing in detail on the intricate processes of mediation might lead to negligence of the "big picture". The multitude of transcultural connections should not overlook the fact that there are borders, and attention towards the obstruction and malfunction of transcultural mediation, combined with a scrutiny of the responsibility of academics, is essential. Yet this can only encourage further research into the workings of mediation, in both their successful manifestations and their failed attempts. By analyzing both emerging technologies of mediation and hidden and latent forms of mediation that have been overlooked, by identifying a wide range of mediators, and by looking at both the political and material conditions and obstructions of mediation, the conference served as a great vantage point for such future explorations.

Conference Overview:

Joseph Maran (Heidelberg), Welcome Address

Christiane Brosius (Heidelberg) Introduction to the Conference

Keynote Lecture I

Erika Fischer-Lichte (Berlin), Interweaving Perfor-

mance Cultures: A Transcultural Approach

Morning Panel I: Mediating Art and Art Criticism in Times of Crises: Japan, China, and Europe in the Mid-Twentieth Century

Speakers: Michael Lucken (Paris), Melanie Trede (Heidelberg), Sarah E. Fraser (Heidelberg)

Chair: Melanie Trede (Heidelberg)

Morning Panel II: Translating Concepts in a Religious Context

Speakers: Anna Andreeva (Heidelberg), Hans Martin Kr  mer (Heidelberg), Ines G.   upanov (Heidelberg)

Chair: Antje Fl  chter (Bielefeld/Heidelberg)

Afternoon Panel Ia: Social Orders in Transit: Passenger Communities During Long-Distance Ship Passages, c. 1770  1945

Speakers: Dagmar Bellmann (Darmstadt), E  in Phillips (Cambridge), Jonathan Stafford (London)

Chair: Roland Wenzlhuemer (Heidelberg), Johanna de Schmidt (Heidelberg)

Afternoon Panel Ib: Transcultural Sartorial Mediations: Performing Identity, Nation, and Modernity through Fashion

Speakers: Paola Zamperini (Evanston, IL), Laila Abu Er-Rub (Heidelberg)

Afternoon Panel IIa: Mediating Asian Christianities: Agents, Practices, Concepts.

Speakers: Robbie Goh (Singapore), Esther Berg (Heidelberg), Matthias Deininger (Heidelberg), Katja Rakow (Heidelberg)

Afternoon Panel IIb: Migrating Images as Transcultural Mediators

Speakers: Cathrine Bublatzky (Heidelberg), Angelika B  ck (Munich)

Chair: Henry Keazor (Heidelberg)

Keynote Lecture II

Nikolas Jaspert (Heidelberg), Cultural Brokerage: A Medieval Mediterranean Perspective

Morning Panel IIIa: Detecting Performance Brokers: Theatrical Agents, Managers and Impresarios in Global Theatre Histories (1850-1920)

Speakers: Christopher Balme (Munich), meL  a yamomo (Munich/Amsterdam), Nic Leonhard (Munich)

Morning Panel IIIb: Building the City Image: Culture, Creativity, and Contemporary Art

Speakers: Fiona Siegenthaler (Basel), Meiqin Wang (Los Angeles), Minna Valjakka (Helsinki)

Discussant: Christiane Brosius (Heidelberg)

Morning Panel IVa: Auditive Mediation of Culture: Sermons, Prayers and Recitation

Speakers: Max Stille (Heidelberg), Jan Scholz (Heidelberg), Hans Harder (Heidelberg), Ines Weinrich (Heidelberg)

Morning Panel IVb: The Display of Words and Narratives in Museum Space    A Transcultural Reading

Speakers: Elke Pfeil (Berlin), Emily Graf (Heidelberg), Martijn de Rooj (Heidelberg)

Chair / Discussant: G  nter Leypoldt (Heidelberg)

Afternoon Panel IIIa: Life-Action Roleplay; or the Performance of Realities

Organisers: Bj  rn-Ole Kamm (Heidelberg), Julia Becker (Dortmund)

Panel Heidelberg Research Architecture: Digital Resources and Scientific Annotations

Speakers: Peter Cornwell (Westminster), Jens-Martin Loebel (Berlin), Heinz-G  nter Kuper (Berlin), Peter Matussek (Siegen), Melanie Trede, Katharina Rode, Violetta Janzen (Heidelberg)

Concluding Roundtable

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Marl  ne Harles. Review of , *Cultural Mediation: Creativity, Performance, Display*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. June, 2015.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=44600>

Copyright    2015 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.