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Investigating the Matrix of Cultural Production

Artistic interventions at the intersections of contemporary art, participatory cultural production and cultural management processes

Introducing the research project P/ART/ICIPATE – The Matrix of Cultural Production

Picture: © Melanie Maddison

“We are moving [...] toward [a world] in which everyone has a more active stake in the culture that is produced.” (Jenkins et al. 2006, S. 10)  (* 4)

Artistic practice as *one* form of cultural production exhibits a central feature that relates it to the irritation of what is described as “common sense” (Van den Berg 2008: 79)  (* 13). As such, contemporary art can be understood as a “seismograph” of social development(s). In grappling with the reflection of the status quo and in the observation and analysis of existing social situations, contemporary artistic practices can allow for and generate new viewpoints.

In this sense, the starting points for the research project “P/ART/ICIPATE” are on the one hand contemporary artistic strategies and practices which aim to initiate social and cultural change, and on the other hand the understanding of „culture“ in the field of cultural studies. The research project investigates how individuals and social groups position themselves within the „circuit of culture“ (Johnson 1985  (* 6), 1986  (* 7); Johnson et al. 2004  (* 8); du Gay et al. 1997  (* 1)) in a way that is not “just happening”, but can be actively and collaboratively influenced and shaped by them within the context of a multi-layered „matrix of cultural production“ – as we call it.

Picture: © Melanie Maddison

The circuit of culture, cultural citizenship und participatory culture

That culture can be understood primarily as a lived daily practice can be traced back to Raymond Williams’ often cited statement of culture as a “whole way of life” (Williams 1972  (* 12): 17, zit. n. Göttlich 2006: 97)  (* 3). The field of cultural production by Pierre Bourdieu has been described as such: “Bourdieu’s theory of the field of cultural production covers [...] both the material and the symbolic production of cultural works, which entails taking into account the multiple mediators which contribute to the work’s meaning and sustain the universe of belief which is the cultural field” (Johnson 1993: 20)  (* 5). In this project we aim to grasp these “multiple mediators” in the field of cultural production in relation to Richard Johnson’s model of the circuit of culture to demonstrate in how far the production, but also the reception of cultural content are influenced by cultural context factors within a matrix of cultural production.

In further developing Stuart Halls Encoding/ Decoding-Model, Richard Johnson (Johnson 1985  (* 6), 1986  (* 7); Johnson et al. 2004  (* 8)) assumes that culture can be understood in a circuit of production, products as

meaningful texts, their readings, the embedding of these products and their meaning in lived cultures. In this „circuit of culture“ all these elements are interdependent. Paul du Gay et al. (1997) have extended this circuit model by adding the term „articulation“ and they describe the model in relation to five levels of articulation, namely: representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation. In the context of this circuit cultural meaning is produced, the consequence being that culture is to be understood as a process in which viewpoints and attitudes are produced, received and distributed in a public circulation process and, at the same time, are continuously reproduced and renegotiated in society. It can be concluded that societies, groups and individuals are therefore continuously involved in processes of cultural production.

The concept of „cultural Citizenship“ (Stevenson 2001  (* 11), Klaus/Lünenburg 2004a  (* 9), 2004b  (* 10)) is central in this circuit of cultural meaning production in today's media society. Cultural citizenship „is comprised of all such cultural practices which unfold against the background of unequal power relations and which allow a competent participation in the symbolic resources of society“ (Klaus/Lünenburg 2004a: 103, authors' translation)  (* 9). Competent participation in the symbolic resources presumes the possibility to acquire cultural production in society (Klaus/Lünenburg 2004a)  (* 9). In the context of art it is not about participation as a naive paradigm of co-determination and a matter of reproducing dominant discourses and simulating participation (Ziese 2011: 77)  (* 14) but, as we argue with Maren Ziese, about participation which enables intervention (ibid.). We understand such interventions through artistic strategies – meaning: the conscious and active part in the circuit of culture – to be a main part in the process of cultural production.

Such competent and interventionist participation involves an active moment of co-determination and an active shaping of cultural meaning production by the individual and through various publics. This aspect of lived cultural participation and the meaning of civic engagement have also been explored in the context of the concept of a „participatory culture“. Henry Jenkins et al. (2006)  (* 4) describe the concept as such:

“A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created).” (Jenkins et al. 2006: S. 3)

 (* 4)

While this concept has been mainly discussed within media pedagogy and in regards to online developments with a focus on youth, in this project it is related to “real“ space and to possibilities of interventions in the field of contemporary art. The overall challenge lies in making the step from cultural consumption to active cultural production which may lead to social and civic engagement. However, as we argue, artistic interventions can play an important role in opening up new viewpoints and opportunities for participation and collaboration of various publics.

Towards a matrix of cultural production

It is our argument that as cultural producers we operate within a matrix of cultural

production. In this matrix, the meaning of cultural artefacts is never fixed, but always remains tentative and contested; meanings are continuously being worked on and are being reworked. In this sense, cultural producers are intervening in cultural and social meaning production. Such interventions need not only take into account the social and cultural contexts in which they are introduced, but also have to scrutinize which publics are involved in the process of cultural production – and aim at involving participation of these publics in their interventions. Culture in its relation to society cannot be produced – or better: realised – by a singular person. Understanding the “product” of cultural production as a result of making meaning and pondering on its consequences for everyday life, specific publics have to be integrated into the negotiation of an alternate meaning or perspective. Ideally this is to be done in an active approach and through ways to promote a kind of social acceptance. Thus understood, projects of cultural production entail the possibility to question established ways of thinking, raise awareness of processes of stereotyping and finally counteract mechanisms of exclusions. We argue that this can only be accomplished as a collaborative process: a process of public negotiation and co-producing – often initiated, supervised and mediated by artists and cultural entrepreneurs.

In order to involve publics like artists, managers, audiences, citizens, journalists or politicians in cultural productions, new ways, forms and principles of communicating with each other are necessary. We assume that this is one of the greatest challenges in the whole process: breaking down boundaries set by hierarchical arrangements or/ and legal authority, determining one’s strategies of intervention, using participatory marketing and relying on civil engagement. All of these practices have emerged as integral parts of successful and innovative cultural processes.

While many projects in the field of cultural production are aiming for participation, sustainability and social change, this is an on-going challenge, often times resulting in failure or dissatisfaction. So how can processes of participation, sustainability and transformation towards social change be set into motion and be supported through instances of cultural production? Which competences are necessary for a competent participation in the cultural resources of society against the background of unequal power relationships? How can these be made possible and stimulated? How do all the nodes in the matrix of cultural production relate to and influence each other? How can conscious interventions in the cultural circuit be made? More specifically we are asking: at which particular nodes are a reflective intervention and processes of participation needed, so that culture can actively and sustainably be co-produced? And what kind of approaches, artistic practices and strategies need to be developed and initiated in order to successfully integrate and involve local communities and various publics in these processes? These are only some of the questions that we are concerned with in this project.

P/ART/ICIPATE – The Matrix of Cultural Production

The project “P/ART/ICIPATE” is developed and conducted at the program area Contemporary Arts & Cultural Production within the Focus area Science and Art at the University of Salzburg in Cooperation with the University Mozarteum.

The project investigates the following areas:

- (a) Artistic strategies as cultural interventionist communication strategies
- (b) Artistic collectives and collaborative working processes
- (c) Requirements for collaborative and process-oriented production and management processes
- (d) Participatory cultural production with and by young people

Aims:

1. Documentation and analysis of contemporary artistic interventions as projects of cultural production and in relation to the meaning of communication processes involved
2. Development of a theoretical model of a matrix of cultural production based on the circuit of culture and in the context of contemporary artistic practices, cultural citizenship, participatory culture, participation and process-based cultural management
3. Development of a toolbox to facilitate a practice-oriented navigation within and through the matrix of cultural production in the context of contemporary artistic practices for cultural producers

Method:

- literature review
- case studies
- qualitative interviews with cultural producers (individual and focus groups)

(Program area Contemporary Arts & Cultural Production, Focus area Science and Art, University of Salzburg in Cooperation with University Mozarteum, in collaboration with Elisabeth Klaus, Department of Communication, University of Salzburg)

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Elke Zobl

Elke Zobl leitet seit 2010 den Programmbereich Zeitgenössische Kunst und Kulturproduktion an der Interuniversitären Einrichtung Wissenschaft und Kunst, sowie verschiedene Drittmittelprojekte in den Bereichen Forschung, Wissenschaftskommunikation und Kultur, aktuell „Räume kultureller Demokratie“. Nach Studien der Kunstpädagogik im Fach Bildhauerei, Germanistik, und der Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften in Salzburg, Wien, und North Carolina, USA), forschte sie an der Universität of California San Diego (USA) zu alternativen, feministischen Medien und transnationalen Netzwerken. Seit 2017 ist sie Associate Professorin am Fachbereich Kommunikationswissenschaft und an der

Interuniversitären Einrichtung Wissenschaft und Kunst. Als Kulturvermittlerin führt sie Workshops mit Jugendlichen durch, bietet Weiterbildungsangebote für Multiplikator:innen an und entwickelt laufend künstlerisch-educative Vermittlungsmaterialien.

Mehr Info

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Siglinde Lang

Siglinde Lang ist seit 2009 als Senior Scientist am Programmbereich Contemporary Arts & Cultural Production, nebenberuflich als freie Kulturmanagerin und Dozentin tätig, davor u.a. Leiterin der Kommunikationsabteilung der Kunstuniversität Linz. Studien der Germanistik & Kulturjournalismus (Wien, 1994-2000), Postgraduate Lehrgänge in Marketing und BWL (London, 1999 und Deutschland, 2001- 2002), Masterstudium in Medienkunst & Kulturtheorie (Berlin/Linz, 2006 - 2009), Doktoratsstudium der Kommunikationswissenschaft (Salzburg, 2011-2014). Ihre Forschungsschwerpunkte umfassen Partizipatives Kulturmanagement, künstlerisch-kulturelles Unternehmertum und Partizipative Räume und kollaborative Wissensproduktion.

Mehr Info

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