

## COMMUNICATION AND MEDIATION IN/ OF ART: INTRODUCTION

### COMUNICAÇÃO E MEDIAÇÃO NA/DA ARTE: INTRODUÇÃO

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In the current (tensive) backdrop of contemporary art (Jimenez, 2005/2021), given the complexity of its formal, compositional, procedural codes, yet also its imbricate entanglement with the social and political (Bishop, 2004), and economic (Afonso & Fernandes, 2019) dimensions, the imperative of *communication and mediation* has been accentuated.

Communication and mediation between (and within) art, artists, artistic and cultural institutions, and its professionals (critics, curators, strategic communication specialists, cultural journalists, researchers) and the public is motivated by the importance the principles of accessibility, democratisation, participation or collaboration, or even art education, have in opening the “art worlds” (Becker, 1982) to the multiple spheres of communalised aesthetic experience (or, desirably, made common; Stiegler, 2004/2018).

The risk of the growing communication gap, identified in recent research (Anastasiya et al., 2020), motivates many existing practices and experiments committed to transforming the paradigms that persist in art and culture.

Confining the practice of artistic mediation merely to its transmissive/decoding dimension is ignoring the fact that mediation, since it interferes in the weave of social relations, is always permeated by a certain conception of those relations “therefore, bearing both in its discourses and in its devices, an ideological component (Caune, 2012, p. xi). Thus, it is important to focus precisely on the action of communicating, that is, the act of building relationships of mutual exchange or interaction between audiences, works, artists and institutions. This interaction always involves sharing the experience of the sensitive and it is inscribed in a particular lifeworld and socio-political context (Caune, 2012, p. xiii), the basis for producing meaning.

To rethink the performance of the action of communicating, we evoke the idea of a “contact zone”, proposed by the anthropologists Mary Louise Pratt (1992) and James Clifford (1997) and evoked by Russian curator Maria Lind, to replace the common assumption of a gap — or something negative — that needs to be reduced between art and what is called “the public”. According to Lind (interviewed by Schipakina, 2020), “art-works, visitors, artists, people working in institutions, together inhabit and create contact

zones” (para. 17), that is, spaces of interaction and co-presence often within radically asymmetrical relations of power (Pratt, 1992, p. 7). As such, they open up multiple possibilities — negative and positive — and it is important to understand how signification moves along these lines or across them.

Accordingly, all artistic mediation includes a political or transformative dimension, which can be driven by reproductive forces and de-constructive, critical and dialogical movements (Mörsch, 2005; Rodrigo, 2012) and should be understood and debated in this tension. Reason enough to reflect on the how or on the pedagogical arts of art mediation.

The meaning of artistic mediation, like cultural mediation (Lafortune, 2012), a more comprehensive field in which we can inscribe artistic mediation, is a vector of movement, “an open space of theoretical and practical perspectives constantly renegotiated according to the evolution of societies and the role played by culture” (Lafortune, 2012, p. 1).

In this volume, we present contributions that are part of this debate around the notion of artistic mediation, its professionalisation/teaching and how it operates in different institutional contexts. In cultural studies and communication sciences, particularly in the Lusophone context, the interest and research on the relationship between mediation, communication, and art are still incipient. This issue highlights the need to further invest in this area.

Marina Clauzet Ferraz de Mello and Ascension Moreno González’s article opens the volume. It reviews the nature and evolution of the concept of artistic mediation in the Ibero-American context. The authors collect, from Google Scholar, a set of scientific publications in Spanish, from 2010 to 2022. They classify the different articles into two classes, those where artistic mediation is understood as a form of social intervention through art, and those that circumscribe it to museum spaces, as an intervention that aims to bring art closer to the public, making it more accessible, understandable and meaningful, an understanding inherited from the work of the previous educational or pedagogical departments of museums and cultural centres. In the Ibero-American context, the first understanding — artistic mediation as a form of social intervention — seems to be the most recurring in the *corpus* of scientific works analysed.

The second article of this collection, signed by Cristina Barroso Cruz and Laurence Vohlgemuth, also addresses the concern with defining the nature of artistic mediation. The contrast between the symbolic importance ascribed to the role of the mediator in the field of arts and the frailness or precariousness of their social status is well known (Pro Helvetia, p. 36). This paper draws on data from the research project *Entre: Investigação em Mediação Artística e Cultural* (In between: research in Artistic and Cultural Mediation) to address what teachers, institutional partners and some graduates in artistic and cultural mediation from the Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa share about the role of the artistic and cultural mediator, artistic and cultural mediation and the knowledge and skills deemed necessary for the exercise of this profession, in a country where the professional category of cultural mediator does not yet exist, as is the case in Portugal. In their definitions of artistic and cultural mediation, the respondents include several concerns (educational, social, cultural, political, and economic...) and identify a wide range of skills required for an intervention in this area.

As part of a doctoral research project aiming to explore the involvement of communities in the development of urban art projects in public space, Ana Luísa Castro and Ricardo Campos provide a discussion about the project *Meu Bairro, Minha Rua* (My neighbourhood, My Street), promoted by the Municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia. In this project, the community was invited to participate in the decision-making process regarding micro-interventions in public space in ten locations in Vila Nova de Gaia, including urban art painting. Through an analysis of the project's official discourse and the fieldwork developed with local communities, the authors show how the project studied can be used as a reference for the development of participatory projects in urban art.

Regarding community participation, within the framework of artistic mediation and museums, Luis Campos Medina, Cynthia Pedrero Paredes and Mónica Aubán Borrel write about the *Mirada de Barrio* project in Santiago, Chile. This project was developed by the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende from 2017 to 2019. It aimed to create a link between the museum and the neighbourhood where it is located: the República neighbourhood in Santiago de Chile. The innovation of this initiative in the Chilean context lies in the search for a new form of territorial co-production, which “considers sensitive and affective elements previously not consciously regarded by the residents” of the neighbourhood. Supported by the systematisation of experiences and ethnographic tools, the authors show, in their article, how this writing of the territory — understood as a field of forces through microscopic actions — occurred, in which each of its inhabitants had a relevant role.

The last of the three articles highlighting the participation processes within the scope of artistic mediation is a text by Fernando Fontes, Cláudia Pato de Carvalho and Susete Margarido. The article focuses on a community generally excluded from the contexts of cultural offers and experiences, people with disabilities. The authors draw on the experience of implementing a project for inclusion through artistic activity and promoting inclusive art — *A Meu Ver* — by a professional artistic structure in theatre in the city of Coimbra – O Teatrão. It is a three-year theatre training and practice project for people who are blind or have low vision, funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the “La Caixa Foundation” under the Partis & Art for Change programme. In their article, they report the results, collected through different methods (participant observation, questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews and focus group) of an exploratory study between October 2021 and August 2022 to monitor and assess the impact of the project's first year of implementation. The authors analyse the individual impacts of the project on those who took part in it directly, focusing on how it contributed to the construction of the identity of participants with visual impairment in the *A Meu Ver* project.

Closing the volume, we have included two papers focusing on the crucial role of communication in the processes of artistic mediation aimed at bringing art closer to the public, allowing people to experience and engage with art in a meaningful and personal way. Communication can include different formats, such as informal conversations, workshops, lectures, and presentations. In his article, Yuji Gushiken takes us to

the contemporary theatre scene, focusing on dramatic reading in arts, a form of theatre performance where the actors read a text aloud, without scenography, costumes or full staging, and where the *audience-foyer* offers an interesting strategy for dialogue and public formation. It is a moment of encounter between the artists and the public, which takes place in the *foyer* or the audience before or after the performance. Drawing on the Latin American model of communication as dialogue, Gushiken, based on the case of Teatro Mosaico (Brazil) and the staging of two dramaturgical texts, Sandro Luçose's *Prólogo* and director Alcione Araújo's *A Caravana da Ilusão* shows how the *audience-foyer* works to create an audience and simultaneously a public that, "more than enjoying a show, hypothetically has the theatre as a mediating instance of new sociability".

Finally, with Manoela Barbacovi and Maria Angélica Zubarán, we go back to the world of museums to reflect on these spaces as producers of "hybrid" culture. The example selected is the Gramado Film Festival Museum in Brazil and its connection with the Film Festival and local cultural tourism. Using an ethnographic perspective of participant observation and field diary records aiming to capture the materiality of the permanent exhibition of this museum, the authors discuss the cultural meanings produced and disseminated to its visitors, showing how the museum, through interactivity, also plays an educational and media role.

### Translation: Anabela Delgado

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