

Kunstvermittlung

Kunstvermittlung von Grund auf neu zu denken und zu praktizieren: dazu hat die vergangene documenta 12 entscheidende Anstöße gegeben.

Die Publikation bietet eine ideale Handreichung für MultiplikatorInnen aus dem Bildungsbereich, aus Kinder- und Jugendarbeit, aus Kulturpolitik und Kunstinstitutionen sowie für fachlich Interessierte. Sie richtet sich außerdem an eine breite Öffentlichkeit, die mit dem Kunstfeld weniger vertraut ist.

Die HerausgeberInnen

Ayşe Güleç, Claudia Hummel, Carmen Mörsch, Sonja Parzefall, Ulrich Schötter und Wanda Wiczorek kommen aus dem künstlerischen, kunstwissenschaftlichen, pädagogischen, politischen und sozialen Bereich und haben während der documenta 12 die verschiedenen Formate der Kunstvermittlung aufgebaut und entwickelt.



Kunstvermittlung als gesellschaftliche Praxis



KUNSTVERMITTLUNG 1
Arbeit mit dem Publikum, Öffnung der Institution. Formate und Methoden der Kunstvermittlung auf der documenta 12
Hrsg. von Ayşe Güleç, Claudia Hummel, Sonja Parzefall, Ulrich Schötter und Wanda Wieczorek
160 Seiten • Broschur (16 × 24 cm) • inkl. DVD
ISBN 978-3-03734-077-6
€ 19,90 / CHF 35,90

Juni 2009

Das Thema »Kulturelle Bildung« hat Konjunktur. Auf dem Weg in eine offen strukturierte und dennoch auf Gemeinsinn angelegte Gesellschaft nimmt kulturell-ästhetische Bildung eine Schlüsselposition ein. Ein überaus geeignetes Medium dafür ist die Kunstausstellung, denn sie ermöglicht die Verhandlung von Differenzen: eine Art der Auseinandersetzung, die weniger auf Konsens und Harmonie angelegt ist, sondern im Widerstreit, im Konflikt und in Brüchen die Fortsetzung »kultivierter« Kommunikation sieht.

Im Wechselfeld zwischen Publikum und Institution, Professionellen und Laien, Kunstfeld und Öffentlichkeit liegt das umkämpfte Terrain der Kunstvermittlung. Für ihre Entwicklung bedarf es sowohl gelungener Beispiele als auch der Auseinandersetzung mit praxisrelevanten Schwierigkeiten und Problemen.



KUNSTVERMITTLUNG 2
Zwischen kritischer Praxis und Dienstleistung auf der documenta 12. Ergebnisse eines Forschungsprojekts
Hrsg. von Carmen Mörsch und dem Forschungsteam der documenta 12 Vermittlung
ca. 480 Seiten • Broschur (16 × 24 cm)
ISBN 978-3-03734-078-3
€ 24,90 / CHF 43,00

Juni 2009

Eine reich bebilderte, zweibändige Publikation präsentiert nicht nur die auf der documenta 12 erarbeiteten Formate, sondern stellt auch die flankierende Begleitforschung vor und schafft die Basis weiterer Entwicklung in Theorie und Praxis der Kunstvermittlung.

Der erste Band bietet einen umfassenden Überblick über Vermittlungsformate und Modelle der Zusammenarbeit mit Besuchern. Bildstreifen veranschaulichen Methoden und Situationen der Vermittlungspraxis.

Der zweite Band widmet sich der Selbstreflexion der Vermittlungspraxis, ihrer Methoden und Hintergründe. Die im ersten Band dargestellten Beispiele werden reflektiert und in den Fachdiskurs eingebettet. Professionell Interessierte finden hier Anleitungen, Hinweise und Denkanstöße zur Kunstvermittlung.

Eine beiliegende DVD ergänzt die zwei Bände durch Originalmaterial aus der Praxis der Kunstvermittlung auf der documenta 12. Sie erlaubt den vertieften Zugang anhand zusätzlicher Texte ebenso wie das Stöbern in bislang unveröffentlichtem Bild- und Filmmaterial.

Die Publikation wird zudem in einer englischsprachigen Ausgabe erhältlich sein.

Performing essentialism at documenta 12

By Hansel Sato

“All humans communicate—even when they are not saying anything.”¹

Motivation

Having lead a number of tours at documenta 12, I noticed that a significant number of German participants reacted with surprise or rather skepticism when learning that a non-European foreigner was to conduct the tour. After introducing myself at the beginning of the tour, I would often be questioned as to my origins. I would oblige and provide additional information on my nationality.

I have lived for twenty-eight years in Peru, where I was born. Recently, I acquired Austrian citizenship, and I have been living for ten years in Vienna, where I obtained a degree in painting at the academy of fine arts. My father is Japanese, and my mother Peruvian. My mother tongue is Spanish, and I speak German fluently.

Gradually, the question about my origin started to bother me. Lurking within the sentence: “Where do you come from?” is the sub-text: “You are not from here.” I started asking myself which factor could so obviously reveal, right from the beginning, that I was not German. Language could not be a factor, as I had only briefly introduced myself in High German. Evidently, it was my appearance, which diverged from what a Central European is expected to look like. But if this were the case, it would imply that there are no other physiological types in Germany other than the *white* German.²

Thus, I realized how deeply ingrained in some of the visitors was the conception of the German as being white despite an evidently diversified reality. This German imagined as ‘typical’ corresponds with ideas of a fixed national identity or an ethnocentric definition of cultural unity and purity, that is to say, with forms of ethnic nationalism.³ The tacit question behind the inquiry about my origin was: If I was not German, why was I conducting tours in German, in an exhibition that is held every five years in Kassel, and ranks among the most renowned exhibitions of contemporary art in Germany? This is all the more interesting if we consider that correctly naming this exhibition is a prerequisite to potentially successful

¹ Watzlawic, Paul. “Jeder Mensch kommuniziert auch wenn er gar nichts sagt” *P.M. Perspektive Kommunikation* 89/112 53-x

² While Ursula Wachendorfer in “Weißsein in Deutschland” advocates the spelling of ‘Black’ and ‘White’ with capitals (see Wachendorfer, Ursula. *TheBlackBook. Deutschlands Häutungen*. Eds. AntiDiskriminierungsBüro Köln von Öffentlichkeit gegen Gewalt and cyberNomads. Frankfurt am Main: IKO, 2004), the editors of “Mythen, Masken, Subjekte”, Maureen Maisha Eggers, Grada Kilomba, Peggy Piesche and Susan Arndt, write ‘white’ with italicized lower-case letters, so as to separate the term from the potential of black resistance, but to mark it nonetheless as constructed. See Wachendorfer, Ursula. “Weiß-Sein in Deutschland. Zur Unsichtbarkeit einer herrschenden Normalität“ in *AfrikaBilder. Studien zu Rassismus in Deutschland* (Ed.) Susan Arndt, Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2002, 2006 and *Mythen, Masken und Subjekt. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland*. Eds. Maureen Maisha Eggers, Grada Kilomba, Peggy Piesche and Susan Arndt. Münster: Unrast Verlag 2006.

³ Turner, Graeme. *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*. London, NY: Routledge, 1996, 230.

naturalization in a citizenship test proposed by the state of Hessen.⁴ I had landed in the awkward situation of having to legitimate and prove—whether consciously or not—that I was qualified for the job, for I was ‘actually’ not supposed to be there. It followed from this observation that not only did I have to deal with the exhibition, but also with the matter of how I was perceived and whether I could act as authorized speaker. Visitors were occupied with the question “What are we seeing?” but I felt I had to tackle the question: “How do they see me?” I was therefore at risk of developing a relation to myself that was dictated by others.

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 in form of ‘jokes’: “*We’ll go for your tour; but make it cheaper.*” (White German female visitor) At the same time, I noticed that the reactions fluctuated depending on whether I introduced myself as Peruvian, Peruvian with Japanese ancestry or simply as Austrian. These experiences provided the motivation to investigate ascriptions of origin and ethnicity to gallery educators, and to find out whether these ascriptions influenced the visitors’ perception of the exhibition.⁵

Visitor groups

I conducted my research with four groups. The participants were adults who had signed up for the so-called open tours. This tour format allowed visitors to register on the same day without having to book in advance. Most of them were *white* Germans and ‘art lay-persons’. The ratio of men to women was relatively proportional. For the most part, they lived in Kassel or its surroundings. The age range was wide, but there was a large amount of retirees (who made up a third of the visitors). Some of them had already attended tours with other gallery educators: They affirmed that as all of them had been different, they had been able to experience different versions of the exhibition each time.⁶ This diversity received a positive response.

Self-essentialization⁷ as method

Finding a method to analyze the above mentioned ascriptions and perceptions of the visitors did not prove easy, as these were articulated through subtle remarks and gestures. At the outset of my research, I realized I was becoming increasingly thin-

⁴ This question is addressed by the project *Know[ledge of] German [Deutsch wissen]*, developed by Angelika Bartl, Sophie Goltz, Susanne Hesse and Andrea Hubin within the framework of the gallery education program at documenta 12. See <http://www.documenta12.de/826.html?&L=1> (accessed on October 22, 2008). For a detailed report of the project (German version), see

http://www.documenta12.de/fileadmin/Kunstvermittlung_Projekte/Bericht_DeutschWissen.pdf (accessed on June 18, 2008)

⁵ On stereotypes and norming ascriptions, see Wienand, Hossain and Wiegand.

⁶ See Schürch, Nölle, Henschel (Wish). On the multiplicity of perspectives, see Distelberger, Wienand, Hossein and Ballath, p. XX.

⁷ ‘Essentialization’ refers to the categorization of people, processes or things, according to which certain traits, characteristics or behavior are attributed to their nature or essence.

skinned. I was concerned about the likelihood of my own perceptions being preconditioned by my anticipations of the public's reactions. Had I conducted a survey at the end of the tour in such a frame of mind, I would have asked: "Would you have perceived the exhibition in a different way, had the gallery educator been German?"; "Do you think that foreign gallery educators should work at documenta 12?"; or: "Who would have commanded more respect as an authorized speaker?" It would have been a futile enterprise, because none of the addressees would have liked to be identified as racist or prejudiced. I would have provoked socially correct answers. Aside from that fact, I would always experience that the visitors liked me. This would have stood in the way of a critical assessment of my tour, and the answers prompted by my questions would have revealed little about their previous dispositions. Fortunately, I was able to discuss my experiences with the other gallery educators of the parallel research group⁸, in which we addressed all of the specific problems encountered in the quest to find an appropriate method. Drawing on some of the group's suggestions, I opted for another research tool: a performative gallery education aimed at self-exoticization and self-essentialization.

The first step at the beginning of each tour involved introducing myself to the groups by alleging to have a specific nationality: either South American Uro native⁹, Japanese, Spaniard or Austrian. I wanted to find out whether the different ascriptions of ethnicity and nationality would generate other perceptions and versions of the exhibition and the tour. In the native and Japanese case, I claimed it was my first time to Europe. As a Spaniard, I affirmed I had never been to Germany before. I had purportedly learned the German language in my countries of origin. My birth place was the capital of the respective countries and I affirmed having lived there (with the exception of the Uro native, who had lived on a 'floating' reed island).

Thus, instead of basing my method on theatrical/bodily representations¹⁰, I focused on performative utterances. Uwe Wirt compares 'constative utterances', which may be true or false, to 'performative utterances', which change social conditions by virtue of their statements; hence they do not merely describe, but generate social conditions.¹¹ With each adopted identity, I tried using the same repertoire of language and gestures, as well as the same (black) clothes. Moreover, I would always deliver the same information on the same ten or twelve art works in the four situations, unless specific questions were asked.

The second step, by the middle of the tour, was to reveal to the public my origin (Peru) and nationality (Austria). This revelation was meant to cause confusion, which would prompt the group to talk on a meta-level, beyond art works. Following that, I initiated a debate that dwelled on my motives to run this experiment and the research theme.

This was not always unproblematic, because some visitors felt disappointed or betrayed. It was all the more unsettling to them to learn that this role-play, which was a research instrument, run parallel to gallery education, turned them involuntarily

⁸ On the process of parallel research, see Mörsch in this volume, p.XX.

⁹ The indigenous Uro people live on man-made reed islands at Titicaca Sea, in the Peruvian department of Puno.

¹⁰ On this consideration, see Ortmann. On the notion of 'performance-index' and speech acts, see Campaner.

¹¹ Wirt, Uwe. *Performanz. Zwischen Sprachphilosophie und Kulturwissenschaften*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002, 11. See the glossary.

from observing subject into observed object of investigation.¹² My way of tackling this insecurity was to explain that the point was not of merely swapping power positions (as in: “Now it’s your turn to become the object of my analysis”), but to reflect on constructions of perception within the group (myself included), examining our shared experiences in the process of gallery education.¹³ Furthermore, I impressed on them that I had not lied: I had simply drawn on one of the cultural identity constructions that made up my personal history. After these elucidating remarks, most of the group participants were willing to engage in a discussion about my research. A total of ten persons, or 15 % of all groups, decided to leave in the middle of the tour after I had disclosed my ‘true’ identity and sought to trigger a discussion. Possibly, their quitting the tour was demonstrative of the fact that they chose not to waste any time with themes not directly related with the art works. Only once did a man protest and state that he would be filing a complaint. With the exception of these individuals, most of the other visitors were rather curious.

In the third step I carried on with the tour and engaged in further discussions with the visitors.

In what follows, I will list the reactions of the public throughout the three steps.

First Step:

Reaction to the Uro native (Situation 1): The group was surprised, but relaxed quickly; some smiled, showing tolerance and curiosity. A number of visitors immediately posed questions about his country and the floating island. Some assumed that the chain necklace he wore throughout the tour was of Uro origin.¹⁴

Reaction to the Japanese (Situation 2): Attentive, earnest. A visitor even bowed his head, greeting him the “Japanese” way.

Reaction to the Spaniard (Situation 3): Mostly somewhat skeptical and expectant. Two visitors responded in a very friendly way, saying ‘buenos días’ with a sunny smile in their faces.

Reaction to the Austrian (Situation 4): Mostly distanced and expectant (and absolutely devoid of commentaries in comparison with the other groups).

Second Step:

After my true origin and intentions were made public, it transpired from the discussions that the group participants had allowed themselves to be influenced by the purported origins of the gallery educator.

The overall responses to the tours conducted by the *native gallery educator (Situation 1)*:

The conveyed information was more interesting and in-depth when it touched upon South American art.

¹² On the observation of observers, see Henschel (Palm Groves), Campaner, Sözen, Ziegenbein and Distelberger, p. XX

¹³For a discussion about the impact of gallery education on perception, see Distelberger, Schürch, Henschel (Wish) and Ballath, p.XX

¹⁴ Artist Symrin Gill crafted a chain necklace using my favorite book (a Japanese manga). This was part of her *Pearls* project, presented at documenta 12. I was free to use the necklace as I pleased, so I wore it during my tours.

The gallery educator was perceived as being very friendly, sympathetic and emotional.

The gallery educator was surprisingly well-informed and very proficient in German. Sometimes he seemed a little 'nervous', but that was 'logical' given his origin.

When I talked about Ines Doujak's piece (*Victory gardens*, 2007), which deals, amongst other issues, with biopiracy in the Amazon-basin¹⁵, I felt I got concentrated attention and empathy towards my Uro native persona. By contrast, the same artwork elicited almost no interest when I discussed it as Austrian and Japanese; in fact, it was even described as 'showy' or 'boring'.

The tour was rated as being very good.

A visitor admitted that, at some point throughout the tour, he had grown skeptical of my competence with regards to European art: How could a Uro native be so knowledgeable about this field? Some viewed the fact that a Uro native was 'leading'¹⁶ the tour just as interesting and novel as the exhibition per se; indeed, one could even say that I had almost been accorded the status of another object in the exhibition, hence becoming a kind of living art work.¹⁷

Let us consider a further aspect of the Uro native as gallery educator: From the inception of capitalism, the flow of commodities and signs from south to north was unhindered, even promoted. By contrast, the people who produce these commodities were and are still expected to remain in their respective countries. To a certain extent, this also applies to the artists of those countries. Their reception is characterized by interest and respect when they produce commodities (art works) for the Western market, but not necessarily so when they live and work as migrants in Europe – unless they conform to cultural stereotypes. In Austria, for example, migrant artists often enjoy only marginal visibility. Although international artists are invited and welcome, those already living in Austria are ignored.¹⁸ There was no room within this logic to see the Uro native in all his complexity and contradictions—neither as subject nor in his professional competence a gallery educator—for he was looked upon as a further exotic commodity.¹⁹

The overall responses to the tours conducted by the *Japanese gallery educator (Situation 2)*:

The conveyed information was more interesting and in-depth when it touched upon Asian art.

The gallery educator was friendly, but distanced.

The explanations provided by the gallery educator were very precise.

¹⁵ For a description of this piece, see Ortmann, p.XX.

¹⁶ Distelberger and Henschel challenge this notion in p.XX.

¹⁷ There is a notorious European tradition of 'displaying' non-European people. In the case of Kassel, the hamlet *Mou Lang*, erected in Chinoiserie-style, was inhabited in the 18th century by three black women who, clad as 'Chinese', were there to entertain visitors and Frederic II. See <http://www.kassel-wilhelmshoehe.de/chinesen.html> (accessed on July 5, 2008)

¹⁸ See Ofoedu, Obiora C-Ik. "An uphill task for migrant artists" *Art in Migration* Nr. 6 (2007):23.

¹⁹ To some extent, the work *Fairy Tale* (2007) by artist Ai Wie Wei responded to such categorizations: This project entailed flying in a group of 1001 Chinese to Kassel. Twice I was asked on the street whether I was one of such Chinese. On ascriptions of this kind, see Wienand in this volume, p.XX.

He spoke German very well.

The conduction of the tour met with positive response (in the sense that it was explanatory).

It was of no surprise that he was well informed about European art and culture, because “Japanese learn just about everything, they can assimilate everything.” A visitor stated he had heard me utter a few terms in Japanese, although I am sure I never said a word in such language. I noticed increased visitor interest towards the calligraphies of Chinese artist Zheng Guogu (*Illiteracy No.3*, 2004). They were accordingly thrilled when I mentioned that I had learned some calligraphy.

The overall responses to the tours conducted by the *Spanish gallery educator (Situation 3)*:

The conveyed information was more interesting and in-depth when it touched upon Latin American or Spanish art.

The gallery educator spoke German well, but at times too quickly.

The gallery educator was well prepared.

Although the tour was positively rated, it did not meet all the expectations: Some stressed the fact that, instead of discussing few works at length, we could have looked at far more works.

The overall responses to the tours conducted by the *Austrian gallery educator (Situation 4)*:

No additional attention was given to my speaking about Austrian or German art.

The gallery educator was well prepared, but his explanations were a bit complicated.

He exaggerated his use of terms in Latin.

His German was all right, but not 100% correct, which might have owed to the fact that he came from a migrant background.

The tour was not that bad, though it could have been better.

Most complaints were voiced in the Austrian scenario, and I noticed that the visitors would heighten their critical standards. One of the classic complaints was: “Why do the exhibition labels provide so little information about the artists (why not include birth date and nationality)?” “Could you please repeat that word, but slower this time?” would be one of the first questions asked. In comparison with reactions to the other gallery educators, it was my impression that they were the much less tolerant of the Austrian.

These examples clearly illustrate how anticipations of nationality and ethnicity allow but a fraction of the broad spectrum of possible perceptions and interpretations. The different readings are supposed to fulfill and confirm the respective expectations. Although I tried to use the same words consistently throughout the tours, the speaker’s cultural background produced four different versions of the same text in the exhibition. According to Wolfgang Wagner, perception is not predetermined by instinctive choice and personal history, but rather already pre-structured by a given

theoretical assumption; indeed, when we see, we build on our preconceived, constructed image of the world, so that our observations complement and expand this image.²⁰

Third step:

After the discussions we continued our walk through the exhibition, and it became apparent to me that in all four situations no group member dared anymore to ask about the nationality of the artists. The situation was pervaded by this insecurity, although I consistently tried to abstain from moralizing comments that appeared somewhat biased toward me.

It became clear that participants could no longer fall back upon former judgments that secured and ordered their own world image. Thus, the implicit and simple message of the discussion was: if one's capacity of perception is to unfold, then certain experiences and expectations must be unlearned.²¹ Preconceptions must be identified and named, then replaced with diversified reflection.

To conclude the tour, a discussion would expand on the topic of essentializing prejudices regarding the sphere of art works and artists at documenta 12. Some of my questions were: Does the information about the cultural background of the artists change our perception or judgment of the art work? Would we view an art work as more valuable or more 'contemporary' if it had been produced by a Western artist? Why do visitors to documenta 12 view the fact that the curators retained information about the artists' nationalities as a deficit?²² Why should the ancestry of the producers play such a decisive role? If, in fact, the issue were to concern ancestry, nationality or 'culture': Who defines or how does one define what exactly makes up 'Peruvian' or 'Chinese' art and culture? Are not art works and art currents the result of hybridization processes?

In the groups participating in my research, I talked about other visitors at documenta 12 contributing their share of essentializations, for example on the installation of artist Cosima von Bonin. When I mentioned that she was born in Mombasa, Africa, visitors found that her colored carpets looked, to that effect, 'African'. If I added to that information that her parents were *white* Germans, and that she had spent practically all of her life in Germany, then the reception of her work would change all of a sudden: her work would be categorized in the tradition of European geometric abstraction.

Mirrorings

On the one side, I could sense the inner struggle of some visitors as they were faced with a contradictory image: a speaker, authorized by documenta 12, simultaneously non-European foreigner, conducting a German public through an exhibition organized in Germany. On the other, the research was of almost therapeutic value to me: My battle with ascribed illegitimacy and feelings of self-doubt was channeled into a

²⁰ Wagner, Wolf. *Fremde Kulturen wahrnehmen*. Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 1997, 15.

²¹ On unlearning, see the papers by Wienand, Plegge and Fürstenberg (Interfaces), as well as the guest article by Castro Varela and Dhawan in this volume, p.XX.

²² See, on this issue, the papers by Wienand, Oberleitner, Hossain, Ziegenbein and Ortman in this volume, p.XX.

performative intervention. Above all: For the first time, I was able to consciously experience the impact of the diversity of contradictory subject positions that I am made of in the public sphere, even though my behavior –observed from the outside– always stayed the same. The mere speech act of defining myself as Spanish or indigenous person strongly affected my self-image. The meta-level of research²³ gave me enough room to experiment with the role of my imagined Spanish²⁴ or indigenous person without having to fear falling into the essentialist trap.

The research setting allowed me to experience the stereotypes I had constructed, to identify and analyze them much more clearly. By comparing the power positions of these fragmented identities, I could see how they struggled with each other: An inner struggle that, to my astonishment, replicated the Peruvian history of colonized and colonizers within my self. In this context, let us consider Mark Terkessidis' views of the Other as the specular image with which the occidental self seeks to identify: "That the Others function as mirror to the Western imaginary is not without repercussions to the very self-image of the Others. The white 'objective gaze' [...] is always intrinsic to one's own perception. As is the case with any other antiracist politics, the politics of migrants has been characterized by an extremely difficult struggle for representation, in which embodiment and personification in the sphere of the imaginary mingle in highly complex configurations. In fact, the 'adversary' in antiracist struggles is not simply positioned on the outside, but rather, such ostensible counterpart is inextricably involved in the construction of personal identity."²⁵

The role of the Uro native proved to be the most difficult to adopt. This has to do with the fact that in Peru, people of Andean origin are often faced with discrimination by coastal inhabitants (such as myself) and stereotyped as wild and uncivilized. This was certainly a new situation for me, because I had never been in the position of being treated as subaltern–although I presently belong to a minority in Europe–or defined myself in those terms. Here, it must be emphasized that belonging to an ethnic, political or economic minority does not amount to being subaltern. According to postcolonial theorist G. Spivak, subalternity implies the impossibility of articulating oneself in speech or of being heard, because "no subaltern (can) claim subalternity".²⁶

What am I allowed to say?²⁷ How should I speak?

In the scenarios of gallery education described above, I found it important that the use of a distinct, yet still accessible kind of German, eventually characterized by grammatical errors and a spoken accent, be afforded recognition. By accepting these

²³ See also, on the role of research in the practice of gallery education, the paper by Schürch, p. XX.

²⁴ I probably do not share much, in the cultural sense, with a Spaniard, although my great-grandparents were Spanish; in Peru, however, the importance of this 'Spanish' self-image lay in its social function, in that it stood for my conscious adherence to the status of the white [dominant] minority and all that it involved. In Europe, by contrast, my other identities enjoyed higher esteem than the Spanish: as Japanese or 'Indian'. These identity constructions work in the European context, because they fit European projections and longings, which differ from the Peruvian ones.

²⁵ Terkessidis, Mark. "Vetrtretung, Darstellung, Vorstellung. Der Kampf der MigrantInnen um Repräsentation". <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0101/terkessidis/de> (accessed on June 18, 2008) [Translation KMC]

²⁶ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Fragments from an interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Politics and the Imagination". *Signs* 28 (2003): 2. See <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/SIGNS/journal/issues/v28n2/280208/280208.web.pdf> (accessed on June 18, 2008)

²⁷ Wienand poses the same question in her paper, p.XX.

deviations from the 'norm', my public would be questioning stereotypical notions of a German standard language.²⁸ It is interesting that the existence of different language varieties of German seems to be widely ignored. By contrast, dialects per se and spoken accents as indicators of migration find more acceptance and a different reception in the English-speaking world. Difference on the level of language often seems to become the equivalent of 'deficiency' in the case of Germany. As I was told by an Austrian philologist, even a so called 'deficiency test' was devised to prove the proficiency of Austrian teachers who wanted to teach German language as a subject in Germany. Already the name of the test is discriminatory. Another account by an Austrian woman who recalls talking to a German woman on a train ride in the Germany of the 1990s, ties with this notion of 'deficiency': When she inquired whether High German was the standard language used throughout German schools, or if some teachers were free to choose a dialect variety when teaching certain subjects, the German woman was utterly appalled (as if she ought to defend some principle): "Of course High German is spoken everywhere!"

At any rate, my point had been to demonstrate that it is possible to speak differently and still provide an insightful and nuanced discussion about art. This different way of speaking not only concerns my accent, but also the issue of rendering certain concepts accessible to others. Just as my use of Latin terminology (which is something I tend to do when I speak German, as my mother tongue is a Romanic language) would bother some visitors, or render them insecure, it would also be viewed as a sign of refinement. Clearly, this was consistent with the humanistic educational ideal of the German bourgeoisie.

In addition, making use of specifically art-related terms reinforced the impression that I was competent in my field.²⁹ Nevertheless, as a rule, I tried to distance myself from a hermetic lingo, which was either perceived as elitist or considered to be utterly unintelligible, so I attempted, instead, to find other alternatives. For instance, I would introduce anecdotes now and again, in order to allow access to theoretical considerations. My favorite example: Instead of elucidating the institutional art theory of philosopher Arthur C. Danto³⁰, I told the story of a visitor who forgot to retrieve his jacket after it fell on the floor; some visitors who arrived after him thought that the garment lying on the floor was an art work at documenta 12 (indeed, there were many textile pieces at this exhibition). Therefore, the institutional context played a decisive role in the 'transformation' of this ordinary object into a work of art.³¹ The public responded with comprehending laughter. This demonstrates that there are approaches to speaking in the context of gallery education beyond the purist High German endeavor.

²⁸ On practices of standardization, see the papers by Plegge and Fürstenberg (Hazardous Bodies), Ortman, Wiegand, p.XX.

²⁹ I have heard similar comments from other gallery educators of non-German background: Art-vocabulary commanded authority in this respect.

³⁰ In *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Arthur C. Danto explores the question of what makes an ordinary object an art work and to what extent the title of a piece may have bearing on its identification and interpretation. See Danto, Arthur C. *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981

³¹ On the impact of institutional power and behavior patterns, as well as institutional critique, see the papers by Sözen, Henschel (Palmgroves), Plegge and Fürstenberg (Hazardous Bodies), Hossain, and Ortman; on authorization mechanisms, see Landkammer; on the order of discourse, Ziegenbein and Ballath, all in this volume, p.XX.

Gallery education as political stage

Talking about art at documenta 12 was not only about delivering information; it was also about shared knowledge production and a reciprocal transfer of information. Therefore, its aim was of a political nature: to change power relations in the exhibition context through shared reflection.³² Sometimes, almost imperceptibly, this objective would be put into practice. Several details of the exhibition I was only literally able to see through my visitors. Let me explain: In the case of Juan Davila's paintings³³, for example, I had reached a point in which I could speak about them without actually looking at the pieces. Increasingly, I would focus more on my language than on the art works.³⁴ It was as if I were composing a poem that I had to keep on fine-tuning. Thus, a Davila painting would merely provide the stimulus to create a harmonious composition of words aimed at evocativeness and resonance, instead of description or explanation of the piece. That is as far as the productive side of it goes. More often than not, gallery educators stop seeing the exhibition because words and explanations foreground the art works. One stops being alert, remembering only the excogitated words on this or that piece and repeating oneself, or paraphrasing. Often enough, my visitors made observations that were just as interesting, if not sharper, than my own—or those of 'art experts'—and helped me to refocus on what was there to see.

Conclusion

The methods and observations described here run counter to the paradigm of objectivity in traditional gallery education, which confines it to the mere delivery of information about art works, artist biographies, styles, creation contexts, etc. It was my experience that information, because it is always conveyed by a 'positioned subject', can never be neutral, and my performative approach to gallery education and the subsequent emotionally laden discussions with the public give further proof to this point. Evidently, ascriptions of ethnicity and cultural background to the gallery educator had an impact on the way visitors perceived the exhibition.

Whether the ends I wished to attain were indeed fulfilled—for example, that the national or ethnic provenance of the gallery educator become relative, if not irrelevant in the course of the tour—cannot be verified. However, it is a fact that the tour was transformed into a more open, fruitful discussion about the aforementioned issues and on gallery education as a theme on its own.

Finally, this research made me realize how many anticipations I had nurtured. Not only did I identify the authoritarian core of my position, I also noticed my internalized bias towards the gallery educator roles I played, especially towards the indigenous persona. I felt a kind of inner resistance to adopting this character, for I had maneuvered myself from a privileged to a subaltern position, which I found unpleasant.

³² On speech as a tool, see the papers by Schürch, Nölle, Hossain; to examine how art is talked about, refer to Wienand and Ziegenbein. On agency and possible structural changes (also within power relations), and a critique of the impact of institutional power, see the papers by Henschel (Palmgroves), Plegge and Fürstenberg (Hazardous Bodies), Hossain, Ortman. This topic is discussed with reference to participatory aspects in Distelberger.

³³ For a description of Juan Davila's works, see Ortman, p.XX.

³⁴ See Noelle's comments on this phenomenon, p.XX.

The documenta experience has heightened my awareness and understanding of *my own preconceptions and ascriptions* with regards to tour groups.³⁵ Most representative of this is an encounter I had with a group of Rotary Club members (a group which did not participate in the research). Before the tour even started, I had already fostered the following assumptions: They are clueless about contemporary art. They are square and come to Kassel just because it is a 'must' to have been to documenta 12. Possibly, they are intolerant, conservative, etc. It goes without saying that my prejudices proved to be gratuitous. Indeed, we had an exciting discussion. The question was: Why had I internalized such an anti-stance? The answer is relatively simple: Based on previous negative experiences with a Peruvian Rotary Club in Lima that had left a deep impression on me, and disregarding the fact that this was a different context, I had jumped to conclusions.

³⁵ On personal stereotypes, see Hossain, p.XX.

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