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Photo essay  
Caroline Minjolle



## **Between Supply and Demand** The two faces of cultural policy

Norbert Sievers



Are cultural policy-makers still caught up in yesterday's thinking? Do they still go out from the idea that if enough is invested in a wide cultural supply, public interest and demand will automatically follow? Norbert Sievers, Managing Director of Germany's Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft, takes a look at the position of cultural policy in the cross-currents of supply and demand |

“The audience has a right not to get what it wants.”  
– Theodor W. Adorno

To look at Germany’s current cultural and cultural-political situation and the associated media coverage is to be confronted with a paradoxical picture: exhibitions like last year’s MoMA at the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, Tutankhamen at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle des Bundes in Bonn, or any number of other topical presentations of this kind are enjoying record numbers of visitors, while publicly subsidized theatres, opera houses and concert halls are beset by mounting concern over ageing audiences and waning audience interest. Cultural politicians proudly point to the tenfold increase in cultural institutions since the 1960s as a success of their New Cultural Policy, yet note that they are faced with a legitimation crisis and are under constant pressure to justify the very existence of their departments. A discipline that not long ago reaped acclaim for its profusion of ideas and creativity and understood its commitment as a contribution to social policy must today complain of the need to go on the defensive and is reduced to discussing the provision of basic services. These paradoxical findings are typical of the politics of culture, a field that oscillates between fantasies of omnipotence and a sense of exotic marginalism. But present-day reality is forcing people to stop and think. With public funds growing scarce and a host of public services being challenged, the “*consensus [that there is a] justification*” (Gerhard Schulze) for cultural policy is also under pressure. New reasons for the government’s role as a subsidizer must be put forward. And audiences play a pivotal role in this process.

**Cultural interest – a scarce resource.** To fulfil its social function properly, publicly supported art

and culture – whether in theatres, concert halls, museums or libraries – need spectators and users. The claim to being a mediator, a conduit between cultural works and values and the general public, is one legitimation for public cultural funding. Moreover, box-office receipts as a contribution to self-financing are becoming ever more important to the economic stability of cultural institutions and programmes. This alone would suffice to heighten the significance of the audience issue. But the growing need to fill houses and sell out events comes up against the realization that cultural interest is not an unlimited resource: it is scarce, and the competition is great. The expansion of public-sector cultural services following from the New Cultural Policy, the sharp competition among private suppliers in the field of leisure and culture and, above all, the attention cornered by the media have given rise to a new situation: potential users of culture now have far more to choose from. The result is that cultural interest is fragmented. The quantitative growth and heterogeneity of supply is faced with a diverse demand structure, but not necessarily with a comparable increase in the total number of participants/users.

Thus the time use surveys undertaken by the German Federal Statistics Office in 1991/92 and 2001/02 show no significant rise in cultural interest during this ten-year period (cf. Ehling 2005). Internationally, there even appears to be a downward trend, with less time being spent on cultural activities. Germany is predicted to go the same way. These findings are all the more remarkable as conditions for cultural participation (greater disposable income, more leisure time, more people attaining higher levels of education and above all

a disproportionately high increase in services on offer) have improved considerably over the past few decades. What remains is the sobering conclusion that the improvement of framework conditions does not run in tandem with an overall growth of cultural participation. There is no doubt that, in the context of the supply-oriented New Cultural Policy, a new interest in culture has developed since the 1970s: this is proven by the concrete rise in audience numbers. But the overarching objective of enabling all sectors of the population to share in the supply of public cultural services has been far from achieved. Even now, half the public remain left out, with the core of avid users amounting to only about five to ten per cent of the population. This is no different in Germany than anywhere else. Approximately the same observation is made in France: the participation-relevant parameters (see above) have developed positively, and yet there are still no more than ten per cent deriving substantial benefit from the publicly funded supply of culture (cf. Berardi/Effinger 2005). This means that, whether here or there, a comparatively small circle of people are taking advantage of an ever greater supply of cultural services at public expense.

The fact that cultural interest appears not to have grown at the same rate as supply is in itself already sobering. But it is equally irritating to have to confirm the validity of a point made by sociologist Gerhard Schulze in his oft-cited book *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* (The Event Society) at the beginning of the 1990s. He demonstrates that, for ever more people, cultural interest and the motivation to participate in culture are shaped by the need to experience an “event”, to have fun, etc. This fact is bound to set exponents of (New) Cul-

tural Policy – who have, for over thirty years, rested their claim to legitimacy on their “mediation” of culture – thinking. If the addressees of their mediational efforts insist on the “event rationale”, leaving educational motivation behind and “*deriving entertainment from services not officially meant for entertainment*” (Schulze 1993/2000: 516), this runs counter to the declared aims of cultural promotion. There is evidently a wide gap between the rationale of the demand side (event orientation) and the self-image driving the suppliers (education, enlightenment, mediation) – a circumstance easily capable of turning into a legitimational burden for public cultural policy since the reasons why cultural services should be supplied by the public rather than the private sector are no longer obvious. To make matters worse, event demanders appear to make no distinction between events supplied by the public and the private sector. Cultural studies experts have long confirmed this trend. They have coined the word *Kulturflaneur*, which might be translated as “cultural promenade” or even “cultural windowshopper”, to describe a type of individual characterized by “casual cultural consumption” with shifting preferences – independent of who is supplying the cultural services. From the cultural-policy standpoint, this trend is potentially explosive in that it questions the privileged position of public institutions from the standpoint of the user.

**Demand orientation as a challenge to cultural policy.** What is needed is a shift of perspective from supply- to demand-oriented cultural policy. Cultural policy-makers are still too caught up in the thinking of past decades, which presumed

that, given a supply, interest and demand would follow. It was uncommon to inquire about them in advance. What cultural institution has built a new building in recent years on the basis of a solid determination of need? This may not have been necessary twenty years ago because supply conditions were different; but today such decision-making aids should be compulsory. Even if the supply of new services can generate new interest, cultural participation is not an unbounded asset: it is limited by motivation, time and money; and they – as we have already noted – have grown scarce. It would be more appropriate to make a direct assessment of the factors – aesthetic development and cultural education – that influence the taking up of cultural services and to improve the marketing of cultural institutions in order to stimulate increased demand and reach new sectors of the population.

Although little has been done in this regard up to now, there are meanwhile promising political declarations of intent and convincing new approaches aimed at awakening children and young people's interest in culture in the hope of generating the cultural audiences of the future. New outreach structures are being planned, above all in connection with the creation of whole-day schools. [Ed. note: Whole-day schools, as traditionally found in the Anglo-American educational system, are still the exception in Germany or Switzerland.] But where are the resources that need to be invested? In general, pilot projects are run, short-term measures undertaken and policies more symbolic than effective are adopted, and that's that. The impact on public opinion may be excellent, but there is little attempt to understand the structural and legitimational problem. And yet, the logical conclusion is obvious: if it is true that cultural preferences and interests are developed during childhood and youth, the problems outlined above can only indicate that well-meaning approaches must be transformed into cogently conceived, adequately funded and effectively implemented policies. And if it is true that there is little remaining potential to increase participation on the part of those who already have cultural interests, then new paths must be trodden, following Berthold Brecht's dictum of turning a small circle of aficionados into a large one.

The aim has not been achieved merely by being on the agenda of the New Cultural Policy for thirty years. The regulative idea of providing "culture for everyone" has by no means outlived its forcefulness and relevance. It still harbours the potential to offer new conceptual impulses and foster greater support for cultural policy in the sense of

an activating policy of "cultural empowerment" and "audience development" designed to encourage the independent creativity of as many people as possible and to make cultural institutions more accessible. A number of European countries have already recognized this. In France the national government and local authorities (regions, departments, communes) agreed in 1998 that henceforth the allocation of promotional funding would be linked to measures to gain new audiences through cultural mediation and education. In the context of this new policy ("*mediation culturelle*"), cultural development agencies were created to offer professional help to cultural institutions. Despite a few hitches in the implementation, the programme reflects a culturo-political shift of perspective away from the broadening of supply and towards audience orientation (cf. Berardi/Effinger 2005). Blueprints for artistic and cultural mediation already have a longer tradition in Austria, where they are systematically developed by state-supported institutions – since 2004 by the Verein KulturKontakt Austria (cf. Giessner 2005). Britain has proceeded even more methodically than France and Germany. In 1998 the Arts Council England launched a five year, action-oriented research scheme (New Audiences Programme), which ran until 2003. Equipped with a budget of £20 million, it was "*set up to encourage as many people as possible, from all backgrounds and every walk of life, to participate in and benefit from the arts.*" (von Harrach 2005) Over these five years, the programme supported 1157 projects from all areas of the arts and evaluated a great many of them with a view to passing on the findings (cf. [www.artscouncil.uk/newaudiences](http://www.artscouncil.uk/newaudiences)). The Arts Council intends to continue supporting cultural institutions in their efforts to deliver high artistic quality to broad audiences from all social strata and systematically "*converting intenders to attenders*". It is convinced that this is the only way for the arts to survive in the twenty-first century.

What holds true for England does not necessarily hold true for Germany in exactly the same way. The two countries' traditions and systems of public-sector cultural funding are too divergent for that. And yet it is clear that in Germany, too, the supply-oriented approach of former years must be supplemented by demand-oriented concepts. On the other hand: isn't the whole idea of cultural policy to promote art that has a hard time – which also means a hard time finding audiences? Doesn't it fall short of its obligation to the public if it asks art institutions to tailor their programmes more closely to the tastes and preferences of culturally interested audiences? How can cultural policy avoid the trap of losing its

democratic legitimation by being exclusive and elitist or then being accused of unfair competition with the private sector by supporting popular cultural services? This dilemma already dominates the debate over cultural policy and will only be aggravated as artistic works and cultural services are declared tradable commodities, which both the EU and the World Trade Organization (WTO) would like to make happen. There is ample reason for cultural policy to reformulate its case for legitimation, and it won't be an easy task. ─

Translated from the German by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart

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# If at First You Don't Succeed...

## New guidelines for cultural promotion

Pius Knüsel

Maybe we're wrong: in thinking that the culture we support with public funds could ever interest a majority. That anyone but the minority of tone-setters would ever benefit from it. A painful admission that after thirty, after a hundred years of cultural policy, art as we define it is not a magic potion that creates its own popularity. That the preponderance of the public insistently stay away. Given this fact of life, a radical rethink is the only way forward.

Pius Knüsel, director of Pro Helvetia, the Arts Council of Switzerland, is intent on finding a way out of the legitim-  
ation trap |

Politics is a stage, and the piece currently being played on it in Switzerland is called "cultural policy". That Pro Helvetia has been accorded a leading role is beyond question. Not as a financial lightweight – with federal subsidies amounting to only SFr. 33 million, the Arts Council contributes only about 1.5 per cent to Switzerland's public-sector cultural budget of SFr. 2 thousand million. But as the country's oldest vehicle of cultural policy and because of its exposed position as an autonomous body where political and cultural interests cross. It is in this role that Pro Helvetia has recently drawn considerable attention. "Cultural policy", which was regarded as something of a soporific in the 1990s, has developed into – if not a drama, then at least a tragicomedy, with every episode played out on the front pages of our newspapers.

The audience in this theatre is composed of two groups: on the one hand, contemporary cultural practitioners, artists and event organizers, the direct beneficiaries of cultural promotion, who are fighting for improved working conditions and are beset with fears of cuts and slashes; and on the other, politicians, whose doubts about the sense and use of cultural promotion as practised today are written all over their faces. Tensions are being heightened by a number of external factors: the shortage of public funds and resulting redistribu-

tion struggles; the general political shift to the right; the undermined sovereignty of the nation-state brought on by economic globalization and the corollary decline in the power of governments to shape the present and future; the weak position of intellectuals in a world dominated by economic discourse.

Add to that a few explosive facts issuing from the cultural realm itself. It is true that the pursuance of cultural policy has succeeded in increasing the number of cultural institutions tenfold within forty years. But active audiences have not grown tenfold to match: the widening of artistic supply has primarily raised user frequency among existing arts enthusiasts; and it has been responsible for the escalating numbers of cultural producers. The burgeoning of institutions has led to tough competition that can only be survived with the aid of greater resources and more sophisticated productions. And, like European public-service television, by adaptation to increasingly aggressive private providers, whose numbers have also swelled in the subsidized context. This puts public-sector institutions under growing pressure to legitimate their existence: why should the public pay for services that can be delivered by self-supporting providers?

It is an unchallenged fact: we live in a state of oversupply from which the few – the educated

and the affluent – benefit, while the many enjoy themselves in front of the (TV or computer) screen. We are approaching the end of cultural bliss – the end of an era in which the arts were held to be the cure for the world's ills. An era whose dogma can be summarized in the words of Hilmar Hoffmann, former director of the Goethe Institute: there can never be enough culture. Whereby culture is understood purely in the sense of an expanded humanistic canon.

A word of consolation: the question “how do we bring art and the general public together” is at least as old as bourgeois culture itself. As Friedrich Wilhelm Schmidt, a German Enlightenment-era theatre director, tells us in his memoirs: “*Apart from the poet's name 'Schiller', the names 'Goethe' and 'Lessing', too, unfailingly guaranteed an empty house.*” Even the programmes scheduled by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe himself, who was theatre director in Weimar for twenty-six years, included only 5 per cent edifying plays. The remaining 95 per cent were musical dramas, light comedies and farces – the entertainments the general public were ready to pay for.

**The utopians.** The elevation of “the classical” to a cultural norm did not take place until the second half of the nineteenth century, in the context of the initial development of a cultural policy. The aspiring industrial bourgeoisie first defined itself culturally in literary, musical and artistic salons from Berlin to Paris, where they created the modern concept of art. The humanistic education of humankind became one of the tasks of a republic. Its pursuit manifested itself most visibly in cultural institutions which linked the representation of power with moral authority and were soon devouring the lion's share of the cultural budget – now financed for the first time by tax revenues. It was through its educational aims that the new bourgeois culture set itself off from its courtly predecessor.

The revolutionaries of 1968 protested against the one-sided use of public funds for the “self-gratification of the ruling classes”. This was the dawn of the utopian phase of cultural policy. *Culture for everyone* was the slogan: the time had come to democratize the humanistic heritage, to breach the protective walls of “high culture” and let in broad strata of society. Culture itself was viewed as a seedbed of justice: the more cultural a society, the higher its level of development and the less exploitative its social conditions. Under the headings of alternative and socio-culture, new sectors of society were drawn into the circle; popular culture was rehabilitated as a relevant expression of identity shaping, becoming support

worthy. Participation was a key concept: cultural policy was to be aimed first and foremost at enabling ordinary citizens to take an active part in cultural production. Where the bourgeois conception of culture had operated top down, the progressive notion wanted to work from the bottom up.

But instead of turning the concept of culture on its head – panto instead of opera, pop instead of classical music! – the utopians of cultural policy only managed to expand it. Throughout Switzerland, from Geneva to St. Gall, numerous alternative culture centres sprang up alongside the traditional institutions, and there was a boom in establishments providing cultural adult education. Via this diversionary route, the number of citizens participating in cultural life really did mount. But the increase in users lagged behind the increase in cultural spend. The bourgeois cultural institutions survived the ideological onslaught unscathed. Perhaps they modernized their stage aesthetic when the reins were passed on to the next generation. But that was only a brief, make-believe attempt at popularization. And now the field between alternative and high culture was suddenly populated with a broad category of new, avant-garde-oriented culture sites ranging from Kunsthalle to dance venue.

Culture for everyone? The utopian approach didn't make art more popular. On the contrary, with its strong emphasis on experimental, self-referential work, it pushed art back into the ivory tower. The general public had not warmed to the bourgeoisie's educational project, and now they ignored the modern trajectory too. But they gladly followed the call of event culture, the internet, the commercial opposition. The cultural establishment responded with an even sharper division between art and entertainment, intellect and the market. Cultural policy, which was aimed at the broad masses thirty years ago, has narrowed in on supporting cultural practitioners, on helping the difficult and uncomprehended to survive. Talking about audiences has become risky. Whoever does so is suspected of pandering to the tastes of the masses. Whoever regards success as a relevant criterion becomes guilty of economic censorship. Whoever undertakes an impact analysis undermines the purity of art. This line of argumentation leads to the conclusion that nowadays true art can only exist where there are also *subsidies*. Everything else is business, sham folklore or amateur culture. And with that, culture as it is understood today attains the same segregating power it once had. In the past, nothing outside the humanistic canon could ever achieve the status of art. At the end of the 1970s, the Mayor of

Zurich was still denying rock music the status of culture. Nowadays what is created outside the administered and subsidized art system is denied artistic quality.

Bad luck for us culture administrators that the general public finds its pleasures *outside* the system. The political sector, whose brief includes the evaluation of government activity in the broadest sense, confirms: only some 5 per cent of the population make frequent use of the cultural services on offer, while 45 per cent make little and 50 per cent make no use of them at all. These recently published statistics concerning the way Swiss spent their leisure time in 2003 establish that 80 per cent of the population never or only rarely cross the threshold of a theatre, opera house or museum. And the cinema is not much better off, with 71 per cent (almost always) staying away.

**A twofold answer.** Switzerland's political sector, which is always at pains to ensure that benefit accrues to society, has responded with a twofold answer. It demands more mediation and easier access to culture – as clearly formulated in the draft for Switzerland's first cultural promotion law at the federal level. Mediation means greater efforts to bring works of art to the presumed public; easier access generates measures that lower inhibitions and barriers on the side of the consumer and move art and culture within reach. In other words: the traditional supply of art is now being joined by the promotion of demand.

Is this the way out of the dilemma? At first glance it seems sensible and, in fact, indispensable to the political justification of cultural policy. But on closer scrutiny the approach recalls the visions of the 1970s, which likewise shifted mediation centre

stage. Here the lofty sphere of art, there the public; now let us make a concerted effort to bring them together. But a policy of mediation conceived from the standpoint of art can have only limited corrective effects on the present situation. Because it allows culture to remain a precious specialist product that requires improved marketing by the state.

Money is not the reason four fifths of the Swiss public stay aloof from cultural life. Zurich has been distributing culture vouchers to young people for years, giving them free admission to the most important local cultural institutions, including jazz clubs and the Theatre Spectacle. Throngs of thousands? More like one or two dozen. Investing time in culture has to yield a social advantage, has to bring personal recognition within the individual's peer group, otherwise it will end up being discarded as a passing fad. And intellectuals are no exception. Cultural consumption has always been linked to social distinctions, as even the history of cultural promotion proves. That is why some people go to the Grand Théâtre, while others make their way to the Kunsthalle to see cutting-edge art, and yet others attend a rock concert in a football stadium. It is their way of manifesting their positioning in society, because cultural models are lifestyle options that change in the course of an individual's biography. Kylie Minogue fans are making the very point of not being like opera-goers, even if they spend almost as much for tickets. DJ groupies and radio listeners also have – culture. In their own perception.

**A new concept of culture?** A cultural policy that acknowledges its commitment to the public needs a new approach. Increasing the supply of cultural





services is too unaffordable to be the solution. Widening the zone of state financial intervention is equally futile. What we need to do above all is to reconsider the concept of culture that underlies both our old and our new cultural legislation. It comprehends all the behavioural patterns that structure the way we live together and casts its shadow over every inhabitant of every country. Secondly, the political sector must describe the impact it would like public-sector cultural support to have – apart from providing art with the necessary space to develop. For example, if the ideal citizen is culturally educated, then cultural education must be granted a key position in school curricula at every level, far ahead of primary-school English. But instead of moving forward, the situation is deteriorating. If culture is to create jobs, the products of culture must be marketable. If culture is to transmit values central to a thriving society – let us say tolerance, curiosity, diversity – we need different quality criteria for artistic production. Then categories like “avant-garde” or “difficult” must take a back seat, so that content, comprehensible forms and emotions can move centre stage. If culture also encompasses creative behaviour, we finally need to bring about an interpenetration of professional work and lay audiences.

Everyone in favour? Careful, this sort of cultural policy touches on the great taboo of the present-day concept of art and would, in order to reach broad strata of society, need to actually take note of the interests of the so-called culturally passive majority of the population. It would, at the same time, put the usage statistics cited above into perspective. Because just as communication rests on the principle that you can’t not communicate,

culture presupposes that *no human being is without it*. Culture is as manifest in club music, at the computer, in weblogs, in online games, at youth centres, in amateur dramatics, in amateur orchestras and in TV series as in experimental video; its ostensible simplicity does not impede the power of its message, on the contrary. Most particularly against the backdrop of a broad, inclusive notion of culture. This is a fact future-oriented cultural policy must come to grips with. Engaging with new phenomena means redistributing emphasis. In a sector as structurally conservative and media-protected as cultural production, this will be difficult enough. Because the prevailing view is still: the more, the better. The idea of closing institutions is inconceivable. Yet the limiting of supply will be unavoidable if promotional measures are to be enhanced and given more substance. A great deal of responsibility can be assumed by the private sector today; it, too, favours differentiation. A future cultural policy will rank *the diversity of audiences* above the diversity of works – not only in multicultural countries like Switzerland. It will promote understanding rather than hermetic work. It will welcome simplicity – intelligent messages need not be complicated. A future cultural policy will shape the relationship between art and the public from the standpoint of the clientele. Pandering to the tastes of the masses? Not by a long shot. Merely mastering the media that the artistically passive 80 per cent of the population have mastered.

**Online opportunities.** No, the internet itself is not an art form. The Swiss *sitemapping* programme, which the federal administration has spent millions of francs developing, is the classic result of

a supply-oriented policy: how do we enable our artists to turn virtual space into a production site? That is a question the artists themselves are most qualified to answer. No, cultural promotion has missed its chance on the internet. The powers-that-be regard the digitalization of cultural production with nostalgic mistrust. Audio books are anathema to them. The culture of downloading music is simply ignored. Why? Wouldn't the internet be the perfect way to disseminate cultural production in all its elite and popular forms, complete with heritage, via a medium the generation of tomorrow has taken to like a duck to water?

Anyone who has used the Apple iTunes Music Store is astounded at the simplicity of the model. The reason for its commercial success is immediately obvious. Any Swiss who visits the download platform is disappointed: Swiss music production is virtually non-existent there. Even if Apple promises to take on more Swiss music, it will only ever be a tiny fraction of the work being done in the country. Wouldn't it be the job of cultural promotion to develop a Swiss download platform? No, not as an educationally inspired, state-run company but as part of iTunes (or some other commercial provider)! I can already hear the clamour of protest – and yet: a model contract could be worked out. But the idea would call for new skills on the part of the cultural promoters; it would require knowledge of distribution mechanisms and economics. It might also mean bidding farewell to discriminating value judgements. And the same principle could be applied to the Swiss cinema, Swiss literature and art!

Last year computer games generated a higher turnover than the film industry. This fact, which was reported throughout the media, did not unsettle culture administrators. The phenomenon of computer games is never even mentioned in the analyses of Swiss recreational behaviour. Yet it is clear that computer games are a shaping cultural force in present-day society. That one out of three young people takes an intense interest in them. And that games are very important projection screens for behavioural patterns. That they affect our perceptions. And supply aesthetic models. Why is there no Swiss computer-game industry to speak of, no Swiss 3-D design? And why are intelligent games for the computer so rare? Is it exaggerated to say that here cultural promotion has failed – in the very way it neglected comics for thirty years? In any case, *Myst & Co.* offer the best example that promotion doesn't take place in the arena where audiences are.

**Potential for social development.** Culture creates dreams and visions. But cultural promotion is al-

ways – or almost always – too late. Both the rapid social changes we are currently experiencing and the forthcoming new cultural legislation offer us an opportunity to turn our eyes to the future. Production on a bewildering scale, falling trade barriers leading to a proliferating supply of cultural commodities, events vying noisily for attention: all these awaken an inner need for orientation and identification.

What this would mean for a new, responsible cultural policy is, first of all, respecting and nurturing culture produced by all strata of society, penetrating popular culture with commitment and intelligence, taking new behavioural patterns on board more quickly, and establishing a balanced relationship between tradition, local relevance and innovation. The focus would not be abstractly on the work, but concretely on audiences in all the diversity of their needs and cultures.

This kind of policy would undoubtedly cause a major upheaval for artists and cultural practitioners, but it would not mean less work for them! Pro Helvetia, too, would embark on a totally new phase, with a strong impact on our activities in the country itself, less so abroad. Comprehensibility and authenticity would have to become our guiding principles, with the continual development and integration of popular forms of culture as our prime task. Media platforms as windows of access would be indispensable, as would a circle of socially diverse event organizers to serve as production partners. We have already mentioned amateurs; training cultural mediators and promoters would be the noblest of our new tasks.

Cultural promotion opens up societal development potential. But this potential is not the monopoly of artists. It slumbers in ordinary citizens as well. A cultural policy that does not want to be merely an arts policy, a cultural policy that wants to bid farewell to romantic notions of the eternally misunderstood minority, must address the general public and its culture. There is no alternative. ─

Translated from the German by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart

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# Make a Joyful Noise

## Composers, musicians and their listeners

Martyn Brabbins

**When audiences take their seats in the concert hall, they are usually hoping to experience the magic of a live performance, to be swept away or fascinated or at least entertained. They are unlikely to give overly much thought to the feelings of the musicians, let alone to the motivation of the programme planners or composers in the background. But all of these groups are indispensable to the world of live music. And who could be more qualified to discuss what happens on the other side of the podium than a distinguished conductor who is also a composer and the director of a prominent international music festival I**

The remarkable thing about concert audiences throughout the world is the enormous amount they share in common. A commitment to live music-making and an optimistic desire to witness interpretative brilliance and gain musical satisfaction are paramount common factors. And yet, there is a tremendous variation in what is considered to be a brilliant and satisfying performance! Each and every audience, each and every audience member, has thoroughly different ideas on these issues. Fulfilling the desires and expectations of an audience is a struggle which all performing artists are anxious and willing to undertake. Without the desire for one's artistic vision to be appreciated, comprehended and eventually applauded, a performer would be somehow incomplete.

I currently live a dual role in music. As a very full-time conductor and as Artistic Director of the Cheltenham Music Festival. In the latter position, I am beginning to acquire an intimate knowledge of one particular audience. (During the 72-concert 2005 Festival, I attended more than 50 concerts, as well as conducting 3 concerts and leading a master class.) This inside knowledge, this familiarity, has two very clear advantages.

First, a clear picture of what the Festival audience enjoys. What performs well at the box office and how enthusiastic the audience reaction is to various performers and repertoire. Armed with this information, one can more confidently plan a diet of artistic events which will fulfil the expectations of one's loyal core audience.

The second advantage is the sometimes depressing confirmation that audiences can be far more fickle than one expects and hopes. Withdrawing their support by non-attendance – there is nothing more dispiriting than a half-empty hall.

One major post-Festival undertaking is to analyze carefully the complicated mixture of elements that goes into the making of a concert at the Cheltenham Music Festival. Another is to attempt, by gazing into the crystal ball long and hard enough, to understand the reasons a particular concert evoked the reaction it did, be that posi-

tive or negative. This process, at which I am, as yet, a novice, is proving to be illuminating and instructive, if at times a trifle perplexing!

Over the past fifteen years I have conducted several hundred first performances, and have a certain reputation as an exponent of, and enthusiast for, new music. (Given the fact that I was a post-graduate student of composition and a prize-winning composer, this is perhaps hardly surprising. I have an insider's knowledge of the pain, heartache and sheer hard graft involved in the creation of a new composition!) So, you won't be surprised to learn that with me as the Festival director, responsible for the artistic content of the programme, there will be a good number of either world or UK premieres in the programme (2005 saw sixteen world and seven UK premieres.)

The question I must answer is – how best to present new music to the Cheltenham audience? Historically the safe option was considered to be the “sandwich” of new between the safe, old, admired masterpieces. Attract the audience in with Mozart and Beethoven and hope that they a) stay in their seats to listen to the new work and b) that the new work does not prevent the audience from having a positive concert experience and therefore coming to future such events! I am sceptical as to whether or not this “sandwich” actually helps to develop an audience for new music, or merely gets them to listen almost “under false pretences”!

I therefore pursued a somewhat different course in the 2005 programme, and presented a focused new music series within the main programme. Featuring living composers, many of whom were present at the concerts, with talks and interviews before, during and after performances. Thus the audience members were able to get to know the human as well as the musical voice of several creative artists. (It is interesting to observe just how eloquent many composers are on a diverse range of topics. Sadly though, composers are rarely featured as cultural spokespersons in today's media-driven world. A real pity, as this further re-

inforces the ghetto mentality that threatens classical music generally, and more particularly, new classical music.)

One fascinating interview I conducted with composer-in-residence Jonathan Harvey, underlined a crucial and often overlooked aspect of the concert experience. I questioned Jonathan on the subject of creativity, and, more specifically, to what extent all people are creative. In his answer Jonathan drew attention to his belief that concert going, and the experiencing of live music-making, is itself a creative act. Not merely a passive seeking of pleasure. The listener has a duty to listen creatively and energetically. To listen with the correct pair of ears – it is unwise to attempt to appreciate the music of Messiaen with ears attuned only to Mozart!

If then the listener has this duty, and is prepared to accept a creative listening role, it is incumbent on the providers of the concert – artistic direction, administration, venue and performer – to act as “enablers” for the audience by providing the appropriate listening environment. This can mean a thousand things, but must include the careful planning of the concert programme, informative and engaging programme notes to read, interviews with living composers, informed introductions to the music, especially the unfamiliar, and, above all, first-class communicative performances.

Dangerous though it is to make assumptions, I do believe that an audience attends a concert in the hope that they hear a miracle! A performance transcending the bounds of what was considered possible. A reading of a work that is somehow transformed from within into an entity unimagined before this moment.

It is the desire of every performer, myself included, that whilst remaining completely true to the composer’s written intentions, one’s performance places before the listener a soundscape or an emotional journey never before heard. Like footsteps in fresh snow as a familiar vista viewed from a new angle!

As a conductor – a solitary, somewhat lonely leader – one is being observed and critically evaluated by not only one’s audience, but by that more severe gaggle of critics, one’s orchestra members. They, after all, have “seen-it-all-before”, and have a collective wealth of experience no single conductor will gain in a lifetime! This triangle of conductor, orchestra and audience is a complex living organism. Nurturing each other is an essential task for each member of the group, as is respecting each other’s needs, wishes and potential. Too

often there is a fatal flaw in one or other aspect of this relationship, inevitably leading to meltdown!

To conclude then, it is my fervent hope that the current trend towards a declining audience for classical music can be reversed, and that sooner rather than later, people in positions of power and influence will recognize the phenomenal potential that music has, both on a purely aesthetic and spiritual level, and as a powerful force for societal cohesion, cultural evolution and the enhancement of the life of the individual.

Don’t forget that after the fall of the Taliban, music, which the regime had banned, was the first thing to reappear on the streets! ┐

2005 sees Martyn Brabbins’ first year as Artistic Director of the Cheltenham International Festival of Music. Brabbins was Associate Principal Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra 1994-2005, and also the Philharmonia Orchestra’s *Music of Today* Series Conductor 1999-2004.

Following studies in London and Leningrad (with Ilya Musin), he won first prize at the 1988 Leeds Competition. Since then he has conducted most of the major symphony orchestras in Britain, and is much in demand abroad. Highlights of 2005/6 include: Netherlands Radio, Melbourne Symphony, Südwestfunk, Berlin and Lucerne Festivals with the Ensemble Modern and London Sinfonietta, Flemish Radio, Hallé Orchestra and City of Birmingham Symphony.

Particularly admired for his performances of British music, Brabbins is also a strong advocate of contemporary works. Equally at home in the opera house, he has conducted productions at the Kirov, English National, Opera North, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Frankfurt, Montpellier and at the Netherlands Opera. Brabbins has made over sixty recordings, thirty of them on Hyperion.



# “When a Thousand Children Stand Up”

## Cultivating the concert-goers of tomorrow

Isabelle Mili

How can we turn young people on to classical music and opera? What are orchestras and other musical institutions doing to counter the problem of ageing audiences? Passages asked musician and musical educator Isabelle Mili to survey the scene |

Jean-Marc Grob is categorical: “Young people are far more interested in the visual appearance of the percussion section than that of the strings! And they are very sensitive to the presence and performance of the instrumentalists; they do not need drowning in a flood of explanations.” As a result of his long experience, the musical director of the Lausanne Sinfonietta has a firm opinion on certain issues. Especially as regular appraisals have been made ever since this musical ensemble began playing to school audiences twenty years ago, putting on twelve concerts a year. There is, for example, the menu principle: “We offer them a series of starters, then a main course,” explains Jean-Marc Grob. “In other words, after highlighting what to listen for with a number of examples, we play a good ten minutes of music without further comment.”

**At the crossroads of politics and culture.** Developed empirically, the formula is proof of the Sinfonietta’s desire to play an active part in making classical musical accessible to young people. This ambition, now shared by the great majority of orchestras, ensembles and opera companies, has given rise to the establishment of regular educational programmes over the last two decades.

At the crossroads of politics and culture, these programmes are born of the institutional need to renew an ageing audience and the determination shown as early as 1968 by Francis Jeanson and the signatories of the Villeurbanne Manifesto<sup>1</sup> to welcome what were referred to as “non-audiences”: social groups who do not attend concerts or opera performances as a matter of course. Originally initiated by professionals in the world of theatre,

this trend has since spread to operatic and musical institutions.

“The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande (OSR) devotes a page of its website<sup>2</sup> to young people,” points out conductor Philippe Béran.<sup>3</sup> “The important thing, in my opinion, is the interactive element of concerts for young people. I organize things so that the children can sing or beat time... The great moment is when a thousand children stand up and make music with the orchestra.”

**The aim: to do a thorough job.** Philippe Béran has built a fine career, thanks to his educational work and the performances he organizes for young people and families. Though working mainly in Switzerland, with the OSR and the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra (OCL), he has also cooperated with the Opéra de Bordeaux. And his reputation has now spread to non-French-speaking parts of Europe. In his view, the role of the conductor is vital: “Scriptwriter, performer and presenter, he must reassure the musicians that the music will remain central to events organized for young people.” And what do you need to succeed in this role? “You mustn’t be timid,” he replies. The OSR and the Sinfonietta are dedicated to doing a thorough job. This dedication is shared by Roland Demiéville, who teaches at the Haute Ecole Pédagogique of the Canton of Vaud and is associated with the OCL. For him, this also means providing teachers with carefully prepared presentation packages and adopting different approaches for specialists teaching at secondary level and generalists in primary schools. Another key factor in the success of the enterprise is the frequency of encounters with school audiences, which depends mainly on the

### **Biel: a bilingual welcome**

The Orchestre Symphonique de Bienne / Bieler Symphonie Orchester is also involved in educational activities: school concerts with commentary, family concerts, special commissions, participation by young instrumentalists, workshops on a particular composer, etc. As the conductor Thomas Roesner explains: “The important thing is to get the music across and not package the works in such a way that the packaging becomes more important than the content! You learn music as you learn a language: when a child learns to talk, you do not begin by explaining the origin of his language; you just talk to him in a way he can understand.”

budgets allocated to the orchestras' educational services. At present, unfortunately, the money is not even sufficient to ensure that every primary and secondary class in French-speaking Switzerland gets to attend a concert once a year.

**Opera companies actively involved.** Also keen to appeal to younger audiences and play their part in the democratization of culture, European opera companies, too, are adopting a more pro-active approach.

Head of the educational service of the Opéra de La Monnaie in Brussels, Sabine de Ville says the biggest change since the service was set up ten years ago has been “the extension of the range that we offer, which now includes performances geared to families and school audiences as well as events specifically intended for young people, in addition to the official opera season. A good example is the fifth edition of our take a note weekend, which combines opera performances, workshops and meetings with performers.” The Opéra de La Monnaie can rely on a well-resourced team of six permanent and thirty part-time staff members, but the same cannot be said of most other institutions. In Geneva, for example, they have only two permanent members of staff, who work part time. The head of the educational service at the Grand Théâtre in Geneva, Kathereen Abhervé, is delighted at the new policy adopted for the current 2005-2006 season, with the emphasis more on the vocal side. This decision is reflected in new educational activities focusing on voice. In addition, greater care is being given to providing teachers with materials and guidance prior to the performance of the opera concerned. With the number of teachers wanting to take part in the programme constantly increasing, it has proved impossible to respond accordingly; hence the need to raise the number of participants, and also to adopt a different type of selection process, more dependent on the teachers' project work.

**An engine of social development.** “As part of our Dix mois d'École et d'Opéra programme, the most 'elitist' institution in France is taking on the young people who are most estranged from it, often the children of immigrants,” explains Danièle Fouache, the teacher/trainer responsible for this scheme. “We are offering a different way of approaching educational matter, of imparting knowledge, by giving an overall meaning to learning experiences.” An engine of social development, Dix mois d'École et d'Opéra is geared to priority education areas (“zones d'éducation prioritaire” / ZEP) and draws its strength from “encounters with professionals at the top of their profession”, adds Danièle Fouache, who expects that this “direct and authentic relationship with the world of

work will renew the motivation of young people and help them break out of the cycle of failure”. The 150 trades represented at the Opéra provide the backing for a “multi-disciplinary initiative which breaks with accepted norms”. Going by evaluations based on the progress of each participating student, the success of the programme has been “amazing”, says Danièle Fouache. “We have established a system for finding out what each of them has become ten years later. All of them have completed their education and are actively in work.”

Seen in this way, the repertoire and musical knowledge in the strict sense provide an educational setting, but social rehabilitation and integration are the real goal. In contrast, the instrumental ensemble Contrechamps, which for the last twenty years has been propagating twentieth-century music, sets its objectives in terms of the artistic impact of its work. “Contemporary music, with its dynamic contrasts, experimentation with timbre and distinctive atmospheres, is a good tool for training people to listen,” says Philippe Albèra. “Children aged between five and eight do not classify classical music the way adults do. Atonality is not perceived as something odd. It is therefore no more difficult to present Stravinsky or Boulez than it is to present music by Bach.”

An interesting line of thought, which refocuses attention on the relationship with the repertoire. The aim, using an approach combining the didactic and the artistic, is to help lay the foundations for real “expertise in listening”, which is nowadays the prerogative of many self-taught music lovers, trained mainly by listening to the radio and their collection of recordings. ─

Translated from the French by bmp translations ag

A musician and producer of performances for children, Isabelle Mili lectures on music teaching in the Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Geneva. She is currently doing research on educational programmes run by orchestras and opera companies.

<sup>1</sup> The concept of “non-audience” appears for the first time in the Villeurbanne Manifesto, a document signed by forty or so theatre administrators and managers responsible for disseminating culture (directors of cultural facilities, drama centres and repertory companies). The manifesto was drafted and published on 25 May 1968 by Francis Jeanson, a philosopher and friend of Jean-Paul Sartre, and a contributor to the periodical *Les Temps Modernes*.

On this subject, it is worth reading “L'émergence du 'non-public' comme problème public”, by Sabine Lacerenza, in *Les non-publics. Les arts en réception*, vol. I, ed. Pascale Ancel and Alain Pessin, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> [www.osr.ch](http://www.osr.ch)

<sup>3</sup> [www.suisu.com/beran](http://www.suisu.com/beran)





# From Observer to Participant

## The growing interest in interactivity

Florian Rötzer

New technologies and media shape societies and change people. This does not happen overnight, but sometimes at a very swift pace. Media theorist Florian Rötzer has set out to understand a rapidly growing audience for a new aspect of culture |

The internet and – perhaps even more obviously – the mobile (camera) phone have demonstrated just how quickly new media spread and people develop new behaviours that supersede or superimpose themselves on existing behavioural patterns. But through the resulting opportunities for new forms of action and communication, people are exposed to ever new constraints and demands. The upheaval we are currently experiencing in the visual media is as dramatic as the revolution brought about by the invention of perspective in the modern era, photography in the nineteenth century and film in the twentieth. Every period has its dominant media to open up new ways of perceiving and experiencing the world and to foster a new understanding of reality. Whereas the nineteenth century was the century of the photograph and the twentieth century, the century of the film, the twenty-first century promises to be shaped, not only by the internet, but by digital, interactive, immersive media, whose artistic guise – so the theory goes – is epitomized by computer games, because they unite the essential, new characteristics of the technology and are embedded in a totally new dramaturgy. Rather than addressing the spectator, they target the participant. This promises to revolutionize not only media and art production but above all people's expectations.

**Entering the picture.** The most important innovation of computer games is their ability to draw spectators into the action: no longer is it a matter of watching from a distance, as if through a window. Now viewers become participants, plunging in via their virtual representatives and able to change the course of events by their actions. As in a total work of art, the environment – i.e. the visuals, sounds and situations the players are confronted with – must possess aesthetic interest. But the main thing is the openness of the setting, which allows the player a certain freedom of movement and action, while also offering a dramaturgically interesting, even riveting narrative to be tapped into from the “I” perspective. Depending on the type of game and target audience, there may be vast differences in complexity and difficulty, but more important than the meticulously worked-out visuals is the organized sequence of decisions and the events that take place in the on-screen space, in other words, the reality arising from the narrative. Even if players manipulate simulations of the course of human history, the building of a city or the life of a family from an external, almost divine perspective and are not drawn personally into events by way of a virtual avatar, they are no longer pure spectators: they are at the very least like stage directors who, as performers, also become participating artists,



even if their productions need be neither successful nor elegant.

We are ever less interested in pictures on the wall or screen that, whether dynamic or static, are separated from us by an unbridgeable, unapproachable distance. They shut us out as physical creatures and condemn us to passivity. What might once have attracted us for its auratic, contemplative value now disappoints the expectations of the generation growing up with the digital media. They don't want windows through which to observe from a distance or into which they can peep voyeur-like; they want doors through which pictures or artificial realities can be entered as if they were buildings or physical reality, places where they can do, not watch. Pictures or events that present a montage of attractions and affect the spectator are no longer in demand; the new generation is after pictures and events that, as in a computer game, are affected by the spectators themselves and react to their actions. Admittedly, television and radio have been trying to integrate viewers and listeners, at least vicariously, for some time, by way of reality-TV formats and other participative forms. And art, too, has long been experimenting with the abandonment of the image in favour of audience participation. As a new medium and art form, computer games are therefore simply the logical consequence, and an expanded version, of the technological, aesthetic and social developments that have gone before. Perhaps the contemplation of a painting, which, in modern art, has long ceased necessarily to involve aesthetic pleasure, should also be understood as a cognitive effort to discover and interpret. On the other hand, for aficionados, computer games represent a gripping narrative that seems more real

than the most photorealistic 3-D picture, because gamers have to act and are working towards a goal. Good players don't just want to win, they want to attain speed, dexterity and elegance – in other words, the qualities of a virtuoso. Games are often played with others, which means performing in public, be it on the internet or physically on the spot. That alone draws the player out of the darkness into the light, but also out of the safety of the distanced spectator of bourgeois art, who must possess sound judgement but not the ability to act.

Young people's attention span, perceptions and expectations are already operatively shaped by their experiences with computer games – the need for quick decisions and reactions in equally quickly shifting, surprise-packed scenarios requiring concentration on the narrative but also preventing anything but a superficial look at the scene, since stopping to observe may cause the player to risk his or her virtual life or to miss something. Playing computer games could be understood as a combination of watching a film and driving a vehicle at great speed. And often enough, the two do, in fact, go hand in hand.

With respect to the images, which are only one component of the game, the difference between contemplating a painting and playing a computer game can perhaps be more precisely expressed. Viewers actively contemplating a painting explore the picture with their eyes; they can jump back and forth from detail to overall view and, over the long haul, need an active mind and imagination to engage with the object before them. Computer gamers, on the other hand, are driven through a visual space that must be grasped quickly. Information literally jumps at the players, who, while exploring this dynamic space, must react



quickly to new or suspicious signals. This is no longer the reflective world of aesthetic contemplation: it is a suspense-filled world tailored – for my sake – to the keenly acute senses of hunter or prey, warrior or athlete.

**Where reality and virtuality merge.** For the moment, children and young people are still seated in front of their computer screens to play their ever more realistic shoot-em-up games from the “I” perspective. But soon, equipped with wearable computers, radio transmitters and GPS technology, they will be playing in the streets of our cities, which will thereby transform into a playing field for simulation. We have already grown accustomed to people walking down the street seemingly talking to themselves – a behaviour once considered a sign of mental derangement. Now we will have to get used to people not only talking to partners we can’t see but, for example, carrying weapons invisible to us as they chase across city squares constantly taking cover – in other words, to people who see something we can’t see if we have no access to virtual reality.

Immersive, interactive environments are only the first step in the technology of virtual realities. The future lies in connecting virtual reality with the internet and mobile computing in such away as to give people access to virtual worlds wherever they are and to enable them to move in virtual and material reality at the same time. It will be interesting to see the extent to which the human body genuinely can – and should – be integrated into virtual reality, but also to discover whether there are limits to realism. Technical, sensory and motoric interfaces enable the body to become an inhabitant of both worlds. For the moment, the inter-

faces, or points of access to the virtual world – for instance, goggles, microphones, data gloves and data suits – are still put on the body; in future some of these neuro-technological interfaces may be implanted. Chips and implants for the purpose are already being developed.

No matter whether we go out from expanded reality or virtuality expanded into reality, the penetration or overlapping of reality and virtuality is an exciting creative challenge capable of opening up interesting, but also lucrative, possibilities: from education – which will nevertheless continue to depend crucially on abstract linguistic and mathematical skills and can only be enhanced by simulations based on them – to new possibilities for teleworking, teleshopping or spending time together in a virtual space, and on to new forms of art and entertainment.

But virtual reality is not just a way of supplementing or overlaying reality, because it also allows us to be at a site distant from where we physically are (telepresence), and to take action there (teleaction) – for example, via robots guided by remote control over thousands of kilometres, as if we were present in the flesh. This is interesting in various respects, not least for the way wars are waged: enemies can, for instance, be killed by armed drones operated on-screen, from a safe distance, by a joystick. This is making computer games and real wars ever more alike, not only in simulation but in fact. In future there will be any number of remote-controlled robots that will not remain exclusively in the hands of security forces. The potential consequences with regard to happenings and artistic actions, but also in terms of vandalism, crime and terrorism, are not hard to imagine.



**Attention span.** One of the problems of the information society is the flood of information generated by ever more media and telecommunications equipment – data that must also be received and processed. As a result of the growing quantity of communications services, “information overload” has now been joined by “communication overload”. “Multitasking” – a word originally used to describe a processor running two or more programs at once – now designates the need and opportunity to keep one’s eye on many different things at once and the ability to react quickly to new situations. There may be individuals who find their concentration – gateway to perceiving the world and ourselves – overstretched by constant zapping and staring at screens or other interfaces, as happens during fast computer games or the very serious game of stock-market investment, when we must remain on perpetual high alert and on our toes, ready to react. But we are also practising switching back and forth between programs and honing our ability to do more things at once than previous generations presumably could. There is probably a difference between short-term concentration and an activity that demands long-term attention under relatively unchanging conditions – for instance, a long drive on the motorway. To be able to maintain concentration in a monotonous situation, change, in other words, multitasking, is an absolute must. And if that is the case, the addiction of so many of our contemporaries to multitasking might lead us to deduce that the world in which they live and work, and likewise the media on offer, are boring or insufficiently challenging. But our thoughts might also run in a slightly different direction: after all, religious rites, which were the first total works of art,

have not only long offered human beings the opportunity to hone their multitasking skills, but have, by way of diverse stimuli including audience participation in religious spectacles, also “massaged” people’s souls through the arousal of specific moods. In the churches, theatres and opera houses of the pre-bourgeois era, totally focused, passive spectatorship was rare. Are multitasking, interactivity and the proliferating options for action and perception merely a way for the members of the information society to break away once again from the rigid stance of the distanced, concentrated observer – however much cultural critics may expatiate on the flood of information that is supposedly distracting us and making us immune to reality? ─

Translated from the German by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart

Florian Rötzer was born in 1953. After completing his philosophy studies, he worked as a freelance author and journalist in Munich, specializing in media theory and aesthetics. He has been editor-in-chief of the online magazine *Telepolis* (<http://www.telepolis.de>) and editor of the *Telepolis Books* series published by Heise Verlag since 1996. His publications include: *Französische Philosophen im Gespräch*, Munich 1986; *Denken, das an der Zeit ist*, Frankfurt a.M. 1987; *Ästhetik des Immateriellen*, Kunstforum International, vols. 97 (1988) and 98 (1989); *Digitaler Schein*, Frankfurt a.M. 1991; *Cyberspace. Auf dem Weg zum digitalen Gesamtkunstwerk* (co-edited with Peter Weibel), Munich 1993; *Das Böse*, Göttingen 1995; *Die Telepolis. Urbanität im digitalen Zeitalter*, Mannheim 1995; *Digitale Weltentwürfe*, Munich 1998; *Ressource Aufmerksamkeit*, Kunstforum International, vol. 148 (1999); *Megamaschine Wissen*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 1999; *Cyberhypes* (co-edited with Rudolf Maresch), Frankfurt a.M. 2001; *TerrorMedienKrieg* (co-edited with G. Palm), Heidelberg 2002; *Medien der Gewalt* (ed.), Heidelberg 2002; *Renaissance der Utopie*, Frankfurt a.M. 2004 (co-edited with Rudolf Maresch).

# Who's Out There Anyway?

Artists speculate about their ideal audience

“Only sometimes the curtain of his pupils  
is pushed silently aside –.

*Then an image enters through the tense stillness of the limbs –  
and ceases, in the heart, to be.” – Rainer Maria Rilke*

## Giorgio von Arb, photographer

The audience. They fill several rows of seats in front of me and sound so different before the lecture than during, when I know they exist because of the isolated coughs punctuating the silence. But they are somehow outside my field of perception, like interference during a TV sportscast. Crocodiles in the moat between my castle and the people with two ears and two hands for applauding, whom some common denominator has induced to come and sit across from this lectern, this microphone. Never hesitating for a moment to drop the coin into the turnstile of the observation tower, but, arrived at the top, never lowering their eyes, for fear of falling, to the place from which they ascended and to which they will in any case return. The vague distance between the audience and myself allows for a tempered version of trembling hands and a fragile stiffness of legs looking for a firm foothold behind the lectern I sincerely hope is closed in front. The lecture lies ahead of me like a golf course dotted with holes, printed out in an at least 24-point font, a forklift for words from a cock-of-the-walk who knows

all eyes are on him and senses the fear tingling all along the crest of his comb. In other words, also protected by shortsightedness and colour-blindness.

The sharks swim in tight circles in the moat between myself and the audience, banishing any sense of security and awakening the most banal fears and inhibitions, which a really smart hacker in thermal underwear transforms online into nervousness. No, there is hardly such a thing as the audience, even when the noise is deafening, feet are scraping beneath seats, the web of relationships is vibrating, and greetings catapult through the air. Only sometimes the curtains of my pupils are pushed silently aside and an image enters of my audience, which is very small and, if present at all, sits scattered among the large mass of the audience. This audience is the individual point of reference for my own demands on myself, the echo-sounder of my movements, sometimes an executioner, as flexible as the back wall of a squash court set up across from me, suitable for adulation and worship by those who revere authority. After the usually wordless friends backing me by keeping me company and being an audience on my way to the solution of a problem – and often only long afterwards – it comes time for the more obvious gathering of the credit-card-carrying audience who proclaim the existential exploration of borderline situations and take my sweat of fear for the latest after-shave. ┘

Giorgio von Arb, born in Zurich in 1952, is a freelance photographer and creator of numerous photo essays, reports and portraits in and outside Switzerland. A member of the teaching staff of the Zurich University of Art and Design from 1980 to 2001, he has supervised art-related architecture projects and was co-project manager of the exhibition, with accompanying publication, entitled *Zürich – ein Fotoportrait* (1997). His many books include *Leute am Grabenberg* (1988), *Portraits*

aus Liechtenstein (1989), *FabrikZeit* (1992), *Klosterleben – Klausur-Frauenklöster der Ostschweiz* (1993/2000), *Davos – Profil eines Phänomens* (1994/1999), *Volksfrömmigkeit in der Schweiz* (1999), *Meister Tod* (2002), *12 Gärten – Historische Anlagen in Zürich, Kinderreich Au* and *FESTFreude* (2004). He is a founder-member of the Kontrast studio collective and lives in Zurich.



### Walter Fährdrich, musician

As a performer I am faced with a concrete audience. They are an energy factor in the concert situation and can consequently influence the music in a certain way, for instance in terms of the density (fluctuation) of passing time. How intensely listeners concentrate may also be an indicator of their degree of understanding. But what sort of understanding? Is it understanding at a structural-formal level, or is being captivated more a matter of succumbing to the suggestive power and compelling flow of energy (if I'm on form)?

As a composer I am faced by, at most, an imagined audience. But showing consideration for an audience during the actual working process corrupts one's work, the pure idea, the piece itself. Consideration of this kind is doomed to failure anyway because: what would this audience be like? Even if they were homogeneous: how educated are they, how much do they know, what kind of mood are they in today?

When I work, I am my own audience. The questions that guide me are: what should (not) be done? or what can (not) be done?

Also: what would I like to hear, what would I like to try out? Where and how far can one/I go? How do I create (no) connections? Etc.

It would be nice to have an audience I could describe as, among other things:

### Elodie Pong, visual and performance artist / Frank Hyde-Antwi, art director

> Can a masterpiece make a person laugh?

> Is the idea of beauty a diversion or a catalyst when it comes to the quintessence of an artwork?

> Does one measure the success of an exhibition by its poor attendance?

> Is linear perspective an overarching category of everyday life?

> Are magicians artists or skilled craftspeople?

> Is it better to present one's work "whoopsie daisy!" or "that's that"?

> Is Lara Croft Raphaelite or cubist?

> Does the success of a work reflect the virtuosity of the artist?

> Are my friends' friends also my friends?

> Is a good specimen a piece of puff pastry?

> When you go to an exhibition, are you more interested in the artist or yourself?

> Is there a correlation between purchasing power and taste?

> Is a person more critical alone or in a group?

> Is a VCR a piece of equipment more suitable to measuring time or space?

intelligent; sensitive; open-minded; receptive; communicative; thinking; associative; (benevolently) critical; educated (or maybe uneducated, depending); self-reliant; independent; ready to accept or reject; able to take up and give impulses; hungry (for questions, points of view, elaborations); capable of mentally going on where something has left off; happy to encounter perplexity.

This is an audience ready: to enter new spaces, to populate spaces; to let themselves be enticed; to set off a process of insight.

They are ready to have their feelings forced into thoughts.

In "Introduction au galet", Francis Ponge writes:

*"I recommend to everyone the opening of inner trapdoors, a journey into the density of things, an invasion of characteristics, a revolution or upheaval, similar to what a plough or shovel causes when suddenly and for the first time millions of fragments, bits of chaff, roots, worms and small animals that have hitherto been hidden are brought to light."* —

Walter Fähndrich was born in Menzingen (Canton Zug). Since completing his studies in music theory and viola, he has pursued an active career, playing improvised chamber music and the viola in his own compositions. A composer and performer of electro-acoustic music, he has created *MUSIK FÜR RÄUME* (music projects and installations in- and outdoors).

He holds a teaching post for improvisation at the Musikhochschule Basel and lives in Brissago.

- > How many unrecognized geniuses do you think there are right now?
- > Can a work be measured with a slide calliper gauge?
- > Is the author the result of the story?
- > Are there certain artists who should be discovered before other ones?
- > Is one allowed to say "I don't like this work" in public?
- > What should one wear to see Olafur Eliasson's *Weather Project*?
- > Are works really necessary at an exhibition?
- > Might one get a slap in the face if one expects it?
- > Is it easier to talk about an exhibition one hasn't seen?
- > Does art materialize only for its audience?
- > If Joseph Beuys were alive today, would he buy an iPod?
- > Process versus result: a knock-out in the fifth round?
- > What should be sexier, the project or the artist?
- > Should old people's homes be established for ageing Hells Angels?
- > Would you do without a holiday in the Caribbean to buy a work of art?
- > Does reality continue to seem more authentic in black and white?
- > Did Edison invent the light bulb by choice or necessity?
- > Considering that three quarters of the world's population are not Christian, how can one explain that Michelangelo's *Pièta* is a work of universal importance?
- > Must artists have the same distance to the works they create as the audiences to what they see?
- > What is the sound of one hand clapping? —

Elodie Pong, born in 1972, lives and works in Zurich and Lausanne. Recipient of the 2003 Viper Swiss Award and the 2002 Re:view Film and Video Award, she has been exploring the interrelated fields of video installation, experimental video, performance and writing since 1995. Her latest exhibition, *Peripheral Area*, was shown at the Tokyo Wondersite Shibuya contemporary art centre (29 Sept.-30 Oct. 2005). *Script*, a collection of dialogues in text-message form, is scheduled to be published by JRP/Ringier at the end of 2005.

Frank Hyde-Antwi, born in 1966, lives and works in Zurich. As an art director and project developer, he has realized projects for Migros Culture Percent and Expo.02, the Swiss National Exhibition. This is his first collaboration with Elodie Pong.

### Bruno Steiger, writer

For Zina.

For Marie.

For Douglas.

My vague but profound mistrust of audiences of any sort and size makes it hard for me to offer an objective, soundly reasoned comment on the subject. And yet as an author, as a manufacturer of cultural products that only gain a profile through publication, I cannot close my eyes entirely to this delicate subject. Let me restrict myself to a secondary aspect of literary “public service”: to the paratext of the dedication. One might think a dedication would exclude the reader as a dubious third party; the contrary is the case. That it is in fact the gateway reserved for him or her alone only became clear to me with the dedication of Patrick Modiano’s novel *Fleurs de ruine*. Realizing that “Zina”, “Marie” and “Douglas” could only be people feared dead, helped my reading to achieve a dimension of witnessing that, I suddenly felt, would always be closed to me in real life. It then struck me that Modiano’s whole work might be dedicated to none other than his characters, which suggested the phrase that I use in my latest book: “For those who must exist”. That this might also mean readers did not elude me. So why, went the question that immediately arose, should this so pleasantly inconspicuous audience not be composed in turn of fictional characters? Who would still read if, as they read, they were not allowed to feel included, knowing that without taking part in this way they might really be lost – at least mislaid? (That people read in order, for once, not to have to feel like a fictional character probably comes even closer to the truth.) ┐

### Ursula Meier, film-maker

Every film has to possess a real element of risk for me. I like to move into territory I don’t know, ceaselessly revamping my approach. That makes it impossible for me to imagine or even fantasize about “my audience”, as any film of mine is bound to be almost the opposite of what preceded it. Every film represents a long process of development in perpetual motion, a delicate balance between intuition and control, never taking on its definitive form until the very last phase, the result of the veritable alchemy between writing, shooting and editing... Consequently, I don’t think much, or at all, about the audience as I work, except during the editing, to which I always invite a few people whose opinions are important to me, my first audience, so to speak. In other words, I never work for or against an audience, which is not to say that I don’t care about them. There is no such thing as an audience per se, but there are certainly audiences, which are in turn composed of a number of individuals. Before a film is screened in front of viewers in an auditorium, I find the idea of an audience – let alone “my audience – very abstract. At each stage of the film I operate as an artist, then as a spectator. The incessant back and forth helps me to arrive at the essence of the film. If I myself am swept by sensations and emotions, then I tell myself that others will respond the same way. I am increasingly convinced that the desire to search, to question the cinema without wanting, at all costs, to second guess the wishes of the audience or wanting to reach a “target audience” need not be inconsistent with the notion of the audience or the viewer. On the contrary. To take a concrete example, a few years ago I plunged into a cinematic adventure called *Tous à table*, which I was able to shoot thanks to prizes I had won for the preceding film. It tells of a birthday dinner that turns sour because of a riddle about three ants. I made this short in a period when I was asking myself a great many basic questions about the cinema. I wasn’t even thinking about finishing the film, because it was so much more important to me to shoot it and, in the process, to ponder the work with the actors, the dramaturgy, the form... Two years later I looked at the rushes again and finished the film, which became a great success. The enthusiastic reception of the public only reinforced my desire to put the greatest possible honesty and integrity into every film, to continue searching, to dig ever deeper and to keep pushing back the boundaries... ┘

Bruno Steiger, born in 1946, is a writer, critic and essayist. He lives in Zurich. His most recent novel is *Erhöhter Blauanteil* (Verlag Nagel & Kimche, Zurich 2004). The novel *Fleurs de ruine* by Patrick Modiano was published in 1991 (Seuil, Paris).

Ursula Meier was born in Besançon (France) in 1971. A dual citizen of Switzerland and France, she did film studies in the Réalisation department of the Institut des Arts de Diffusion (IAD) in Belgium. She then served as Second Assistant in two films by Alain Tanner. The success of her graduation piece, *Le songe d'Isaac*, enabled her subsequently to dedicate herself entirely to her own films, both fiction – *Des heures sans sommeil* (short), *Tous à table* (short), *Des épaules solides* (TV film) – and documentary (*Autour de Pinget; Pas les flics, pas les noirs*). She is currently working on the feature film *Home*.





## Art – Audience – Democracy Variants of a complex relationship

Georg Kohler

What happens to art and culture in a society that increasingly interprets democratic decisions according to economic criteria? Philosopher Georg Kohler examines the fragile relationship between art, audiences and democracy |



A noteworthy essay by art historian Beat Wyss was published in October 1989 in conjunction with the inaugural exhibition of the Zurich Kunsthalle.<sup>1</sup> Noteworthy for two reasons: firstly because it was bursting with ideas and secondly because it dealt with an exhibition at which nothing – or perhaps more appropriately – Nothingness was shown.

For, under the title of *Costruire*, artist Gerhard Merz had designed a space, encompassing the whole hall, which was a) empty apart from b) a bisected, brass-framed, graphite-black rectangle measuring several tens of square metres along one longitudinal wall and c) a precision-cut museum bench of fine marble in the middle of the hall.

Wyss observes: *“The brass frames of the Zurich space open like windows onto the same blackness shown in Malevich’s Black Square... Black is the empty redundancy at the base of all that can be seen; as an opaque sediment, it shimmers through beneath the visible. Like electronic reproduction techniques in music, paint-*

*ing normally tries to cover up the basic white noise by raising the volume of the melody, the distracting diversion. Merz does the contrary: the white noise of the world is turned up till it becomes a black in which, pure and sublime, the emptiness of the universe reverberates.”*

Whatever one makes of this interpretation, Merz’s installation clearly wanted to illustrate something like the metaphysics at the end of metaphysics; it may have contained considerable food for thought but certainly offered little to see, yet was undoubtedly expensive to produce. It was not by chance that Wyss described spatial artist Merz as a lover of *“exquisite materials and precision craftsmanship”*. The exhibition was, incidentally, a success. It put the new Kunsthalle on the map as an important site of current art mediation in Zurich; there was, of course, no scandal.

But why *“of course”*? – After all, the cited philosophical ennoblement of Gerhard Merz’s provocatively expensive, but in fact profoundly dark ges-

ture of denial cannot have been universally accessible. Moreover, considering the essentially empty Kunsthalle – instead of “Plato’s cave” (Beat Wyss) – one taxpayer or another might easily have been reminded of the tale of the Emperor’s New Clothes. So an explanation for the lack of a public outcry is necessary, if not overly difficult to provide.

The explanation emerges from an examination of the relationship between the public, or audience, the process of art mediation and the principle of democracy, as long typified by institutions like the Kunsthalle.

Since their inception as counterforces to past-oriented “museums”, *Kunsthallen* have been bound up with the history of *Kunstvereine*. These art societies formed by elite cultural circles were already intent in the nineteenth century on not only acquainting, but practically wedding the affluent, educated bourgeoisie with the avant-garde and with modern art.<sup>2</sup>

Various stages in the history of these *Kunstvereine* mark the shifting constellations in the triad of art, audience and democracy, and likewise demonstrate the conditions needed for art, audience and democracy to form, not a triangle of mutual disdain or indifference, but a harmonious triumvirate. For with the start of the second phase in the history of (German) *Kunstvereine*, after 1945, we find a plausible “how” and “why” for the circumstance that contemporary modern art succeeded in eluding the anticipatable criticism of the “philistine” majority and yet remained democratically subsidizable.

In the first period of observable interaction between modern art, audiences and democracy, democratic elements had little role to play, if only because this was an era still determined by the class system of the authoritarian nineteenth-century. There were only a small fraction of the bourgeoisie from which potential audiences and patrons of avant-garde modernism could be drawn: namely those who were ready to extend their middle-class belief in the technical-industrial progress of civilization to the dimensions of cultural development and self-understanding. “*The (influential, forward-looking) bourgeoisie co-opted the avant-garde in analogy to their own historical achievement... What (this) bourgeoisie and modern art had in common was that they wished to show no consideration for historically tried, traditional cultural forms, which were viewed purely as obstacles or at best ripe for the museum.*” (Grasskamp) In succinct terms, the relationship between modern art and audiences reveals what was, for the decades between 1870 and 1930, a characteristic constellation: when – with supreme disregard for a democratic, let alone grass-roots, need for legitimation – art and audiences culled from the socially dominant elite advanced each other’s cause and confirmed each other’s respective importance.

This changed radically after 1945 – not only in Germany, but, of course, most obviously so in the new (West) German Federal Republic, which, following the Nazi era of totalitarian anti-modernism, had emerged with the help of the Western Allies. Intent on finally learning “democracy”,





West Germany adopted modern art as an instructional medium in the now possible (self-)education project of the “delayed” German nation: as a means of practising democratic pluralism, liberal tolerance and the capacity for rational-functional argument. Shaped by the makers of public opinion and fostered by the political institutions characteristic of a democracy, this attitude towards the operative and formal repertoire of avant-garde art production expressed itself in the post-war “triumvirate model”, whose effect was also felt in Switzerland. What Grasskamp notes about Germany can also be applied, within limits, to our own country: *“The democratic state, which left the modernization of the production realm to the market economy, now (in contrast to the late nineteenth-century bourgeoisie) saw modern art, not as the symbol of technical-industrial progress, but (above all) of political modernization.”*

Modern art as a pathfinder on the way to a legal, democratic, socially-oriented, levelled-out, middle-class, anti-elitist, general welfare state... – much as this may have been a historical misunderstanding in terms of the self-image of the first avant-garde, it was not entirely unjustified. Although the intentions of most artists and their works were unable to offer a plausible canon of enlightenment and democratization on a mass scale, *dealing with them* and the many other challenges of the modern era were. Putting up with modern art became the litmus test for tolerance and pluralism; and, with the acceptance of a cultural-political educational mission, the threesome of artistic wilfulness, an essentially benevolent public and democratic readiness to award subsidies finally acquired features of a prestabilized harmony. It was from this systemic state of affairs that the 1979 Zurich exhibition and Merz’s luxuriously cool repeat performance of provocative Suprematist gestures were (still) able to benefit.

“1989” marked a turning point and the end of an era – not only in the domain of cultural policy. It heralded the start of a new age typified by the unleashing of the market principle, the economic quantification of all domains of life and the accelerated realization of a society held together primarily by the overarching logic of consumer production but at the same time fragmenting into any number of special interest groups. From the standpoint of this *zeitgeist*, the idea of democracy is reduced to the application of majority rule. Democratic decisions are interpreted according to the behavioural model of economic choice and barter. At which point political discourse represents no more than the struggle for market share in a

special market, and “the public” becomes a mere arena in the attention stakes.

That “art” (and certainly “contemporary art”) has, for at least the past decade, been under the same pressure to justify itself that controls the attention economy of the mediatized public and the mechanisms of democratic government decision-making is evident. Art and culture, too, must become assets (when large cities vie to become the location of a company headquarters or domicile to a wealthy private individual); they must be capable of “serving a purpose” (for instance, when “socio-culture” is called upon to soothe a potentially rebellious scene); “cost and benefit” must – as in any enterprise – be calculated, compared and deemed satisfactory. And, like everything in a complex, highly differentiated society, art and culture must be assessed and culled above all by experts, and withdrawn from the influence of the lay public.

This last point, the reign of the experts, is a necessity that, though rooted in the modalities of an advanced civilization, may easily come into conflict with the logic of the consumer market: why should a democratic state – heeding the opinions of the experts – subsidize something that seems relevant to only a small and often even prosperous minority? That the debate over art and culture falls into palpable self-contradiction is no coincidence. The harmony between art, the public and democracy cannot help turning into a zone of self-centred turmoil and turbulences, into what innocent members of an audience – be they politicians, bureaucrats or ordinary citizens – will experience as a dangerous “Bermuda triangle”, where, though they may not lose their lives, they will certainly lose their grip. How in heaven’s name can art, audiences and political interests ever be made to share the same level playing field?

The problem truly is a difficult one. As always in such cases, it is best to start out by restricting oneself to analyzing the interconnections and intricacies involved rather than immediately seeking a magic bullet. Let me therefore recap only a few insights pertaining to three fundamental facts (by no means relevant only to cultural policy):

Firstly, the content of democracy can never be adequately understood solely in terms of the logic of the market. The liberal, legally grounded democracy we hold dear as an ideal and a norm always pays due regard to the protection of minorities and the rights of alternative thinkers; it recognizes and respects the need for categorical values no majority decision is entitled to annul.

Secondly, art and artistic productivity are guided by an inner force that frequently eludes such cat-

egories as usefulness. Neither the market aesthetic nor political common sense nor a traditional critical canon can determine in advance what will one day be a “valuable”, “support worthy”, “relevant” work or artistic undertaking. Art is essentially unpredictable and surprising. Whether or not something has come off can only be determined once it is observably present – and even then, the process is often gradual. Consequently, experts who set out to evaluate present-day artistic and cultural production under a certain aspect and according to certain criteria will always have to expect that their judgements may be entirely wrong. But even then, their assessments remain indispensable. We must, after all, have some sort of opinion, some position to go out from – whether we are democratic, subsidy-awarding politicians, critical counter-experts or infuriated members of a lay audience.

That brings me to the last point: the audience, which does not exist as a monolithic collective but, taken from the perspective of a lively general public, can nonetheless be viewed as a kind of cohesive unit. Of course, there is *no such thing* as the potential audience or *general public* attention as a homogeneous quantity to be gained en masse for *art per se*. And audiences can never be pigeonholed like “the ideal purchaser of cat food”. Given today’s huge spectrum of artistic and cultural output, we can only define limited interests, narrow fields of competence and restricted areas of knowledge. Which also means that the protagonists encounter one another in both roles, that of expert and that of lay judge (someone who is well-versed in the classical piano repertoire is unlikely to know much about comics, pop culture or Patti Smith; film aficionados are likely to be philistines in matters of ballet and dance, etc.).

As I see it, the above three theoretical insights – (1) that a democracy *oblivious to the flaws of majority rule* is doomed to failure; (2) that artistic judgement *requires expertise, as highly fallible as that expertise must remain*; and (3) that *the audience per se* is a *chimera* – lead us to recognize three significant practical insights: (a) although, as decision-making aids in matters of art and culture, clear quality criteria and hierarchies of values are *less viable than ever*, (b) in many areas of artistic and cultural production, democratic, *expert-dependent state support* is indispensable (c) if the future of our civil society is not to be determined *solely by mass production or private privilege*, products of the entertainment industry and luxury goods – which would permanently damage its *vitality*.

What this tells us is that, even after “1989”, the triad of art, audience and democracy need not lead to the abyss, where reason, fairness and re-

publican consensus are plunged into turbulence and fated to drown; but it will never find its way back to the prestabilized harmony of the post-war era. We have no choice but to live in a *ménage à trois*, with jealousies, misunderstandings and shifting loyalties, but at least in the *one household* we share and would like to maintain. ─

Translated from the German by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart

Georg Kohler, Ph.D. and lic. iur., studied philosophy and law in Zurich and Basel. After several years as a research assistant while preparing his doctoral dissertation and post-doctoral thesis qualifying him to become a professor, he joined the management of a family firm in Vienna from 1983 to 1991, also working as a freelance journalist (for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, among other publications). He taught political philosophy and theory at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich from 1992 to 1994. He has held a professorship in philosophy at the University of Zurich since 1994.

1 Beat Wyss, “Das Ende der Bilder. Gerhard Merz und Platons Höhle”, in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, No. 249, 26 Oct. 1989

2 The following is based on essays by Walter Grasskamp: “Rekonstruktion und Revision. Die Kunstvereine nach 1945” and “Demokratie und moderne Kunst. Umwidmung und Demontage”, in Grasskamp, *Die unbewältigte Moderne. Kunst und Öffentlichkeit*, Munich 1989, pp. 120-146



## From Review to Showtime The arts pages as a cultural marketplace

Isabelle Rüf

Whether in newspapers or on television, the media approach to literature has shifted away from credible commentary and taken on a performance-like character, contends literary critic Isabelle Rüf. Will the growing noise of the literary scene drown out the unique voices? |



On 22 September, *Trois Jours chez ma mère* by François Weyergans at last hit the bookshops. Year after year, with every new literary season, the author's publisher, Grasset, had been announcing this novel. To no avail. So that when the book finally did appear, it hit the Parisian microcosm – already shaken by the “Houellebecq affair” – like a second tsunami. The press attaché fretted over whether the media would highlight the book's contents or only the author's affronts to the public during his long literary silence.

Such a worry is revealing. Spring and summer 2005 marched to drum beats announcing the simultaneous publication in five languages of Michel Houellebecq's latest novel. All one saw on television, in the newspapers and on the internet was the author and his cigarette, his existential despair, his dog, his sex life, his relations with the Raelian sect – to the point of nausea. Once published, in the midst of much secretive ado in-

tended to heighten the desire for it, his book did reveal certain qualities. Yet the critics almost didn't feel like saying so. Conceivably, potential readers, too, might be sick of all the textual harassment. Still, the machine runs on automatically: a phenomenon impossible to ignore. Nor is it altogether uninteresting, sociologically speaking. All the same, by analyzing and denouncing it, we fuel the system, etc. Is critical discourse on the wane in favour of promotion?

Without our wanting to bemoan the situation, things are undeniably being cast in a new light. Formerly, critics worked in the name of a certain idea of “Truth”. From the mass of books published, they would select or dismiss works according to criteria they believed to be objective: the beauty or novelty of the language, the originality of the thinking, the form and content of the book and the dialogue between them, etc. They

traced filiations, made criticisms – that was their job. A job they had worked hard at acquiring. In Germany and the Anglo-Saxon countries, they often gained recognition through university careers. In France, more through their writing style and a talent for polemics. In what the Germans termed “instalments”, the literary critics of the day wrote for a cultivated public. Such readers, familiar with the slants of the lengthy critiques, obeyed the critics’ dictates in their tastes. Although this utopian model still exists in certain newspaper columns, it is gradually dying out.

Nowadays, the question is put differently: editorial staffs seek out what “the people” want, in order to satisfy readership desires. Unable to apprehend the masses, publishers attempt to define them by means of such skewed instruments as best-seller lists and TV ratings, themselves created by supply and demand. Self-censorship is coming to the fore: overly specialized, laborious or innovative works are being dismissed automatically. “The people” have no time to read long articles; just give them a few annotations in a promotional vein, together with some explanatory notes or pictograms to rapidly steer them. Given such a condescending attitude, no wonder space for discussing books is shrinking. Television prefers talk shows that, reminiscent of a circus act, bring together figures from different backgrounds and enjoin them to stand up against the host’s aggressive cues. The written press will “go all out” from time to time, featuring two or three pages on an author. This requires a hint of scandal (with his nihilist provocations, Houellebecq certainly fits the bill) or, failing that, a beautiful and/or sad story – a story of exile, bereavement, abuse, redemption, faraway adventure or political clashes.

These caricatural approaches coexist and delineate a whole new scene. Recently, French-speaking Switzerland’s daily *Le Temps* united its “Culture” and “Society” sections on its final pages. Whichever has the best story to tell gets the highly coveted last page. Generally the “Society” section wins, which is only natural, since it offers readers practical advice, novelties to make life easier or more fun. “Culture” takes over for the latest shows, records or films. Readers are happy to catch up on what’s new – no matter under which heading, “Culture” or “Society”. No cause for mourning.

Barring a literary prize, the death of an author, a scandal, a case of censorship or a lawsuit, books stay put under the “new books” column of the major dailies or in specialized reviews, where curious readers know they can find them. Another literary refuge is with the state-subsidized cultural radio stations, whose – by definition – limited audience shields them from audience ratings (for how much longer?): these target but a small percentage of the public. Still and all, in a country like France that means several hundreds of thousands of listeners, potential readers, who are bombarded with specialized information. The current publishing scene is very strange: on the one hand, a surfeit of publications, most of which tend to fall into oblivion before even reaching the public. This autumn, for instance, that very French phenomenon of “*la rentrée littéraire*” (literary season kick-off) boasts over six hundred new titles in literature alone. And on the other, several preordained successes that capture all the attention (the latest being the incredibly long-lasting *Da Vinci Code*). These are in part recognizable by the wealth of subsidiary literature that proliferates in

their shadow: already prior to its publication, Houellebecq's *The Possibility of an Island* invited five book-length commentaries. Between these two extremes, there are the media, pretty well discredited and overtaken by now. Publishers, noting that "the press no longer prescribes", are catering to booksellers. When one of them falls in love with a work, he or she can sell over a thousand copies, which is half of an average press run. Awards such as the Audience Prize, supposedly reflecting "the people's" taste, have also become highly popular. Audience proximity has come to represent an ideal.

Credibility has shifted from commentary to performance. For some time now, authors in German-speaking countries have been setting out on book tours with their latest opus, reading excerpts around the world – at schools, bookshops and book fairs. They participate in writing workshops, debates and encounters; they take up writer residencies. In short, they pursue a parallel activity become part and parcel of their work. One can deplore a literary market thus organized, avoid it, or else, albeit reluctantly, join it. One can also deflect it to one's own advantage. Many of today's young authors use entertainment tactics: they organize parties, performances, events of all sorts, and publish their works on the internet, where they invite readers to converse with them. Rightly so, since the author figure in itself is a good sales argument. Woe to those who refuse to indulge in fantasy.

It is as if reading itself were no longer enough. For the last few years, every autumn the French-speaking countries have been staging a book fair, the strangely named "Fureur de Lire" (Reading

Rage), which groups dozens of events over several days. Participants are encouraged to take pen to hand, as if the desire to write needed to be awakened despite the fruitlessly logorrhoeic trend of our times. All this hullabaloo is something of a screen, but also serves as a platform. A certain puritanism is wary of success and the money accompanying it. So what if Michel Houellebecq earns a football player's salary and Europe is inundated with his books? Where's the problem? Victor Hugo, too, was rich and famous! So what if flocks of adolescents identify with Amélie Nothomb's lively prose? Novels have always held up a mirror to society and individuals. And truly innovative works have ever had trouble acquiring a readership. Time could be trusted to sort things out. Surely it will continue to do so. Today's literary scene is particularly noisy. The din may cover up some singular voices. It will not be able to silence them. And many people have their ears pricked up to detect them. Publishing houses are being created. The percentage of "true" readers has not changed for a century. Critics are on the lookout, anxious to discover emerging talents. The new literary season has what it takes to satisfy them. If today's writers express themselves in less academic fashion, it is also because they are targeting a far wider audience. Who could complain? ─

Translated from the French by Margie Mounier

Isabelle Rüf, born in Montreux in 1943, holds a degree (licentiate) in human sciences (ethnology, linguistics, history of religions, sociology) from the Sorbonne. She has been a literary journalist with *L'Hebdo* and Radio Suisse Romande since 1983 and with the daily *Le Temps* since 2000.

# A Special Sensibility

## Target readerships in a multilingual country

Marion Graf

**Switzerland is a place where several languages meet. But is it still a crucible for translations and does it still have correspondingly multilingual readers? Literary critic and translator Marion Graf is concerned about the dwindling number of translations published in Switzerland. All the greater is her admiration for the flair and courage of the French-Swiss publishing houses that still dare to put them out!**

International best-sellers. Stardom. Bookshops being closed down and bought back up. Publishing houses merging. The literary pages disappearing from the newspapers. For several months now, the race for profitability has had the publishing scene in its grip. What are the stakes for readers in this merciless war? Above all, for readers of translations in this multilingual land of Switzerland? Does the public stand to win or lose? Our focus will be on French-speaking Switzerland, given its twofold minority status in the face of France and German-speaking Switzerland. May our survey provide, if not an answer, at least some food for thought.

Early in September, when the first of some fifty thousand annual new French titles, plus – in French-speaking Switzerland – some two and a half thousand works produced locally, sweep the country, booksellers have a decisive role to play in the book chain. One eloquent bookseller on his or her own, be it remote-controlled by the powerful bookshop owner, can sell 1500 copies of a title! Enticing shop windows, well-stacked book piles, attractive posters, red belly bands, discounts (the famous FNAC “green reductions”) and the bookseller’s selections concur to reassure, guide and assist customers in their choices. Indeed, even before being featured in their original language, the translation rights had been sold and the bookshop agents had designated all the Paul Austers, Dan Browns, Philip Roths, Houellebecqs and other Harry Potter cohorts as reader favourites.

However, once readers know which books are the talk of the town, they are still free to choose other-

wise: it is up to them, and the selection is enormous. Twenty per cent of today’s translations are based on international “mega successes”, while eighty per cent represent carefully thought out choices by publishers heedful of public reaction to the works in their original language. But how much longer will the supply keep up with these incredibly varied demands?

Françoise Berclaz Zermatten, an independent bookseller in Sion, makes half her sales out of translations. Mostly for Anglo-American literature, although there is a marked interest in Nordic and Irish writings. Or else, depending on the customers’ holiday destinations, there will be a call for Cuban or South American works... An airing on television, a section in a literary supplement and, above all, word of mouth have the greatest multiplying effect. And even if the bookshop in question is located in the French-speaking capital of a bilingual canton, interest in Swiss literature – written in or translated into French – is only marginal. Be that as it may, she is nonetheless planning to expand her exclusively French-language offer to include German-language books. “Then, too,” she adds, “perhaps we should have the translators join the promotional campaigns for foreign books; they speak French, they know the work by heart (for good reason!), and they would provide living testimony of the too-little-known problems of translation.”

Since 1987 French-speaking Switzerland’s RSR Première radio station has awarded an annual Listeners’ Prize to a Swiss author – the sort of sales



booster that publishers are very fond of. The jury, drawn from the “general public” and comprising twenty-four readers of different ages and backgrounds, confer recognition, not on the authors but on the winning titles. Whether in translation or not. Perhaps more decisive still, according to the radio journalist Louis-Philippe Ruffy, is the “provincial outlook”, which tends to overrate a work’s site of publication. French- or German-Swiss authors published in Paris will enjoy an aura of universality denied to their peers published in Lausanne or Geneva.

Take or leave a few regional publications, the same titles show up in bookstores in Grenoble and Geneva. Ever since the 1960s, foreign literature has registered a spectacular breakthrough in France. Above all the smaller publishing firms act as pioneering researchers. The introduction of translation prizes and foreign book prizes has contributed to professionalizing translation.

André Clavel, a French literary critic who lives near the Swiss border, relishes this state of affairs – as “an antidote to the egomania currently dominating French [book] production”. Because his profession entails reading foreign literature, he welcomes this open door policy. He also points out that French-Swiss literature has a long tradition of permeability to literature from other lands, a policy sometimes benefiting its French neighbours. Good reasons to briefly focus our attention on the fertile and demanding readers that writers can be: “The major twentieth-century Swiss authors were and remain great readers – and often also translators or mediators – of foreign literature, which, until very recently, was hardly the case for the French. The names of Albert Béguin, Philippe Jaccottet, Georges Haldas, Etienne Barilier, Vahé Godel and many more come to mind. Undoubtedly, Switzerland’s multilingualism and school system are the source of this receptivity, which may, moreover, be on the decline today.”

Located at the crossroads of several languages, is Switzerland still a crucible for translation? The falling figures over the past few years are worrisome: in 2004, of the 1904 literary works published in Switzerland, 399 were translations (in 2003, 487 translations for 1833 publications). The translations published in 2004 can be broken down by language (see table).

Taking all categories of publications into account, English heads the list of the twenty-nine languages translated (a position it has enjoyed for at least five decades), followed by the three main national languages, and then in succession Russian, Spanish and Arabic.

Present-day globalization has very powerful means at its disposal to pursue cultural homogeniza-

tion. All the more reason to commend the acumen and audacity of independent publishers for whom, whether in Switzerland or elsewhere, translation rhymes with affirmation of the world’s infinite diversity. Devoted exclusively to literary works, publishers the likes of Ammann, Unionsverlag, Lenos, Diogenes, and Casagrande in the Ticino translate a great deal and sell up to eighty per cent of their stock abroad. In French-speaking Switzerland, l’Age d’Homme (Lausanne) was one of the first publishers to promote East European authors, and this while the Cold War was still raging. Currently, two new publishers – Noir sur Blanc (Montricher/Lausanne) and Métropolis (Geneva) – generously welcome foreign literature to their folds. However, Zoé (Geneva) is today’s reference point in the matter. This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of this small firm with a staff of three, which publishes twenty-five titles a year, with translations making up twenty-five per cent of its catalogue – that is, 140 works.

**Zoé: a case in point.** Marlyse Pietri, the founder and director of Zoé, is above all a reader. “I’ve always read writers from elsewhere. I would never have wanted to confine myself to a single language. What I expect of such literature is new horizons and themes, but also new approaches to literature and different narrative strategies. I’m less interested in the latest titles than in immersing myself in the unfamiliar, in other rhythms, sounds and colours. Faced with a translated book, I have fewer points of comparison, I’m not tempted to classify it or to view it critically. I’m prepared to let myself be surprised and fascinated. I read slowly, taking my time to fully absorb a universe – lately, for instance, Arto Paasilinna or Andrea Camilleri. At first, I pay less heed to a book’s literary quality than to the existence of the unknown world that comes across in the translation. Nonetheless, if a book does not hold its own, you notice that and end up tiring of it.”

From the start, by publishing Niklaus Meienberg, Zoé invited literature from all linguistic regions of Switzerland, and mainly German-language authors. This first realm of publication was soon complemented by a second: African literature, expanded to include authors from the global south writing in English. These two realms represent personal choices because Marlyse Pietri speaks fluent German and English. She feels it would be difficult to publish translations from languages totally unfamiliar to her, and thus only does so on rare occasions. One such occasion is coming up this autumn, with the launching of *Les Classiques du monde* (World Classics), a collection proposed by an association in Paris with which Zoé is collaborating.

### Literary works published in Switzerland in 2004:

	total	of which translations	of which by Swiss authors	of which by foreign authors
German	1042	237 (22.7%)	25	212
French	544	91 (16.7%)	13	35
Italian	106	38 (35.8%)	3	35
Rhaeto-Romanic	9	1	1	—
English	142	20 (14.1%)	1	19

Three successful publications serve to illustrate how varied a readership Zoé reaches with its translations. *La Vache* by Beat Sterchi (orig. title: *Blösch*, publ. in English as *The Cow*) was awarded the Listeners' Prize and attracted fiction fans. *Grosse et bête*, an autobiography by Rosemarie Buri (orig. title: *Dumm und Dick*), appealed to readers partial to first-hand accounts and life stories. Finally, there is Robert Walser, who is read mainly in France. Marlyse Pietri goes on to note that "In our land, a translation is a success once sales reach three thousand copies. But selling two thousand copies each of South African Bessie Head's short story collections seems quite satisfactory to me."

Launching a new author is a delicate operation that affords literary publishers little leeway. "There is no market for innovative writing, for new aesthetic approaches. Then, too, we are suffering from the insidious disappearance of intermediary network links – fewer top-notch reviews, the death of independent bookshops (forty-two bookshops have closed down in French-speaking Switzerland over a three-year period)... As for all the 'events', they entail considerable costs above and beyond the budgeted expenditures. Nevertheless, readers of pure literature do exist, that I know. The problem is how to reach them."

Zoé considers the reader more like a partner than a customer, almost like an associate in the discovery process. In this sense, poor sales results for translations are not such bad news at all. "The greatest disappointment is having an author leave us after a success; the good news is obtaining the [translation] rights."

In a little book put out in honour of the firm's twenty-fifth anniversary – *Une aventure éditoriale dans les marges* (An outside-the-mainstream publishing adventure) – Marlyse Pietri brings up a dilemma with which all border-resident publishers are familiar: two readerships with differing sensibilities. Given how small French-speaking Switzerland is, for any literary publisher worthy of the name (in the eyes of Zoé) to focus on it to the exclusion of all else implies suffocation and compromise. In this connection, the distribution of its publications in France since 1992 by Harmonia Mundi, for which it, in turn, serves as

Swiss distributor, represents a major trump card for Zoé. One that promises to be decisive for the future: "In this small country, publishers who feature literary texts need support to enable them to widen their distribution. A lack of support would sound the death knell for French-Swiss publishing; should there be nothing left in Switzerland but outposts of the large Parisian structures, then these will not be anything more than regional firms no longer so keenly interested in authors from these parts, or in that which, in my opinion, constitutes Switzerland's strength by comparison with France: its sensitivity to cultural diversity. In short, it is the readers who stand to lose." ─

Translated from the French by Margie Mounier

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The author extends her heartfelt thanks to all the persons kind enough to answer her questions throughout this lengthy survey.

Marion Graf, a literary critic specialized in poetry, is also a translator of Russian and German, most especially, in the last few years, of Robert Walser. She is currently president of the *Collection ch*, which promotes the publication of translations of works by contemporary Swiss writers.

# Seeing with Collective Eyes

## How individual are our tastes?

Roy Schedler

The very mention of “audience taste” tends to evoke a negative response. Whatever the broad mass likes, whatever succeeds in gaining widespread popularity, cannot have any aesthetic value – so common wisdom has it. An experienced cultural manager tries to show us just how individual aesthetic judgements really are!



People who regularly go to the theatre and are lucky enough to see the right performance will understand what is meant by the French expression “*un ange qui passe*”. The “angel passing” is the moment when suddenly, apparently by chance, a magic hush descends and time seems to stand still. We hardly dare breathe; we are highly alert and see what is happening on the stage with new eyes. The Germans, too, describe the experience as “an angel passing through the room”, whereas in Russia we find “a policeman being born” and in the Netherlands “Jesus is riding on a scooter”. The language of the theatre, as we have known since Peter Brooks’s legendary trip to Africa, spans the world.

But the special thing about this phenomenon is not its ubiquitousness, it is the fact that it can be

experienced collectively. The feeling of “an angel passing through the room” is shared by the whole audience, unambiguously and with intersubjective verifiability: we sense this moment at the same time and with the same intensity as everyone else. The instant transcends our everyday horizon of experience: it is as if the sudden hush that falls were exploding the boundaries of our ego, making us part of a larger whole. For as unexpectedly as this silence connects us with the Here and Now, so close does it bring the spectator in the seat next to ours. “An angel passing through the room” transforms individual theatre-goers into an audience that sees, hears and feels collectively.

But that is not all. The truly special feature of “*un ange qui passe*” is – if not the certainty, then at



least a strong suspicion – that this shared experience is accompanied by a shared insight. Our subjective perception is supplanted by a collective recognition. We are not in agreement about the magic moment alone, we also believe we understand its message: here is what happened, and here is what it means.

Whether this hush reveals the Kantian sublime, whether we recognize the flash of a spiritual learning process in a figure on stage, or whether we experience a sort of collective *samadhi* would deserve a separate study. The sole aspect of the mystery of the magic angel that concerns us in our present context is audience taste *per se*. Must something that appeals to a large number of people – because they have a similar perception and therefore a similar judgement of what they have seen

– necessarily represent the conventional mainstream? What do we actually go by when we evaluate a performance, production, book or concert? Do we judge by individual criteria or as a collective? And if the latter, what standards do we apply in making a collective judgement?

**The (ostensibly) individual aesthetic judgement.**

In making aesthetic judgements, we are accustomed to arguing from the standpoint of an atomistic “I”: “I love Christoph Marthaler’s productions” or “I can’t stand Harry Potter.” We fall back on subjective preferences, conflating our aesthetic judgements with moral, ethical and political convictions that are, for their part, also based on individual impressions and normative standards. The “I” that makes these utterances glosses over

the social premises of its own subjectivity. Personal taste is always the result of an individual biography and thus of a specific social and cultural background and environment. In this respect, our fondness for Pink Floyd is no different from our aversion to spinach.

*"We look with our own eyes but see with the eyes of the collective,"* writes Ludwik Fleck. We may experience the things around us individually, but we can only make sense of them in community. As directed perception subject to corresponding conceptual and factual processing of the perceived, the collective style of thinking is a kind of superordinate principle reigning above our individual way of thinking. We always want – even need – to find our perceptions confirmed by the collective. Statements about aesthetic qualities, too, are, in principle, collective. For one thing, because, being a result of lived experiences, our judgements are rooted in socially organized cultural practice (we were always served spinach when we had to go to Granny's for dinner), but also because the practical situation in which these judgements are expressed (in reviews, in the lobby during the interval, etc.) is always to some degree determined by society. Often consensus even has to be reached about the criteria on which we base our judgements. Aesthetic traits are not self-contained concepts and require continual reciprocal testing. The boundaries between "ironic", "sarcastic" and "cynical" are fluid – but without a reliable benchmark, a qualitative judgement has no validity. Aesthetic judgements can therefore exist only in a social space, independent of whether they are meant to assert individual convictions or to fulfil regulative functions in bringing order into the cultural world.

**The collective aesthetic judgement.** Like the angel passing through the room, an "audience judgement" is evidently more than the sum of the individual spectators' assessments. This raises the question of the theoretical system of reference we recur to in our collective audience judgement when – in the absence of the magic angel – we are not struck by intuitive insight, nor are we able to arrive at a discursive agreement about the drama being played out before us on stage. When and why does a production or performance fascinate and impress us? And when do we look at our watches at half past ten only to discover that it's a quarter to nine?

Probably when the production comes up to, or disappoints, our expectations. Beauty, as we all know, lies in the eye of the beholder: aesthetic qualities are measured by the wishes and dispositions of the recipients, not by the inherent char-

acteristics of the artefacts themselves. Aesthetic quality has no ontological dimension: the quality of an artwork does not "reside" in the work itself, the way sugar does in a cake; it is, as we have seen, a social construct.

That trips lightly off the tongue and leads us into the midst of the current debate over motivation, incentive strategies and demand-oriented culture marketing. A glance at the latest user analyses for cultural institutions arouses significant doubts about the value of empirical visitor surveys. This applies not only to the questions asked (*"How important is it to you to receive impetus to reflect?"*), but equally to the answers the respondents can choose from (on a scale of one to five, from "very important" to "completely unimportant"). When it comes to planning the coming season, there is little useful information to be gleaned here. Those who inquire into the interests and motives of spectators and museum visitors will not only be confronted with complex socio-psychological problem complexes but will also be touching upon basic questions concerning the role and function of art and culture.

That art and culture have specific functions to fulfil in the interests of society and the individual is a truism. Art and culture produce effects, both intended or directed and unintended or random. These effects consist in feelings, emotions and moods capable of awakening images and ideas that develop into motives, goals and incentives for our behaviour. In fashioning a personal design for living, goals (as conditions for certain effects) are indispensable. The way we set these goals ultimately defines our aspirations for happiness, including – as in the case of a visit to the theatre – the fulfilment of aesthetic preferences (clever sets, poetic language, charismatic actors), intellectual challenges (coherent production concept, stimulating programme notes) and the desire to make a social statement (festive evening wear, the confirmation of social status, etc.).

Seen as a sort of post-authoritarian cost-benefit analysis, a theory of good entertainment should therefore identify the mechanisms that control our attention with respect to the fulfilment of artistically formulated aspirations for happiness. But they should not play off our craving for edification (*docere*) against our need for enjoyment (*delectare*), instead acknowledging both as spaces providing scope for the human soul. Good entertainment – not in the sense of an aesthetic classification, but in functional terms, as multi-dimensional media content – manifests itself above all by offering a perspective to go out from and something to cling to: it is a craftsmanly challenge whose *performance* is measured by whether the



audience look alert at the end rather than dropping out anaesthetized along the way.

**The aesthetic judgement of the collective.** Given the above, what might be a suitable mix of criteria for an exhibition or performance that, by keeping us “entertained”, fulfils our aspirations for happiness? Or to put it another way: what essential traits does an artistic artefact need for an audience judgement to develop at all?

Taking the proverbial “pursuit of happiness” of the American Declaration of Independence as a starting point, let us call these criteria “fun”, “impact” and “profit”. While indissolubly linked, complementary to and conditional upon one another, they are distinct with regard to the degree to which they are consciously perceived.

– Fun or “*thou shalt not bore the public*”. Billy Wilder’s witticism is self-explanatory and applies to entertainment in general: something is exciting and interesting if it neither bores us nor leaves us indifferent. To keep from boring us, an object or action must involve us emotionally and/or challenge us intellectually. The bag of tricks that can be used to promote the fun factor is chock full and contains the rules of craftsmanship, but also the principles of grandstanding and manipulation.

– Impact stands for the “objective” side of our presence – what might be described as the physical experience of having been there. “*Have you seen Riverdance?*” – “*Yes.*” – “*How was it?*” – “*Super.*” There isn’t much more to say, which has less to do with Riverdance than with “impact”. Why we take part in something and what we experience there is secondary in comparison with the simple fact of being able to participate and gain a first-hand impression. “Impact” goes hand in hand with the potential scope to shape the future, which offers us the opportunity to exercise an influence and grants us importance. But we also experience the sense of belonging and community by way of “impact”, for instance when we identify ourselves as members of a specific scene. Aesthetic preferences define lifestyles that shape, but at the same time segment and structure, society. In his sociological best-seller *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* (The Event Society), Gerhard Schulze distinguishes five experiential values that further differentiate the notion of “impact”: striving for rank and standing, a sense of security, conformity, self-actualization and simulation.

– Profit, our third and final category, refers to subjective benefit in the broadest sense. It can comprise any sort of gain, from newly acquired

knowledge to the confirmation of old convictions, instructions for direct action, or insights, views and dogmas from which we derive the normative standards by which we define our individuality. As judging something to have been “worth it” is a conscious process, “profit” presupposes reflection – unlike “fun” and “impact”, which also operate unconsciously.

The conceptual proximity of these criteria to the instruments of event marketing is obvious. “Fun” and “impact” are closely connected with the feelings and emotions surrounding our aspirations for happiness. The increasing subjectivity of the various categories is also striking: the majority of the audience will be able to arrive at a broad consensus as to the “fun” factor of a theatre production, but the assessment of “profit” is something else altogether. This follows from the general inner-orientation of psychophysical effects, in the context of which “experiential value” is understood as the subjective improvement a product makes to a consumer’s quality of life. So if we want to determine the basis of an audience judgement, we need a different model, one that fits the individual spectator’s subjective feelings into the overall perceptions of the audience and then feeds them back into the individual’s “brain script”. The result would be a subjectively founded appreciation of the event with equal validity as an audience judgement.

One potential frame of reference would be the BCOS model, which plays a central role in Alan R. Andreasen’s theory of (social) marketing. Andreasen regards the BCOS factors – “benefits”, “costs”, “others” and “self-efficacy” (faith in one’s own abilities) – as behavioural drivers. Influencing them with a view to eliciting a certain form of behaviour (donating money, doing volunteer work) is the aim of non-profit marketing.

In marketing, “costs” and “benefits” refer to the exchange relationship in a market-relevant transaction: the consumer has to accept certain costs to obtain certain objects or services that are of value (to him or her) in exchange. In the private sector of the economy, “cost” generally means time or money; however, in the non-profit sector it can as easily signify pain (for instance, when donating blood), embarrassment (taking an AIDS test), guilt (reporting a mentally retarded exhibitionist to the police) or any number of other complex decision-making criteria. One of the central challenges of non-profit marketing consists in holding out the prospect of attractive advantages that offset the “costs” of such psychological barriers.



However, our decision-making horizon is not limited to carefully weighed cost-benefit considerations alone. Our thoughts and actions are not only influenced but sometimes even determined by our environment. We all remember cases in which, after weighing the facts long and hard, we arrived at a very justifiable solution, only to make a totally different decision just because someone else suggested it to us. As we cannot insulate ourselves from interpersonal or social pressure, our personal environment (“others”) also exercises a substantial influence on our actions. From the standpoint of non-profit marketing, this can be turned into a force for or against a specific type of behaviour; ideally, it is called upon when it aids a certain cause and is minimized when it creates an impediment.

But even where the benefits clearly outweigh our investment of time and energy and social pressure would work to our advantage, we do not automatically have to act. This happens when, lacking the necessary faith in our own abilities, we do not trust ourselves to make a decision or to live with its consequences. Most smokers are convinced that there would be greater advantages if they stopped smoking than if they continued, and they also know that the world around them would react positively to such a decision – but they don’t trust themselves to take that step. In such cases, increasing the social pressure (“others”) or insisting on the benefits (better health, saving money) becomes counter-productive as it merely reinforces the existing sense of failure.

So how does the BCOS model explain the way we arrive at an audience judgement of a theatre production or the like? If “fun” and “impact” are ac-

cepted as general “benefits”, then the “costs” would include whatever else we, the audience, also experience collectively: that may be the airlessness of the auditorium, the uncomfortable seats, the fact that there is nowhere to get a drink during the interval, etc. The same logic applies to the category of “others”: a glowing review of the production in the paper, the producer’s good reputation, the high standing of the theatre, etc., also exert pressure on us as a group. Only “self-efficacy” remains individual, because it calls upon our own subjective power of judgement.

In the case of a positive audience judgement framed as an aesthetically based appreciation, the collective verdict theoretically comes down to the following formula:

- the “benefits” are greater than the “costs”
- the group dynamics of “others” exert a positive effect on individual “self-efficacy” by either reinforcing it or – if we do not share their opinion – putting our subjective judgement into perspective or tempering it.

Conversely, we are dissatisfied with a theatre production if

- the “benefits” do not outweigh the “costs”
- our “self-efficacy” is capable of openly resisting the pressure of “others” or we concur with their (negative) assessment (which admittedly raises the question of why we bother to sit through the performance).

Whether this conceptual approach genuinely does justice to audience judgements as they occur in practice, and in how far this model is applicable to the various areas of the arts (literature, music, film) and their respective forms of



reception (reading literature in a group, hearing it at a reading, listening to an audio book, etc.) would need to be established through a host of individual studies.

But even without empirical proof, there is no doubt that our ever-so-individual judgement is by no means as independent as we would like it to be. As we have seen, aesthetic judgements are always collectively influenced appreciations. Worse yet: our subjective evaluation is probably most accurate when it converges with general audience tastes. This is a terrible insight with which to confront our narcissistic self-esteem. As a small consolation, we can hope that we will be there when an angel passes again. ┘

Translated from the German by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart

A theatre producer by training, Roy Schedler spent nine years working for the Migros Culture Percent, Switzerland's largest private-sector promoter of the arts. From 1999 to 2003 he was responsible for all performing arts projects at Expo.02, the Swiss National Exhibition, and was also in charge of five theatres on the four *Arteplages*.

Since 2004, he has headed the administrative offices of the Solothurn Film Days, also offering advisory services to cultural institutions and non-profit organizations for NonproCons in Basel and Zurich. He teaches at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences Winterthur, the Zurich University of Art and Design and the universities of Berne and Fribourg.

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# Combinations and Permutations

## PROGR – a cultural laboratory in the middle of Berne

Beate Engel

In August 2004 a decommissioned secondary school in Berne was temporarily transformed into a location for studios, complete with an exhibition and event programme. The PROGR\_Zentrum für Kulturproduktion has quickly become an important meeting place for artists and their audiences. Its curator, Beate Engel, describes how it all happened |

Since the students moved out of the former secondary school at Waisenhausplatz in Berne, a great deal has happened behind the thick sandstone walls of the building now known as PROGR\_Zentrum für Kulturproduktion. Classrooms have become exhibition spaces and studios in which over a hundred artists from diverse areas are offered a total of 4500 m<sup>2</sup> at low rents. Last year some 120 events were held at the PROGR, from exhibitions featuring studio artists and guests from at home and abroad to concerts by bee-flat in the gymnasium and *Tacheles*, a discussion series put on by the Swiss visual artists' association Visarte. The abundance of events we run and the large number of requests we receive confront us with a difficult task: as eager as we are to expand on the incredible momentum that has developed around the PROGR, we also want to avoid the "eventitis" that is generally running rampant. What can we do with our limited staff and financial resources to make a useful contribution to enlivening Berne's culture scene and how can we best fulfil audience needs? How are we to position ourselves in a city that already possesses an abundance of cultural institutions, including the newly opened Paul Klee Centre and, soon, the new contemporary art section of the Museum of Fine Arts?

**Fluid transitions.** We are very consciously seeking a middle ground: though the PROGR isn't an alternative culture centre, it isn't an air-conditioned museum either. For many visitors, the Cafébar Turnhalle in the former gymnasium is the gateway to the PROGR. The bar has quickly developed into a popular meeting place for "the scene". The atmosphere can be reminiscent of a creative open-plan office: this is where stage sets are sketched, budgets fine-tuned and cultural debates initiated, and it is a place to get to know new people. The transition from social meeting place to cultural programme is fluid. Flexible structures are particularly crucial to contemporary art projects, which are increasingly process-oriented, audience-inclusive and interdisciplinary. At the PROGR, culture doesn't happen solely in the exhibition area or in the theatre on the

first floor, but may as easily take place on the floor of the gymnasium or in the loft. Take the soft but insistent, electrifying hum coming from the LEERRAUM programme on the first floor, which can already be heard on the stairs leading to the exhibition area. Staged by Michael Pfister (a photographer and culture manager) and Zimoun (a multimedia artist), the project explores the convergences between visual art and music ([www.leerraum.ch](http://www.leerraum.ch)). For *Pass Auf*, a temporary guest project by Spanish-born artist Adela Picón, a kind of passport booth was installed in the hall by the entrance to the bar. Players could apply for a Swiss passport by filling in a questionnaire at the computer and having a passport picture taken. "I found the PROGR the best possible place for this project," says Ms. Picón. "We would never have reached such a lot, and so many different kinds, of people in a gallery. Between ten and twenty visitors registered every day." ([www.passauf.ch](http://www.passauf.ch))

**Grass-roots work.** The general public has little genuine knowledge of what contemporary art really is and what it could be – except for the odd distorted notion deduced from exhibitions that spark scandals in the press, like the Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris with its "Hirschhorn Affair" or the recent Mahjong exhibition at the Berne Museum of Fine Arts, where one of the pieces shown by a Chinese artist included the head of a human embryo. We offer everyday sensations: guided tours through studios, and events and exhibitions that allow our visitors to experience at first hand how tomorrow's art is being created today. Our programming places particular emphasis on the joy of the new and untested. The auditorium has, for example, been the site of the first independent production by a theatre student and the first fashion show by a young designer from the studio programme. We have recognized time and again that the cultural practitioners who work here are our most important infrastructure, for they bring ideas into the PROGR programme and are the most effective promoters of their own cause. One of these publicizers is Heinrich Gartentor, who runs a guest studio in the PROGR and was recently elected "Switzerland's

new Minister of Culture” in an internet poll organized by the Culture Office of Bienne. He is convinced that having the PROGR in the centre of town has given culture a new position: *“People go there just to have a look round – without feeling inhibited about maybe not understanding something or finding something too elitist. The PROGR is a place to meet artists. This natural relationship brings Berne’s culture closer to the people. In the medium term, this deghettoization will also benefit the larger cultural institutions and bring them broader acceptance.”*

**Networking.** That institutions like Visarte, the Kino Kunstmuseum cinema, the Camerata or the University of Arts have rented offices or rehearsal space in the PROGR creates an ideal starting point for collaboration. Visarte supplements our programme with *Tacheles*, a monthly discussion series dealing with such subjects as cultural policy; the Kino Kunstmuseum runs an open-air cinema in the inner courtyard; the University of Arts shows examination projects by their graduating students. It is important to us not to compete with existing institutions in Berne but, in fact, to intensify the give-and-take between them. The 2004 Christmas Exhibition was held in three venues: the Museum of Fine Arts, the Kunsthalle and the PROGR. The PROGR exhibition programme is developed in close cooperation with the Stadtgalerie. Joining forces with similar institutions in other fields, we build bridges between various cultures, for instance by providing an arts contribution to the Schlachthaus theatre’s Arab festival *La Mer Blanche*. This is a way of doing justice to a multi-option society in which user groups for cultural services are ever less clearly defined. The tradition-oriented cultural bourgeoisie has long given way to an individualized audience for mixed forms of culture, who come together in ever new permutations, depending on the occasion.

**The audience as a partner.** Although we don’t undertake audience surveys to quantify our target groups by age, income or social background (and then to influence them), we know that the PROGR attracts a very heterogeneous crowd. Not only are our discos well attended, but special events, such as a lecture on Israeli video art, find their audiences too. The PROGR boasts a mix, not only of artistic disciplines but of audience strata as well: a club of seventy-year-old alumni of the school taking a guided tour, students from the Institute of Art History staging a conference in the auditorium, private collectors who regularly have their lunchtime snack here and occasionally visit our exhibitions, etc... We don’t really distinguish between artists and audiences for art either. Be-

cause the idea of “the audience” as “the other” is practically always a fiction. Our objective is to create a network of relationships in the context of an open community and to foster personal encounters between cultural practitioners among themselves and with visitors. And often, the cultural practitioners are members of the audience as well. Or they generate a part of the audience by incorporating them into the realization of their works. *“It is the spectator who makes the work of art.”* Marcel Duchamp’s motto informs many of the projects created here.

*“Being in touch with the public is so clearly a part of being an artist,”* declares painter Renée Magana. She and a group of other PROGR artists launched the poster programme *Selbstporträt als Strasse* (Self-Portrait as Street) *“to do something together and at the same time show that the PROGR was an important element in the city’s life.”* Using a variety of artistic techniques, twenty-seven PROGR artists produced portraits of Berne streets, from Turnweg to Längwiligweg, which were subsequently presented on Waisenhausplatz, in front of the PROGR, and then all auctioned off at our first-anniversary celebration. This project demonstrates what PROGR artists consider important in the long term: not merely finding temporary space in the centre of town, but penetrating into public consciousness and assuming an active role in contemporary society. ─

Translated from the German by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart

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The management of the PROGR (Beate Engel / managing director and curator and Katrien Reist / head of the studio programme) curate and coordinate exhibitions and projects involving resident studio artists and supervise selected guest events.



## Good Reason to Stay Away? **Theatrics over the theatre crisis**

Andreas Kotte  
Frank Gerber

**Audiences are deserting the theatre in droves, goes the often-heard lament. Not true! Theatre in Switzerland has never attracted as many people as today. And that is not a mere claim, but a fact that has been well researched and substantiated by experts in the field |**



Banned, outlawed, pronounced dead: the history of the theatre can be written as the history of its crises. Yet the patient has a strong constitution and has survived them all, whether real or imaginary. Among the real crises were bans on theatre like the one imposed by Reformation leader John Calvin on the city of Geneva. Among the imaginary ones was the “crisis” around Christoph Marthaler as director of the Schauspielhaus theatre in Reformation leader Zwingli’s Zurich at the beginning of the twenty-first century. And for the intervening period any number of low points can be substantiated: first theatre was stifled by the edifying function that was imposed on it, then cultural pessimists predicted its certain death because of the invention of cinema. And fifty years later the introduction of television meant its even more certain death, of course.

Theatre has survived it all: Geneva Protestants have regained their *joie de vivre* and today have one of the liveliest theatre scenes in the country. With eruptive creativity theatre has freed itself from the constraints of institutionalized morality and discovered new forms, ranging from operetta to performance art. And the development of the technical media of cinema, television and the internet has never seriously competed with the physical immediacy of theatre. Otherwise attendance at subsidized theatres would not have peaked in the 1980s, of all times.

Yet in spite of all this proof – and more – that for centuries, and indeed for millennia, theatre has emerged strengthened from every crisis, for a few years now there has been renewed talk of its imminent final demise. The motto seems to be: *Homo sapiens* is on the case – the earth is flat. Knowledge of theatre history is not required; often it would even be a handicap for an individually concocted line of argument – such as when the abolition of subsidies is called for. For example, the *Weltwoche* newspaper praised Shakespeare for wanting above all to earn money from his theatre. The court, it said, had gone over to masques and had financed the organizing of them, “*and that’s how wasteful subsidies dealt the deathblow to the most successful theatre mankind had even known.*” (*Weltwoche*, 12 Sept. 2002) The argument is wrong as far as theatre history is concerned, among other things because Shakespeare’s theatre existed parallel to subsidized theatre and was not superseded by it.

Two weeks later, the same publication does not only want to abolish subsidies, but theatre as a whole. “Let theatre retire” is the title of an article that allows theatre justification as a drama museum at most, for in the “*box of tricks that is contemporary theatre*”, subsidies are said to be in crass

contradiction to the small audiences that are still left. In this kind of thinking the *Weltwoche* is not alone, but even in its umpteenth repetition the statement remains incorrect. In the first place, it is precisely in the nature of subsidies that they are spent on something that is not self-supporting, but of some value to society. The idea of a profitable enterprise receiving public subsidies is absurd. And in the second place, it is not true that audiences are deserting the theatre in droves.

It is true that the municipal theatres have registered a fall in attendance since the golden Eighties. If one takes a longer span of time, though, and traces audience fluctuation since the end of the Second World War, one finds that it is the economic boom years that deviate significantly from the average and show an increase in theatre attendance. The current decline in audiences, in relation, shows a minus of barely ten per cent over the long-term average.

These people have – for the moment – turned their backs on the municipal theatres, but not on theatre as such. For it is also a fact that the total number of people going to the theatre in Switzerland has risen continually in the past twenty years. The rise has been by 600,000 or 17.4 per cent to almost 3.8 million. Thus more people are actually going to the theatre, and there has been a move away from the municipal theatres to other forms, to fringe or folk theatre. Each of these three forms reaches over a million people in Switzerland. It is about time to take a broader perspective in the discourse around theatre audiences and no longer to focus solely on the twenty-eight municipal theatres. For apart from those, there are a large number of, at most, partially subsidized small theatres, such as the Tuchlaube in Aarau, and numerous unaffiliated professional groups. Parallel to these, there is the choice of amateur or folk theatre, such as the Emmental Liebhaberbühne. Or people take part themselves: every hundredth Swiss is a member of one of the country’s over six hundred theatre clubs.

If one considers the sum total of all theatre audiences, there has been an increase. Yet individual theatres have indeed lost a lot of their audiences. Experience shows that such falls are mostly temporary, all the same. Secondly, it is inadmissible to conclude that audience decline at the Schauspielhaus in Zurich, for instance, means a general fall in attendance at all Swiss theatres. And thirdly, it is always risky artistic ventures that give theatre new momentum and thus secure an audience in the longer term. What is new and unknown is at first perceived as an annoyance, and the hatches are battened down. Then it develops

### Dictionary of the Swiss Theatre

The *Theaterlexikon der Schweiz* appeared in September 2005. Containing about 3,600 articles, each in one of the four national languages, this richly illustrated standard reference work documents the theatre in Switzerland, past and present, focusing on the twentieth century. Most of the entries are biographical. The dictionary, which evolved at the Institute of Theatre Studies of the University of Berne over eight years, was produced with the support of various bodies including Pro Helvetia, the Arts Council of Switzerland.

*Theaterlexikon der Schweiz – Dictionnaire du théâtre en Suisse – Dizionario teatrale svizzero – Lexicon da teater svizzer*  
(ed. Andreas Kotte), Zurich 2005

into a trend adopted by other theatres that are willing to experiment. And ultimately it finds its way into the mainstream. Today it is a matter of course for even conservative theatres like the Municipal Theatre in Berne to cultivate a kind of aesthetics that thirty years ago caused a great stir – and by doing so achieve maximum attendance. In short: the empty seats in theatres run by today's innovative directors will ensure full houses in the provinces tomorrow. The theatre public in a small country like Switzerland always has the choice of being part of the sowing or the reaping process.

An essential characteristic of theatre is that it does not exist without an audience. A painting is a painting, even if it hangs in a private room, hidden from the eyes of the public, but theatre only begins to be theatre in interaction with the public. Without that, it is at most a rehearsal or a written drama, but certainly not theatre. Conversely, theatre's right to exist cannot be based on the size of its audience. Those who think it can, ignore the question of quality and put interactive theatre on the same level as the consumer media of cinema and television. Cinema and television reach a lot of people, theatre reaches few. That sort of quantitative thinking is suited to our era of scarce public finances. It is suited to an era that measures everything in terms of popularity: only what is accepted by a lot of people has the right to exist. But what is left out of account is the fact that theatre, in contrast to film, is not reproducible and draws its strength precisely from that fact. Theatre is a relationship, not a product; it is not technology but the human body that is in

### International Research

Serious discussion requires an exact database. The Institute of Theatre Studies of the University of Berne (ITW) has been researching theatre in Switzerland for twelve years. Since 2005 it has been taking part in an international project on theatre systems of smaller European countries, the focus of which is on countries that are not among the big, intensively researched theatre nations. The Netherlands, Ireland, Denmark, Estonia and Switzerland are involved in the project. One of the ITW's aims within the project is the development of an instrument to study audience data, with a view to supplying theatre managers, cultural-policy makers and interested members of the public with reliable figures. The study mentioned in the text is preliminary to it. The project will run for four years.

the foreground. This essential difference is the reason why theatre has never been supplanted by cinema or television. Going to the theatre and consuming media are leisure-time alternatives. A growing section of the public regards theatre not as a medium, but as interaction. And that's why they go to the theatre. Theatre has survived countless genuine crises in its history. It will have no difficulty in weathering the current, imaginary crisis – with gusto. ─

Translated from the German by Joyce Bachmann-Clarke

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Frank Gerber, lic. phil., is working on a research project on the theatre systems of the smaller European countries (see above).