



Week 4

The place of audiences

SUMMARY

The fourth and final week of the MOOC is dedicated to the relationship with audiences.

As we have seen, the stage does not pre-exist before the artistic expression and it is up to the artist to define its outline and forms. In the same way, the relationship with audiences is not a given and can be developed in many different ways. It is up to the artist to define the point and way in which an encounter is created between the work and the audience.

This challenge is at the heart of writing for public space and is a central component of the artistic work.

Lesson 1: Audiences at the heart of artistic creation

Audiences are at the heart of artistic creation. In a traditional theatre setting, the role of audience members is assigned and rarely challenged. However, in public space, it needs to be created and is a separate component of the artistic writing process.

Art in public space is characterised by the fact that there are no set rules governing audience behaviour. In fact, various disturbances can interrupt or taint their relationship with the work. The first challenge is therefore to capture and maintain the audience's attention. Spectators are free to move, leave and express themselves, which means that the artist needs to create and manage a lot of unpredictable aspects. Sometimes the audience is not informed, especially when the work interrupts everyday life without advance warning. The people confronted with the work may therefore be surprised by art popping up at a time and in a place where they weren't expecting.

Free access to artistic works is a dominant characteristic in art in public space and ensuring that art can be accessed by all is a clear goal for artists, organisers and public authorities. It means that cultural and artistic events in public space can reach more diverse audiences than other forms of live performance. Street art professionals therefore often refer to audiences in the plural, to express the socio-

cultural and age diversity of the people targeted by their work.

The relationship with audiences sometimes involves embarking participating spectators in an unexpected sensory motor experience. In this case, we talk about **experiential works**, where the unique experience is an integral part of the artistic project. Sometimes, the experience constitutes the full work itself.

Active audience participation is a common component of art in public space, where the possibility of breaking the barrier with the audience drives artists to develop varying forms of involvement. Some works are entirely based on audience participation. Breaking the symbolic barrier between actors and spectators is the idea behind the portmanteau "*spect-actors*", which describes spectators as fully involved actors in the work. Creating an appropriate relationship that respects the integrity and free will of audiences is the basis behind this type of project.

The various possibilities for audience relationships does not mean that outreach work is not required before or after the artistic action. This work has multiple goals, such as to locally prepare for an artistic intervention, support an artistic work, find local participants or people willing to tell their stories, provide communication about an upcoming event or assist in the presentation of an artistic work. Various



people can be involved in this outreach, starting with cultural outreach staff, but also the artists or technicians in contact with the local population or

municipal services. This work requires strong collaboration between the organiser and artist.

Lesson 2: Performance formats

In the traditional performance configuration, a symbolic **fourth wall** separates the actors from the audience. This configuration is culturally ingrained and spectators naturally position themselves in front of the stage area, marked by a simple visual line.

However, artists can challenge and alter the rules, breaking them for staging purposes. The lesson provides two examples where performances are taken to unexpected locations.

An essential part of managing audiences is determining the show's audience capacity. Identifying the maximum capacity takes security and reception quality into consideration. Managing audience capacity is no easy feat for organisers and artists but is a determining factor in a successful performance. The ticketing or booking system can ensure that audience capacity is not exceeded.

The ways in which the audience is addressed shape the spectator experience throughout the performance. This experience is determined by the content and structure of the work, the performance quality and the way the audience is spoken to and drawn in by their senses, emotions and imagination.

Walking is a specific performance format where the audience travels and moves through a changing decor, offering perspectives and situations that enrich the experience by multiplying the possibilities of creating parallels between the message and the landscape. It is a demanding process, where maintaining the dramatic tension and offering perspectives that everyone can see are significant challenges for artists and the audience.

Lesson 3: From cultural action to local projects

Although performances are the most visible form of art in public space, other more underground formats exist, consisting of local projects in contact with residents.

Cultural action projects associated with a performance or the development of an amateur artistic practice target diverse social groups, often cut-off from cultural activities and events. These include school children, the elderly and rural communities, etc. These actions encompass a range of diverse experiences that use art to create local encounters with people.

Participatory projects are another form of encounter based on the principle of **doing or creating together**, triggering a community of action that uses forms of solidarity between people who do not necessarily mix on a regular basis. Participatory projects can be broken down into two types of projects:

- Specific creations are projects commissioned from artists that require the participation of volunteers
- **"Protocol creations"** are the most common

and are based on a specific outline that the artist adapts with the help of local participants involved in bringing the project to life.

The notion of **local projects** has become popular in art in public space over the last several years. These artistic creations are based on a close relationship with the location, landscapes or the political or social context. The relationship with local residents is an intrinsic part of these projects, which recognise and bring legitimacy to the value of local culture.

One characteristic of these local projects is the long-term investment they require. Artists need to immerse themselves in the community for a long period of time to gain the acceptance of the locals and draw on the rich inspiration and poetic material of the place.