Week 4
The place of audiences

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Introduction

Hi everyone, we have now reached our 4th and final week of this MOOC.

In the previous lessons, you have looked at the issues around dramaturgy and space. Now we're going to explore another fundamental theme: the relationship with the audience. This is a key issue in creation in public space, space that belongs to the public or audience. It is a constant concern for artists and programmers. What place should be given to the audience? How do we capture their attention? How do we involve them? How do we manage or guide their movements? How can we create despite their sometimes-unpredictable behavior? We will use various examples to answer these questions.

As usual, this theme will be broken down into three lessons:

We will start by tackling 5 issues that structure the relationship with audiences in public art and influence the reception of artistic works: ways of capturing an audience's attention, free entry, the concept of experience and the challenges of participation and artistic outreach…
The second lesson explores concrete processes for staging the audience's place in both stationary or walking performances. We will see how different configurations can shape the audience experience.
The third lesson discusses the notions of cultural action and local arts projects, which are a different way of meeting audiences, for both artists and spectators.

So, ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats… And have a great week!

Lesson 1 - Audiences at the heart of artistic creation

1. Capturing audience attention

Public art leaves incredible space for invention, with endless possibilities. But it must take into account the constraints and contexts that influence the work. Choosing to use public space, with its history or sometimes very specific uses, is about willingly surprising the audience, who is not always forewarned. This involves thinking through and anticipating the place of audiences in the performance. Anything is possible and artists have invented countless ways of creating with audiences.

The issue of how to communicate with audiences always comes up in very different ways: a lone audience member guided through the city with a mobile phone cannot be managed in the same way as a group of around twenty people invited to sleep in the forest…

Whatever the format, the artist's challenge is to succeed in capturing and maintaining the audience's attention for as long as possible. Bringing a performance into an unconventional environment requires artists to expect the unexpected.
In a performance hall, the behaviour of audiences is established and generally doesn't change. But this clearly varies more in the public space: some audiences are very undisciplined, others get involved more easily; those used to walking theatre know what attitude to adopt, but others require more guidance. During a performance, artists will need to manage and adapt to disturbances or unexpected reactions without interfering with the performance. Artists in public space are constantly on the alert.

2. Free entry

With art in public space, professionals tend to use the term audiences in the plural. Use of the plural demonstrates a goal which is almost central to the entire sector: to reach a large and varied audience. The tradition of free entry illustrates this constant concern. Most performances or installations in public space are totally open and free of charge.
For artists, programmers, festival directors and elected officials, this free access to artistic production is a political act in itself. It is a way of opening up these practices to people who do not traditionally gravitate towards art: either for economic reasons or because they do not have the socio-cultural and symbolic keys they need to engage with the theatre.

Audience surveys at street art festivals show that this is an effective strategy. They have more varied audiences than other forms of live performance. Dance and jazz audiences often have fairly similar socio-professional or age profiles. Street festivals succeed in bringing together people from varied social, economic and cultural backgrounds. This is even more true when artists or programmers choose to locate their performances in working class neighbourhoods.

3. The concept of experience

The term "experience" is often used in art in public space. The freedom of public space makes it possible to come up with original situations that would be almost impossible to reproduce in theatres or halls.
Similarly, audience members perceive the works in line with their sensitivity or background: a single situation can therefore be experienced very differently and uniquely by two different members of the audience. This concept of experience is very widespread in Western societies. The term experiential paradigm shows to what extent the concept has entered into our everyday language.
Brands now sell their products by promoting experiences: drive this car and you will experience the joy and freedom of wide-open spaces; use this smartphone to unleash your inner creativity.

Recent mobile technology development has reinforced this paradigm with an increasing focus on the user experience. Artists are part of the world around them and are certainly influenced by this omnipresent focus on experience, as are audiences, who manifest an interest in sensory situations that draw them into the action. This results in artistic creations that engage audiences' bodies and all of their senses. For example, they are blindfolded, asked to be silent or to block their ears. This immerses them in a specific environment or allows them to take part in a collaborative experience.

4. Participation

The question of audience participation is raised whenever artists breach the barrier between the performance space and audience space. This is obviously not mandatory, and many shows expect nothing from the audience apart from their presence alongside the artists.

The level of participation therefore varies considerably from one performance to another. For example, in walking performances, the entire performance depends on the audience moving along and following the action. At the far end of the scale, some artists create shows entirely based on audience participation.

This is the case for Catalan author and director Roger Bernat. In *Domini Public,* audience members with headphones are asked questions on their personal tastes, and their marital and employment status. They are grouped with people who give similar answers. The answers given by others are revealed, and complicity develops between audience members throughout the performance. Bernat uses this to question social diversity, free will and democracy. The series of questions and development of situations make the audience ask questions and can generate uneasiness: do I have to do what I'm told? Do I have to because it's a show? Can I disobey? The idea of obeying instructions is at the heart of this performance. It could not exist without audience participation - as there are no other actors on the stage. Some audience members refuse to join in - which is also a way of participating.

This type of situation clearly raises a number of ethical questions: the audience must not be used, manipulated or exposed without having given consent. What might seem trivial to the artist (e.g. being physically touched) might not be from the spectator's perspective. Never forget that audience members are not necessarily accomplices and that they are clearly entitled to exercise their own free will. It is the artist's role to develop bonds and form a proper and appropriate relationship with the audience. This is achieved through scenography, staging and the way in which the audience is addressed.

5. The need for outreach

Simply presenting art in public space is no magic formula for reaching the residents of a community.
This is the purpose of "outreach programmes", which include preparation and awareness-raising before a project. This is a crucial step, as is events communication.

You might think that performing in public space naturally forges a direct contact with the community. But actually, this is not straightforward. Works are received relatively naturally in a performance hall, but this has to be developed for art in public space.
Outreach involves laying the groundwork for a performance. It creates the conditions for an encounter between a work and audiences. Outreach is provided by various people: the technical teams who install the work, dedicated "public relations officers", and also often the artists themselves. Particularly with participatory formats, intense preparation is often required before the performance.

This concept of outreach also covers communication actions used to advertise and present the performance. This aspect is often managed by the organisers. They publish a programme, which is given to shopkeepers and individuals, and shared on social media. They inform their local partners, such as schools and social centres. This work is vital and has a major impact on the number and type of people who will attend the performance.

Despite preconceptions, performances in public space do not always target everyone. Not all themes or formats are suitable for families. A project can target children, adults, the elderly, or even clearly defined parts of the population. Organisers have to select the best ways of informing the public of the type of performance in their communication. They do this in collaboration with the artistic team. Basic information to communicate includes the date, time and place, whether or not there are a limited number of tickets, whether you need to book and whether it is a walking or stationary performance.

Outreach is often key before an event. If necessary, it can be used to recruit volunteers or participants. It is important to explain the context and reasons for their participation in order to ensure full engagement. Outreach is also vital for performances that might disrupt daily life or enter into people's homes.

For example, in Pierre Sauvageot's performance, *Grand Ensemble*, a symphonic orchestra sets up on the balconies of an entire apartment block and plays a symphony to the audience below. This performance requires significant outreach:
the symphony is designed as a dialogue between the orchestra and apartment block. The score includes sounds from the building, such as voices, doors slamming, telephones ringing and stories from residents. The first step in outreach is therefore to collect these sounds.
The score is then played from around forty balconies in the same apartment building. Teams therefore need to meet with all residents to convince them to let the musicians use their private balcony for rehearsals and the performance. The performance could not take place without these two vital outreach steps. This is also one of the strengths of the performance, which brings together most residents of an apartment building on the same day.

British artist Seth Honnor's project *PIG* illustrates the roles of communication and outreach. The project is simple. A large transparent piggy bank is placed in a busy public space. Inside is a sign that reads: "This is a community fund. You can contribute to it if you like. When you've agreed how to spend it you can open me and spend it". The artist insists on the importance of surprise: this pig is not intended as an artistic object for passers-by, but as a means of creating space for free will in public space. It is there to challenge and awaken the imaginary community of passers-by.
The programmer is therefore asked to limit project communication as far as possible so that the performance can stand alone. Similarly, the artist refuses any outreach to organise discussion around how the money is used. He claims that this would directly nullify the audience empowerment enabled through the work.

Lesson 2 - Performance formats

1. The role of audiences in conventional configurations

Performance formats aren't the only way of communicating with audiences. However, most artistic projects take the form of a performance: so to say, artists present a work to the audience, in a fixed time and place. We've already covered the range of different staging configurations. We've gone through walking or stationary performances, through front-facing or other staging. But the configuration isn't all there is to it. It is also interesting to explore the different ways artists relate to the audience in performances. Indeed, it's up to the artists to guide the audience. They have to show them where they need to be, how to get there and how to take their place in the artistic creation. They have to put themselves in the audience's shoes to plan ahead and work with their perceptions of the environment.

The choice of staging directly impacts the audience's behaviour and how they receive the performance. Each kind of staging configuration has its own way of capturing the audience's attention.

Typically, the audience gathers at the venue. A stage, a line on the ground, or the artists themselves help the audience understand the setting and find the best spot to watch from. Interestingly, even in unconventional venues, the audience tends to conduct itself the same way as in a theatre: they follow the fourth wall rule, with artists on one side, and the audience on the other. It's therefore easy for the artist to arrange the audience in a front-facing, semi-circle or circular position.

For example: the mentalist show *L'Homme Cornu* - The Horned Man in English - by Flemish artist Kurt Demey, is performed in a front-facing configuration. It can be adapted to different venues, without impacting the performance itself. It's insinuated from the start that the

audience is going to sit to watch the show. And even when the artist invites audience members to come and join him during the show, the other members of the audience follow the rule and remain seated. They immediately understand that you can only cross the invisible line separating the audience from the artist if you are invited to do so. Only the artist himself initiates and controls how this invisible line is crossed, by letting specific audience members cross it for a restricted period of

2. Subverting the rules

Any rule can be broken, played with and subverted – either by artists or by audiences. Here are a couple of examples:

In 2006, with *Beaucoup de bruit pour rien*, the artists of French company 26,000 couverts invited a theatre audience to watch a performance of the Shakespeare play Much Ado About Nothing. But a technical problem holds up the beginning of the performance…which then never actually takes place! The audience expects a regular play but ends up actually trapped in a queue that is the actual location of the production. This break from the conventional rules is so radical that some audience members don't understand what's going on and leave the show, frustrated that they haven't been able to watch the play! For most of the audience, though, the situation becomes comical, and gets a lot of laughs.

In 1998, with *Ville invisible* (Invisible City), the Théâtre de l'Arpenteur also subverted audience expectations. The show was advertised as a performance by the theatre, but the organisers announce at the entrance that due to a technical problem, the show will actually be held in another theatre. Fake taxis, driven by actors-turned-drivers, turn up to pick up the audience members. They start a conversation, take different routes and tell stories about the city as it settles in for the night, chatting away about what's going on beyond the closed curtains. Meanwhile, the switchboard of the imaginary taxi company keeps putting out alerts: Calling 85, 32 and 28, please come back to headquarters immediately. The taxis drop off their passengers, promise to return, and disappear. The passengers' conversations make up the rest of this theatre-less and actor-less play in a story where you are the hero.

3. Controlling audience numbers

By now, you've probably understood the life-size role-playing game that takes place between artists and the audience. On one hand, artists try to define where the audience can be, and what they should see from there. On another hand, each audience member tries to find the best possible spot to watch the show. And sometimes, ruins the artist's plans.
But there are some simple ways of controlling an audience. One of these is to define a maximal number of public members.

In project L'Homme Cornu", the horned man in English, which we've already talked about in a previous lesson, the setting is thought for a small audience, of no more than a few hundred. This creates physical proximity and intimacy. The actor is also equipped with a microphone, which lets him vary the intensity of his voice, even whispering sometimes. This would be impossible in a public space without amplification sound system. The presence of a musician also participates in creating a very special atmosphere: in this case, the actor doesn't need a lot more of staging effects to convey his world and immerse the audience in it.

This example shows that even an apparently simple front-facing configuration is based on audience relationship choices: chosen audience numbers, controlling the performance areas and the movement of artists and audience between them, and a specific approach to communicating with the audience. All these choices combine to fully captivate the audience's attention. And that's a key for mental magic!

More generally, limiting audience numbers is a constant headache for artists and organisers. A performance meant for 300 people will suffer if 500 for instance show up, as people won't be able to see as well. How can we control that? Each case is different, but there is always a balance to find between staging tricks, and how much the event is promoted. When shows are created for a very small audience, the right balance is more difficult to find. If you advertise on the performance too much, too many people will attend, and the project will be performed in bad conditions. If you offer a free ticket, often people won't show up. This can in turn, sometimes, affect the performance as well. Sometimes, for small numbers, a ticket price may be introduced to encourage the audience members to attend. In addition, creating a show for a small audience can generate gaps between artists' desire and producers' constraints. Indeed for producers, production costs are too high with respect to a small public. This can be another reason why to introduce paid tickets.

As a conclusion, you will remember that the audience number is a sensitive issue that needs a lot of planning.

4. Communication with the audience

In public space physical proximity and the use of digital or mobile technologies make it possible to give audiences powerful physical and psychological experiences. They can be thought-provoking, and create shock, wonder, surprise, or entertainment. It's important to determine the emotions that the audience is likely to feel. We'll call these emotions the audience experience. The challenge for the artist is to ensure they change according to his overall work.

We can say there is a general dramaturgy and a specific dramaturgy associated with communicating with the audience. These two approaches need to be thought through together. It can be useful to think of the audience experience as taking the audience member from point A to point B. Points A and B are not necessarily referring to 2 different positions in space, or to the beginning and the end of a narration. They can also play out on a symbolic level. Some artistic creations are built essentially on the experience they give to their audience. Most of the time, in some way, the intimate, sometimes organic experience aims to give the audience a new look on certain social themes.

This is the case with project *Walking: Holding* by British artist Rosana Cade. She invites participants to take a walk, holding hands with a local resident who's been given instructions beforehand. The residents all belong to different ethnic, social or sexual orientation communities. Rosana Cade uses this performance to question our ability to accept difference by living it directly. The audience members suddenly experience for themselves the gazes that these local residents usually get. Cade offers a simple but powerful relational experiment. Walking hand in hand with a stranger in public is full of meaning: by staging apparent intimacy, she explores the barrier between what is public and private, for all the world to see. There is a clear political dimension to *Walking: Holding*. Rosana Cade's intention is to provoke reflection in the participant, in the people who allow their identity to be used as a platform, and in passers-by who become unwitting, but central participants.

It should be noted that this kind of artistic creation that targets a single participant at a time has developed significantly since the early 2000s. Some of these productions use digital and mobile technologies

(including headphones, radio, smartphones, etc). They somewhat share the same kind of aesthetic, because they take place in urban fabric without affecting it, becoming immersed, sometimes almost invisible, in the flow of the city.

5. The example of walking creations

Walking creations are used to explore and discover or rediscover a location and offer a shared journey for both artists and audiences. But despite appearances, this is a complex format in terms of the relationship with the audience. How can you be sure that your audience will go to the right spot? Will they follow along like in a parade? How do you help them understand that they can mix with the artists? Or, how do you keep them at a distance for aesthetic or safety reasons?

During the writing and site-visit, the position of the audience needs to be a major focus. The same questions apply to each stage of the walking creation: where will the audience be positioned? How can we ensure that they will be able to see?

The artist needs to combine two points of view: the ideal perspective they have of their work, and the idealised perspective that they have of the audience and the position they are going to take. In walking creations, audiences can also be quite undisciplined, they walk too slowly or too fast…and there's a risk of them getting lost and falling out of the performance or getting ahead of the actors. The artist needs to be in the habit of looking for the right place.

This idealised viewpoint is what we call the "oeil du Prince", which means prince's eye. In Italian-style theatres, it was the name given to the front-row middle seat on the first balcony, that gave the best view of the stage. But in public space, there is no prince's eye. The audience can see the performance from various points of view, and it is up to the artist to ensure that things make sense from every perspective. They need to pay attention to both audience and unwitting onlookers: for example, residents watching from their windows or passers-by who walk through the performance.

In *Long Ma*, one of the many walking creations of French company La Machine, a giant dragon is the focus of attention. However, the audience doesn't necessarily focus on it the whole time. They can look at their surroundings, try to get closer or remain at a distance. In this case, the challenge for the artist is to maintain enough theatrical intensity and powerful imagery to keep the audience captivated and following the walk. One of the efficient techniques for this is to place actors in the middle of the audience. In particular at the end of the procession where the crowd is expected to start losing their focus on the play. These actors refocus attention and play a crucial role in reconnecting the audience with the artistic creation.

Lesson 3 - From cultural actions to contextual projects

1. Cultural action projects

Shows are the most visible artistic production in public space. But art is not limited to performance formats. The way artists can work closely with communities across a broad variety of territories makes them leading candidates for implementing cultural action projects. Cultural action includes a huge variety of projects and is

difficult to define in simple terms. In its broadest sense, it includes all projects aimed at raising public awareness of an artistic practice or show attendance.
Whether working with secondary school children, the elderly, or a rural village community, it is vital to consider how to communicate with the target audience in this type of project: knowing how to get audiences on board is a real art form.
Cultural action mostly involves social and cultural mechanisms and does not involve any artistic goals. There are a huge number of mechanisms in France. But when used by artists, they can take on an additional dimension with real artistic scope.
In street arts, the relationship with the audience is so important that projects have long included forms of cultural action, without identifying them as such. The development of more structured cultural action specifically for art in public space is more recent. Over the past fifteen years, many companies and centres for artistic creation have developed cultural action mechanisms.

They generally use traditional mechanisms, such as meetings with artists in residence, artist residencies in schools and practical arts workshops. Even when working in traditional formats, artists and public space operators bring a unique approach to their projects and aesthetics.
For example, school residencies can work in outdoor spaces, practical arts workshops can be held outside dedicated venues, and residency outputs can take place in the street where shows are performed. Once again, it is a question of playing with, adapting and distorting constraints and frameworks.

2. Audience participation

Cultural action mechanisms mainly seek to create new ways of meeting with local residents. In some cases, they involve them in artistic creation. Managing participation is therefore an important key to a successful project. But it is a challenge that can be complex: target audiences are often isolated from culture and the arts. They therefore need to be met with on other ground. Artists need to understand the context in which they are working and come up with a project that makes sense to all participants. This is the only way to turn them into accomplices and real creative partners.

The *Fleeting City* (*villes éphémères*) project by French visual artist Olivier Grossetête is a successful example of this. It asks residents to help recreate monumental buildings, using just cardboard and tape. In each city, the construction project is selected in line with local history and culture, and can include houses, towers, bridges, etc. The plans are drawn up by the artist, in accordance with the organisers. The power of the project is the collective nature of the action. Residents follow precise instructions to help make the boxes. Lots of people can take part thanks to the fun and simple work required. It also brings together communities that would not usually interact. The assembly and collective destruction are especially moving rituals. People have to work together to lift the heavy structures under construction. The project is also of symbolic importance: for once it is residents who build their city. In some ways, this project gives them an active role in the architecture of their living spaces. Choosing to showcase the ordinary and everyday is an artistic, poetical and also political act
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3. Different types of project

There are two main types of participatory projects:

Specific creations are often commissioned from an artist. The commission may have a very strict or looser framework, but resident participation is generally central. However, it remains unpredictable and it is not unheard of for artists to take over when participant contribution is too weak. These creations have an especially strong impact on those involved and the process is sometimes more important than the end result.

Protocol creations are the most common. Artists produce an outline or canvas that can be transposed and adapted to each location, depending on the participants. The concept of protocol highlights the artist's need to precisely and formally manage participation. This ensures the best compliance with their artistic approach.

The creation *Les Veilleurs* by choreographer Joanne Leighton is a unique project and a good example of the concept of individual participation. It was initially created solely for the city of Belfort in France. It caught the eye of the operators, who succeeded in convincing Leighton to rework it for other cities. The principle is simple: a temporary wooden box with glass windows is installed at a high point in the city for 365 days, and a man or woman watch over their city from sunrise until sunset.
Leighton's only condition, which underpins the entire project, is that the chain remains unbroken throughout the year. Someone must always be in the box from sunrise to sunset.
This is an exceptional length of time. In every city, the artist works closely with the operator to organise specific opportunities to discuss and meet with the resident one-day watchmen and women in order to create a potentially lasting community. The author uses *Les Veilleurs* to challenge the relationship we each have with our city, the ancestral notion of keeping watch and the quality of presence, which characterises the state of watchfulness in which those involved in the adventure are immersed.

4. Drawing inspiration from the local context

Over the past 20 years, local context has become a key concept for art in public space. Artistic creation was previously restricted to shows touring from one festival to another and has gradually extended to include the places, landscapes and social or political context in which they are performed. For programmers, this involves greater consideration of the environment in which the programme is presented. For artists, the challenge is to build ties with the audience and stop considering their work without taking into account context.
The contextual dimension is therefore essential in these projects. This does not necessarily mean that they are unique creations specifically created for a place or community. Artists can work with a protocol that they adapt. Their approach must resonate with the context and community to make the proposal relevant and appropriate.

These kinds of creations can take very different forms: artistic residencies, creation of artistic objects, comic strip or book publications, etc. The notion of public space lies in the bond created between the artist and the territory and in the spaces for encountering users.

This is true of *Temples* by artist David Best, presented in Derry, Londonderry. In this Northern Irish city, which has been profoundly scarred by the troubles and community divisions, the artist uses the practice of the Burning Man to question its meaning. David Best worked with residents to design and build a carved wood temple. People left messages in the temple, such as a memory, a name, a hope or aspiration. In Derry, thousands of residents visited the *Temple*, some several times, to leave a thought, memory or tribute, and to read what others had written. In this unique historical and cultural context, David Best's *Temple* took on a particularly strong political dimension, transcending communities and differences. The Burning Man ritual was especially

meaningful to all those who had left personal thoughts or wishes in the *Temple*. On a larger scale, it symbolised the population's ability to achieve unity, and to break free from their differences and troubled past.

5. Working in the long term

Let's continue our exploration of contextual projects. One key characteristic is their long-term nature.
It takes time to build ties between a project and its environment, social context and the people involved. These processes often take place over several months. Artists or companies take up residencies and fully immerse themselves in the environment. Although some contextual projects are not repeated, other projects may become longer term.

This is true of *GR2013*, created by the Bureau des Guides in Marseille, France. It started in 2013 when a group of walking artists created a huge hiking trail called *GR2013*. This trail is unique as it crosses 38 municipalities around Marseille, varying between natural, urban and suburban landscapes. The entire trail circuit is 365 kilometres long.

Its success in 2013 led to the artists creating an association, the Bureau des Guides. They now organise walks based on the initial trail. They also create made-to-measure trails, organise events and work with residents, groups and local authorities. Other actions include coordinating conferences and exhibitions.
This example shows how a project can bring together local development, tourism activities and artistic creation. It is representative of a new generation of projects, in which artists question the relationship between residents and their territory and propose new ways of discovering a territory. It also shows that contextual projects are more than just artistic actions. They generally involve hybrid approaches, led by artists and operators or cultural organisations.