

# **DEFENDING CULTURE DIFFERENTLY: METHODS FOR TOMORROW**

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# Introduction

## Why this book?

This book, based on my regular posts on my website, is addressed to those who work daily in the French cultural sector and who, faced with the profound transformations underway, are questioning the paths to its renewal. Directors of cultural organizations, heads of cultural action in local authorities, mediators, project managers, artists engaged in participatory approaches, trainers, students in cultural policy: you will find here analyses and methods forged in the field, in confrontation with the multiple realities of cultural action, from my own subjective vantage point.

This book is also addressed to elected officials, mayors, deputy mayors for culture, departmental and regional councillors, members of parliament, who bear political responsibility for cultural choices in their territories. For to defend culture against budgetary arbitrations and challenges to its legitimacy, one must first be able to clearly articulate its democratic role. The following pages offer, I hope, keys to understanding and arguments grounded in experience to articulate, beyond conventional discourse, what culture concretely brings to the democratic life of a territory and why its public funding constitutes an investment in social cohesion and the emancipation of citizens.

This book is neither a theoretical manual nor a collection of recipes. It emerges from more than thirty years of multidisciplinary practice—artistic creation, professional training, cultural mediation, strategic support for institutions and local authorities—which have pro-

vided me with a privileged observatory, necessarily subjective, but anchored in the thickness of reality. From the first experiments in participatory cinema to the most recent digital initiatives, from supporting small associations to missions with major national institutions, my trajectory allows me, I hope, to draw an embodied understanding of the dynamics at work in the cultural sector.

The observation that underlies this work is widely shared: the French cultural sector is undergoing a profound crisis. This crisis cannot, in my view, be reduced to budgetary tensions, however real they may be. It touches on the very legitimacy of public cultural action, whose qualification as “non-essential” during the Covid-19 crisis revealed its great fragility, challenged as it is by the explosion of cultural practices via digital platforms, experiencing a crisis of meaning, and hampered by recurring difficulties in building cross-sectoral cooperation and honestly evaluating its own effects. The challenge, in my opinion, is no longer simply to defend what exists, but to rebuild the principles and methods of cultural action so that it regains its democratic relevance. And this is, I believe, the best thing one can do during a crisis.

For it is indeed democracy that is at stake. If I defend with conviction a cultural sector funded by taxpayers’ money, it is not out of corporatism, nor in defense of “creation” (which can very well exist free of any institutional framework), but because I am convinced that this sector carries possibilities for emancipation, for the development of freedoms and capacities for action that private actors, subject to the logic of profitability and attention capture, cannot offer in the same way. This conviction is not naive: it is accompanied by a demand for clear-sightedness about our own contradictions, about the systems of domination that we often

perpetuate despite ourselves and unconsciously, and about the gap between our discourse and our practices.

This book therefore proposes a dual movement. First, a critical analysis of the current state of the sector: its history, its ideological foundations, its blind spots, its structural fragilities. Then, and above all, concrete methods for acting differently, for building authentic connections with audiences, for evaluating our actions with rigor and honesty, for genuinely cooperating between actors and across disciplines, for integrating digital transformations without losing our sovereignty, for reinventing our professional practices in light of cultural rights.

These methods are not “models” to be applied. They are tools to be adapted, proposals to be tested, paths to be explored according to the contexts and singularities of each territory, each socio-cultural environment, each team, each project. They have all been experimented with, refined, sometimes abandoned then taken up again in other forms. Their value lies precisely in this experimental grounding: they have proven themselves not in the abstraction of principles, but in the roughness of real situations.

The ambition of this book is both modest and ambitious: to contribute to making the French public cultural sector stronger tomorrow than it is today. Stronger not in the sense of a defensive retreat to protect existing achievements, but in the sense of a renewed capacity to fulfill its democratic mission: enabling everyone to exercise their cultural rights, to participate in the cultural life of the community, to contribute to the elaboration of our shared narratives. This sustainability requires, I believe, a fairly profound transformation of our ways of thinking and act-

ing. It also requires the generous sharing of what works, in the hope that others will take it up, transform it, and enrich it.

My voice is personal, subjective, free, not bound to any institution or funding sources, and it can sometimes be partial. And it is precisely, it seems to me, the richness of our democratic organization to consider that disagreement and argumentation are productive of mutual enrichment, in respect for the diversity of cultures, experiences, and opinions. I do not believe that I am right, but I am convinced that we can mutually enrich one another through our situated knowledge.



# Benoît Labourdette

Benoît Labourdette is a consultant in cultural policies and innovation, an independent researcher, educator, and cultural engineer. He is also an artist, filmmaker, and president of the Benoît Labourdette production agency, which creates cultural and digital experiences and develops creative engineering.

For over 30 years, he has supported cultural institutions, local authorities, and popular education organizations in their cultural and social innovation strategies, with a focus on cultural rights. Among other initiatives, he founded the “Pocket Films Festival” with the Forum des images in 2005, co-founded the “Fête du court métrage” (Short Film Festival) with the CNC in 2011, designed the collaborative project “Par ma fenêtre” (From My Window) during the Covid-19 crisis in 2020, etc. His expertise focuses on cultural mediation, participatory programs, and building connections between audiences and cultural offerings.

His approach is grounded in a critical analysis of the cultural sector, which he observes in depth through his diverse practices. He develops support methodologies to strengthen the antifragility of cultural projects in the face of societal and digital transformations. He works in dialogue with the fields of artistic creation, cultural action, popular education, and public policy, through a resolutely multidisciplinary and horizontal approach.

He leads professional and university training programs on digital strategies for the cultural sector, participatory project engineering, and the challenges of cultural democracy in the platform era. He explores new forms of cultural participation linked to technolog-

ical innovations (digital interactivity, mobile phones, social networks, artificial intelligence...) and their implications for cultural policies. Through consulting and professional training, he supports businesses, institutions, and local authorities in their cultural innovation strategies, particularly regarding youth, drawing on cultural rights and digital transformations. He also supervises the development of creative and collaborative web platforms. He shares numerous resources on his website [www.benoitlabourdette.com](http://www.benoitlabourdette.com)



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The PDF version of this book is interactive, making it easier to use as a working tool. In the table of contents, the titles are clickable and take you directly to the chapters and sections of the book. I suggest you read it in parts and in no particular order, according to your needs!

Within the chapters, the header and footer are also clickable, allowing you to immediately return to the table of contents or its sections.

## **PART I - FUNDAMENTALS: RETHINKING THE CULTURAL CONNECTION**

Cette première partie pose les bases conceptuelles et pratiques de tout ce qui suivra. Elle part d'un constat simple mais aux grandes conséquences : la fréquentation culturelle ne dépend pas de la communication mais du lien tissé entre les personnes et les propositions.

### **CHAPTER 1: THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AUDIENCE**

Pourquoi certaines propositions culturelles mobilisent-elles des foules tandis que d'autres, pourtant de grande qualité, peinent à trouver leur public ?

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#### **The artistic relationship with the audience**

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#### **The Accelerated Eye**

Manifesto for a new ecology of the gaze.

### **CHAPTER 2: LEGITIMACY AND RECOGNITION**

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#### **Legitimizing unfamiliar cultural practices**

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#### **The myth of recognition through cultural democratization**

Rethinking artistic value beyond systems of

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**The Non-Institutional Cultural Institution**

For a citizen reappropriation of creation.

## **PART II - DEMOCRACY AND POWER IN CULTURE**

Cette deuxième partie plonge au cœur des enjeux politiques de l'action culturelle. Elle propose une analyse historique et critique des relations entre culture et pouvoir en France, depuis la création du ministère des Affaires culturelles en 1959 jusqu'aux crises contemporaines qui fragilisent le secteur. Elle ouvre ensuite des perspectives concrètes pour refonder l'action culturelle sur des bases véritablement démocratiques.

### **CHAPTER 3: HISTORY AND CULTURAL POLICY**

Pour comprendre la crise actuelle du secteur culturel français, il faut remonter à ses origines et en examiner les fondements sans complaisance.

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From 1959 to 2025, history repeats itself... in reverse.

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From Louis XIV to Rachida Dati: anatomy of a rupture between subsidized culture and political legitimacy.

#### **Culture and politics: the forgotten lesson of sanitary totalitarianism**

Reflections on the submission of the cultural sector in the face of authority.

### **CHAPTER 4: TOWARDS CULTURAL DEMOCRACY**

Après l'analyse historique et critique du chapitre précédent, ce chapitre ouvre des perspectives concrètes de refondation. Il ne s'agit plus seulement de comprendre ce qui ne fonctionne pas, mais de proposer des voies pour faire autrement.

### **Cultural rights and professional postures**

Tools for the concrete implementation of cultural rights.

### **Welcoming radicalized people to cultural venues**

For a truly inclusive cultural democracy.

### **What is a cultural policy? Why is culture political? And what is political in culture?**

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### **Implementing cultural dissemination**

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#### **Social Networks and Cultural Institutions: Breaking the Strategic Deadlock**

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En cette fin d'année 2025, tout juste trois ans après l'arrivée de ChatGPT, il est certain que nous sommes au début d'un changement anthropologique profond et sans retour.

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For a democratic reclaiming of our digital spaces.

**Towards a distributed cultural sector**

Hypotheses on the commons and digital diversity.

**Putting Artificial Intelligence to good use in the cultural sector**

Methodological approaches.

**AI in Service of Democratic Transformation of Cultural Institutions**

Methodological proposal inspired by process management, adapted to cultural sector values.

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Après l'analyse des fondements théoriques, des enjeux de pouvoir et des transformations numériques, cette partie entre dans le concret des pratiques quotidiennes. Comment évaluer nos projets de façon sincère et constructive ? Comment construire des projets robustes face à l'incertitude ? Comment coopérer efficacement malgré la diversité des attentes ?

### **CHAPTER 7: EVALUATION AND INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY**

L'évaluation des projets culturels et la mémoire des institutions sont deux sujets que le secteur préfère généralement éviter. L'évaluation, parce qu'elle fait peur : peur de ce qu'on pourrait découvrir, peur d'être jugé-e, peur de perdre des financements. La mémoire institutionnelle, parce qu'elle semble secondaire face à l'urgence des projets à mener.

#### **Pour une robustesse coopérative des projets culturels**

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**Systematize mutual discoveries between cultural players**

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## **PART V - TOWARDS A RENEWED CULTURAL SECTOR**

Les parties précédentes ont posé le diagnostic d'un secteur en crise, exploré les cadres théoriques d'une refondation, proposé des stratégies numériques et des méthodes concrètes pour transformer les pratiques. Cette dernière partie ouvre sur l'avenir. Non pas un avenir rêvé ou fantasmé, mais un avenir à construire, avec lucidité, à partir de la réalité telle qu'elle est.

### **CHAPTER 10: TRANSFORMATION OF THE SECTOR**

Le secteur culturel français traverse un moment de bascule historique. Les financements publics diminuent, parfois brutalement. Les pratiques culturelles des citoyens ont massivement migré vers le numérique. Les institutions perdent leur pouvoir symbolique de prescription.

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Ce dernier chapitre conclut l'ouvrage par un appel à l'action. Après avoir analysé les transformations profondes du secteur, repensé les rôles des artistes et les formes de la création, il est temps de se projeter dans l'avenir et d'assumer pleinement notre responsabilité citoyenne.

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## **tor as a good corporate citizen**

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# **PART I - FUNDAMENTALS: RETHINKING THE CULTURAL CONNECTION**

This first part lays the conceptual and practical foundations for everything that follows. It starts from a simple observation with considerable consequences: cultural attendance does not depend on communication but on the bond woven between people and cultural offerings. This assertion, which may seem obvious once stated, calls into question a large part of the strategies deployed by cultural institutions to “reach” their audiences.

The first chapter explores this notion of audience relationship in depth. It deconstructs the illusion that better communication would be enough to solve attendance problems. When thousands of tickets sell out in a few minutes for a concert, it is not the quality of the poster that explains this success, but the prior importance that this band holds in the identity construction of spectators. Cultural experience is first and foremost a transformation of the self: “I have been to the Louvre” does not construct the same identity as “I have never been to the Louvre.” Understanding this identity dimension of cultural participation radically changes how we conceive our work.

This chapter offers concrete approaches for cultivating this bond: scheduling formalised moments in our calendars for meeting with local residents, developing embodied and living knowledge rather than abstract audience studies, accepting that this knowledge is never definitively acquired. It also analyses the new forms of artistic relationship emerging on digital platforms, where sincere interaction with connected viewers becomes the very condition for the work’s existence. Finally, it questions the transformations in reception practices—accelerated viewing, channel-hopping, mul-

titasking—not as deteriorations to be deplored, but as skills to be recognised and cultural rights to be respected.

The second chapter directly addresses the question of legitimacy and recognition. Who decides what is culturally valuable? According to what criteria? For whose benefit? These questions, often sidestepped in the cultural sector, are here dealt with head-on. The myth of cultural democratisation—the idea that simply making “high” culture accessible would be enough for audiences to embrace it—is deconstructed for what it is: a meritocratic illusion that masks mechanisms of domination. The hierarchisation of cultural practices is not natural; it is socially constructed and serves particular interests.

This chapter proposes another path: legitimising cultural practices we do not know, without presupposing they are inferior to our own. This stance is not a relativism that would deny all value, but an epistemological humility essential to intercultural dialogue. It is particularly necessary when facing the practices of younger generations, too often judged less noble than those of adults. Cultural history is made of objects that, one day, are not legitimate and that, the next day, become so. The aim is to anticipate these movements and build bridges.

This part will be particularly useful for professionals questioning the deep reasons behind difficulties in mobilising certain audiences, those wishing to rethink their strategy for relating to residents of their territory, or those seeking to move away from a position of superiority to enter into genuine dialogue with the people they address. It

will also interest elected officials who want to understand why cultural democratisation policies have shown their limits and what alternatives are emerging through cultural rights and cultural democracy.

# CHAPTER 1: THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AUDIENCE

Why do some cultural offerings mobilize crowds while others, despite their high quality, struggle to find their audience? The usual answer points to a communication deficit: it would be enough to better publicize the offer for spectators to flock in. This belief, which has significant consequences in budget allocations, deserves to be questioned. For it rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of what actually motivates cultural participation.

This chapter proposes another reading: attendance does not depend on communication but on the bond previously woven between people and the offerings. When thousands of tickets sell out within minutes for a concert, it is not the poster that created this enthusiasm, but the importance that this band has long held in the identity construction of these spectators. Communication was merely the spark; the fuel was already there, patiently accumulated over years of listening, sharing, identification. The challenge for cultural professionals is therefore not to constantly improve their communication tools, but to understand how this bond is built and how to cultivate it.

The first section, “The Connected Audience,” develops this central thesis. It shows that the cultural experience is first and foremost an identity transformation: we do not go to the Louvre to contemplate the Mona Lisa—the imposed distance and limited time in front of the work hardly allow for that—but to live the experience of having approached the world’s most famous

painting and to become, through this practice, a different person from the one who has never been there. This identity dimension of cultural participation has considerable practical consequences. It implies truly going to meet the inhabitants of the territory, knowing and recognizing them, not through abstract audience studies but in a living and continuous relationship. It also implies understanding how certain actors, like Netflix, have made algorithmic connection the very core of their strategy—not to imitate them, but to grasp what they have understood that we are sometimes slow to admit, particularly on the subject of data.

The second section, “The Artistic Relationship to the Audience,” explores the new forms of presence emerging on digital platforms. Based on observations of the Belgian pop duo Candeur Cyclone and their lives on TikTok, it analyzes what makes the specificity of the artistic relationship in a digital context. On a social network, doing a live without establishing genuine exchange with connected viewers leads to immediate failure: without sincere interaction, spectators disconnect at once. The value of the live lies in this “being-there,” in this quality of presence that creates a paradoxical form of public intimacy. But this mastery of digital presence does not guarantee excellence on stage: these are two distinct arts, each with its own requirements, techniques, and pitfalls. One can excel in one while being clumsy in the other, and this observation has profound implications for artist training and for cultural venue programming.

The third section, “The Accelerated Eye,” constitutes a true manifesto for a new ecology of the gaze. It takes a counter-position to the dominant discourse on the supposed attention deficit of younger generations. Speed viewing, this now common practice that allows

consuming content at 1.25x, 1.5x, or even 2x their normal speed, is not a symptom of cultural decline and attention capacity deficit, but the expression of a demand. Spectators who accelerate do not do so uniformly: they sculpt their experience in real time, returning to normal speed when a moment worthy of their attention arises. This practice falls within the framework of cultural rights as stated in the Fribourg Declaration: the right to participate in cultural life on one's own terms, not to be a mere receptacle for the artist's vision but a co-creator of one's aesthetic experience. Artists who take offense at these appropriations and demand that we "respect" their work have not understood what art is—a shared experience; they have only understood what domination is.

This chapter will be particularly useful to professionals seeking to escape the impasse of ever more sophisticated yet still ineffective communication, who wish to concretely rethink their relationship with the inhabitants of their territory, or who wonder how to integrate the transformations of reception practices into their artistic and cultural project. It proposes not recipes, but a change of perspective: understanding that the audience is not a set of "targets" to reach but a fabric of relationships to cultivate, and that this culture of connection is the very condition of our relevance.

# The connected audience

## **Rethinking cultural participation through building connections.**

*Cultural attendance does not depend on communication but on the bond woven between people and cultural offerings. This prior relationship determines the meaning that each person finds in participating.*

## **Beyond the Logic of Supply: Connection as Foundation**

In cultural action, whether subsidized or private, the objective most often remains to reach an audience, meaning that people feel the desire to participate. I am convinced that every cultural offering, in its singularity, has somewhere its natural audience. When attendance is low, the cause does not lie in the inadequacy of the proposed work, but in the absence of a bond woven between this offering and the people it could reach. The challenge therefore consists in establishing this relationship, in building this bridge between the work and those it concerns.

The approach I advocate here goes beyond simple matching between supply and demand. As Antoine Hennion emphasizes in *La Passion musicale* (1993), cultural mediation is not limited to the transmission of content but involves the construction of attachments. It is about working from the outset on the nature of the bond, because cultural participation is above all an identity question: do I have within me a deep connection that makes me recognize this cultural activity as essential to my journey?

Let's take an example: I have adored since my adolescence this music group that I listen to regularly. It symbolizes for me something very important, if not essential, in the construction of my identity. When I learn that this group is performing in a large venue, I rush to buy tickets. In a few minutes, thousands of seats can sell out. A superficial analysis might conclude that it was good communication that generated this turnout. In reality, it is precisely the opposite: communication was only the spark. The true reason

for this mobilization lies in the prior importance of this music group for these people. Rare will be those in the audience who are discovering the artist. The neophytes present will have been convinced by close friends themselves deeply attached to this group, eager to share a common experience.

## **The Illusion of Communication and the Reality of Pre-existing Connection**

We dream that the same process could apply to emerging artists. There must be room for everyone, and renewal nourishes cultural diversity, essential to our creative and human ecosystem. As UNESCO affirms in its Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), this diversity constitutes *“a common heritage of humanity”* that *“should be celebrated and preserved for the benefit of all”*.

The usual reasoning would have it that a lesser-known artist requires more communication to create opportunities for encounter. This logic is also false. Why? Because the bond having not been previously woven, even the most sophisticated, best-targeted communication will run up against this absence of pre-existing connection. This bond must therefore be cultivated by other means.

Professionals know certain proven techniques. An emerging, little-known industrial metal group will be programmed by relying on belonging to the musical

genre to reach fans of this aesthetic. This is the principle of opening acts: established artists host emerging talents from the same musical universe. This practice, which has become almost a dogma in contemporary music programming, does indeed allow bonds to be gradually woven. Spectators, who came for the main artist, discover despite themselves new horizons that can, over time, become significant for them.

## **Cultural Experience as Identity Transformation**

The bond is not built solely in the aesthetic continuity of offerings. We must understand all the motivations that lead people to participate in a cultural offering. Going to a show, visiting a museum or monument is above all a social and identity experience. Why rush to see the Mona Lisa at the Louvre in a crowded room, when exceptionally high-quality digital reproductions are accessible in two clicks on our high-definition screens?

We don't go to the Louvre to contemplate the Mona Lisa, the imposed distance and limited time in front of the work hardly allow it. We go there to live the experience, personal and collective, of having approached the most famous painting in the world. This truth applies to all cultural offerings. I do not deny the possibility of an authentic discovery or aesthetic emotion in a museum. But what gives meaning to our visit is the symbolic importance of this visit and the identity transformation it operates within us.

*"I went to the Louvre"* does not construct the same identity as a person as *"I have never been to the Lou-*

vre". We become different through this practice. And "I went to the Louvre Abu Dhabi" constructs yet another identity facet. I am not speaking here of social benefits or cultural capital in Bourdieu's sense (*La Distinction*, 1979), but of our own identity transformed by a cultural practice. Some people, nevertheless, find no resonance in the Louvre and would see no identity transformation there, even by visiting it, for lack of prior connection with their personal construction. Everyone possesses different identity criteria, which can be enriched, transformed, proposed, and cultivated.

## **Netflix or the Strategy of Algorithmic Connection**

Let's observe how certain contemporary platforms work on this question of connection. Netflix represents much more than a simple distribution channel. The platform constitutes an identified label: one finds there content less conventional than on traditional television, but remarkably scripted and produced. Netflix cultivates the bond constantly through extremely fine analysis of its audiences.

The platform does not follow a simple logic of supply but a strategy of deep connection, intrinsic to its very design. After acquiring the rights to quality series, Netflix analyzed viewing behaviors with surgical precision. Artificial intelligence then guided the production of their first original series, *House of Cards* (2013), whose narrative framework responded precisely to identified expectations. This series, of undeniable qual-

ity, was literally designed to create a connection with what already mattered to many viewers.

This approach (called “data-driven”), although commercially effective, raises questions about cultural standardization and artistic risk-taking. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the importance of knowing those to whom one is addressing oneself, not to flatter them, but to establish an authentic connection.

## **Encounter as Method: Toward Embodied Knowledge of Territory**

For cultural venues anchored in territories, the work consists simply, though this simplicity is very demanding, in going to meet the inhabitants, to know them and recognize them. This is in no way demagoguery but knowledge of the other. Let us honestly ask ourselves: what portion of our professional time do we devote to formal encounters with our audiences? We easily legitimize time spent prospecting at the Avignon Festival or the Cannes Festival to spot new creations. But do we deploy as much effort to meet those to whom we address ourselves?

Without this knowledge, how can we propose works that resonate with what matters to them, that give them a profound reason to travel? It is quite simply impossible. This requirement, for it is one, is neither demagoguery nor the desire to please. It is about knowing those to whom one is addressing oneself. Knowing the other is being connected with them. From this re-

lationship can be born mutual enrichment, surprises, fruitful disagreements, constructive disputes.

Authentic connection allows for risk-taking: *“I trust you, I come to see everything you propose, even what might displease me. It interests me anyway.”* That is the true connection. This connection must be built, activated, cultivated. This responsibility falls to us. We cannot ask people to do this work in our place based on a few posters, however aesthetic they may be, or publications on social networks, however numerous they may be.

## **Cultivating the Relationship: A Living and Continuous Process**

My proposal is simple in its statement and demanding in its implementation: organize in our schedule formalized moments dedicated to encounters with the people to whom we address ourselves. From this regular practice, we will establish deep connections, we will truly know them.

Caution, this knowledge is never definitively acquired. Communities evolve, expectations transform, identities recompose themselves. It is not about commissioning an audience study from an external firm to know once and for all “the audience’s expectations.” I am speaking of exactly the opposite: it is not about knowing the tastes or expectations of an abstract audience, but about connecting with concrete people.

This connection passes between human beings. It is not an online questionnaire to fill out, it is a living rela-

tionship. And digital tools and databases must also accompany us. In a cultural venue, the work is collective, staff changes, we must preserve the memory of relationships woven. We cannot afford to lose the connection. Because if we lose it, we will lose much more: we will lose our place itself. **Without connections, no places.** The formula may seem terse, but it summarizes the fundamental challenge of our cultural action.

As Walter Benjamin already wrote in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), the authentic cultural experience concerns the aura, that “singular weave of space and time” that connects us to the work (with many nuances, which I have documented in the article [The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Mediation](#)). Today, this aura no longer resides only in the uniqueness of the work, but in the quality of the connection woven between people and cultural offerings. It is this connection that we must cultivate, patiently, humbly, but with determination.

# The artistic relationship with the audience

## The paradoxical intimacy of live streams on social media.

*Starting from the Belgian pop duo Candeur Cyclone on social media, I explore the dialectic of contemporary artistic encounters. Questioning our traditional conceptions of performance and connection with the audience.*

## The Singularity of Digital Presence

I discovered Candeur Cyclone through their gentle emergence on social media. This Belgian pop duo offered fragments of songs during live streams on TikTok, setting to music texts sent by their connected fans, among other things. I really appreciated their work, this way they had of talking about youth's malaise while weaving, in the very moment of the live stream, authentic bonds with those watching them. And their artistic universe, meeting with their viewers' texts, had great depth, in this improvisation and dialogue.

This relationship made me understand that on a social network, doing a live stream without establishing a genuine exchange with connected people leads to immediate failure. Without sincere interaction, viewers disconnect instantly. They have no interest in staying connected to a live broadcast if it doesn't offer them what television, with its polished production and mastered narration, already does better. This is why we're often surprised to see, during live streams, people who seem to be doing nothing special, who are simply there. But precisely, the value of the live stream resides in this "being-there," in this quality of presence that Walter Benjamin already called the "aura" of the work, but which takes on a new dimension here.

Yet, it's not enough to simply be present in front of a camera to create a live stream that works. One must inhabit their singularity of presence, develop what I would call a **"poetics of connection"**. Content creators who succeed on social media conduct, consciously or not, deep work: they explore and refine their unique way of being present to their community, creating what Sherry Turkle calls in *Reclaiming Conversa-*

tion a “mediated intimacy” of a new kind.

## **Interaction as Raw Material of the Work**

Each artistic form cultivates its specific quality of presence. A dance performance doesn’t offer the same type of presence as a street performance, a classical music concert differs from a rock concert, which itself has nothing to do with the experience of a nightclub. On social media, this specificity of presence becomes the determining criterion: by connecting to this or that live stream, I know I’m going to encounter a particular human energy, recognizable among all others.

This encounter no longer rests on the usual criteria of artistic production, technical virtuosity, elaborate staging, the fourth wall, but on relational criteria of a different order. As Henry Jenkins observes in *Participatory Culture*, we are witnessing the emergence of a culture where the distinction between producers and consumers fades in favor of permanent co-creation. It’s a relationship to the collective that establishes itself in the intimate, creating this paradox of a “public intimacy” that artists, even the most renowned, often struggle to master when they venture onto social media.

This shared intimacy via screens differs radically from the intimacy experienced with loved ones in daily life. It is mediated, staged, but after all, as Erving Goffman reminds us in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, our social life is already theater. The difference lies in the specific nature of this digital staging, entirely based on connection and interaction. There is no single right way to interact; each creator must find their own, and this way constantly evolves according

to what happens in the community. The interaction device transforms itself, reinvents itself. We are no longer in a simple artistic offering, but in an action that is born from interaction and metamorphoses through it.

## The Paradox of Stage Transposition

Candeur Cyclone's story illustrates well the challenges of this new *economy of presence*. Their notoriety, built on TikTok and other social media, allowed them to give concerts that I could see captured on video. I wasn't physically there, but my impression, perhaps mistaken, but nonetheless very clear, was one of a rather striking disconnect: their quality of artistic relationship with the audience in concert seemed surprisingly poor compared to what they deployed on social media.

Troubling paradox: in these venues were probably the same people who followed them online, those who had desired to deepen the artistic encounter. The themes addressed remained identical, loneliness, malaise, drug problems, the financial precarity of artistic creation. Yet, all the authenticity that characterized their digital presence seemed to have evaporated. Watching these recordings of their stage performances, I perceived like an invisible wall between them and their audience. Their way of singing didn't carry the spectators along, and this could be read in the attitudes, one could feel a distance, palpable.

This observation reveals something fundamental about the nature of performance in the digital age. As Philip Auslander underlines in *Liveness*, the very no-

tion of live presence has been profoundly reconfigured by digital media. **Candeur Cyclone perfectly mastered the art of mediated presence, but found themselves helpless facing traditional physical co-presence. They didn't have the experience of this particular form of artistic relationship with the audience that the physical stage demands, with its codes, its rituals, its different expectations.**

## Two Distinct Arts of Presence

This analysis based on Candeur Cyclone is not meant to suggest that it would be easier to establish an authentic artistic relationship on social media than on a physical stage. Both exercises present considerable difficulties, but of fundamentally different natures. **These are two distinct arts of presence, each with its own requirements, its techniques, its pitfalls.**

Establishing an authentic connection via a screen requires mastering what I would call a “**grammar of digital intimacy**”: knowing how to modulate one's voice for the intimate space of headphones, understanding the rhythms of asynchronous interaction, navigating between spontaneity and performance. Conversely, the physical stage demands an entirely different corporeality, a projection of energy into space, a management of the present collective that responds to other laws. As Peggy Phelan notes in *Unmarked*, live performance implies an “ontology of disappearance,” it exists only in its shared evanescence, while digital performance inscribes itself in a logic of traces, archives, circulation.

One can excel in one of these arts while being clumsy in the other, and this in both directions. I've seen seasoned stage artists lose all their force on social media, unable to find the right tone of this public intimacy. Conversely, brilliant digital creators can reveal themselves to be strangely absent on a physical stage, as if their presence couldn't cross the screen barrier to inhabit real space. This double competence remains rare, and perhaps it isn't necessary. Each medium calls for its own form of excellence, its own poetics of encounter, and perhaps it isn't necessary to want to occupy all spaces.

# The Accelerated Eye

## Manifesto for a new ecology of the gaze.

*What if speed were not the enemy of culture, but the instrument of a new form of sensitive intelligence? A radical reappropriation of our right to the work that disrupts established cultural hierarchies.*

## **Acceleration as an act of creation: moving beyond the myth of attention deficit**

Accelerated viewing, this now common practice, especially among younger generations, which allows consuming content at 1.25x, 1.5x or even 2x their normal speed, is too often reduced to a symptom of our era, supposedly sick with speed and inattention. Young people are accused of constant channel-surfing and inability to concentrate. This reading is, in my view, erroneous: it's perfectly fine to watch films, series, news or other "content" at accelerated speed; it's not an attention deficit, it's on the contrary a demand for quality content. I will try to demonstrate why.

This demand manifests through a subtle and nuanced practice. The viewer who accelerates doesn't do so uniformly, but sculpts their experience in real time: at times, one chooses to return to normal speed when sensing they're facing a masterpiece moment that interests them. It's an intimate navigation through the flow, a dance of the mind with images, where each speed change becomes a critical act, an aesthetic decision. 59% of Gen Z members watch longer versions of videos they discover on short video apps, demonstrating that far from being prisoners of short formats, they navigate with agility between different temporalities. And moreover, within certain videos created by influencers, there can be moments of speech acceleration; they anticipate the acceleration their viewers would make.

Acceleration is therefore not an escape but a quest, that of moments of grace, of flashes that justify return-

ing to “normal” speed. It means recognizing that not every work is uniformly dense, that the rhythm imposed by the creator is not necessarily the optimal rhythm for each viewer. This has, in my opinion, an excellent cognitive impact, contrary to what we’re told. This cognitive agility, this ability to modulate one’s reception according to felt interest, develops a form of critical intelligence that previous generations, subjected to the diktat of the single rhythm of theatrical projection or television broadcast, could not develop in the same way.

## **From passive consumption to co-creation: affirming cultural rights**

This practice of acceleration is part of a broader movement of cultural reappropriation that finds its theoretical foundation in cultural rights, as stated in the Freiburg Declaration of 2007. Cultural rights aim to guarantee everyone the freedom to live their cultural identity, understood as *“the set of cultural references by which a person, alone or in common, defines themselves, constitutes themselves, communicates and intends to be recognized in their dignity.”* Viewing acceleration, in this sense, is not a degradation of the work but a modality of its appropriation, a concrete exercise of the right to *“participate in cultural life”* recognized by Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The viewer who accelerates affirms their right to interact with art on their own terms, to not be a simple re-

ceptacle for the artist's vision, but a co-creator of their aesthetic experience. Article 5 of the Fribourg Declaration guarantees freedom of expression in a particular language and the right to "*pursue a way of life associated with the valorization of one's cultural resources*". By extension, why not recognize the right to pursue a viewing mode associated with the valorization of one's temporal and cognitive resources?

The work is no longer a sacred and untouchable object, but living material, open to reinterpretation, to recreation, and that's for the better. Moreover, the trailer for Jean-Luc Godard's film "Film Socialisme" (2010) was the entire film (1h40) accelerated into 2 minutes, like a thumb to the nose. Jean-Luc Godard would certainly have loved for viewers to be free to watch his films at whatever speed they want. Why would he have loved it? Because he knew that people would see something other than what he had put in himself, and that's precisely the power of art, its recreation by viewers. This vision recognizes that the work only exists fully in its encounter with an active, creative public that appropriates and transforms it.

## **The intelligence of speed: toward a new media literacy**

Viewing acceleration constitutes an act of media and information education through practice. It develops specific cognitive skills: the ability to quickly evaluate the informational density of content, to hierarchize narrative elements, to identify key moments of a work. Nearly two-thirds of Gen Z send messages on social networks about series or video content. During

their viewing, 60% simultaneously talk with their friends. This multitasking practice is not dispersion but an augmentation of the viewing experience through real-time sharing and commentary. On this subject, read the article « [The reinvention of collective cinema sessions on TikTok](#) ».

The viewer becomes their own programmer, their own editor, exercising instant curation of content. This practice is part of a broader media ecosystem where 15-24 year-olds master the art of composing their à la carte usage. They very often watch TV programs on catch-up, notably reality TV shows and suspenseful genres encouraging “binge-watching.” Acceleration is just one tool among others in this toolkit of active reception.

This cognitive agility, far from making us stupid, makes us more intelligent, more conscious of the value of our time and attention. As I wrote in « [Cloud of nuanced screens](#) »: on a phone, one is exposed to a greater diversity of activities, interactions and content, and this at a greater speed. This requires greater cerebral agility, which can be hastily qualified as attention deficit or superficiality. But in purely objective terms, the brain is solicited by more information than before, and it has never been scientifically proven that this reduces intelligence.

## **Artist resistance: between domination and sharing**

Faced with these new practices, the artistic world is quite divided. On one side, creators who are offended, seeing in acceleration a profanation of their work. Net-

flick faced controversy when developing a player allowing accelerated viewing of its programs, accused by certain artists of damaging the integrity of works. On the other, artists who understand that art lives in its reappropriation by the public.

**Artists who want people to “respect” their work haven’t understood what art is, they’ve just understood what domination and vanity are.** The artist who demands a single mode of reception, who refuses any creative appropriation of their work, remains prisoner of an outdated vision of art, based on symbolic domination and not on sharing.

True artistic creation accepts, even celebrates, the multiplicity of readings and appropriations. It recognizes that once delivered to the public, the work no longer belongs to it entirely. It lives its own life in the consciousnesses and practices of those who receive it. Acceleration, deceleration, cutting, remixing, commentary, parody, all these practices participate in the cultural life of the work, in its social and historical circulation, in its real impact on imaginaries.

## **For a cultural policy of trust and accompaniment**

Cultural institutions, inheritors of a vertical and paternalistic model of cultural democratization, struggle to integrate these new practices. They often remain prisoners of a vision where the public must be “educated” in good reception practices, where mediation consists of translating legitimate knowledge for supposedly ignorant publics. Cultural rights must not be thought of as a limit to cultural policies, but as a foundation re-

quiring the implementation of policies that respond to many concerns.

The digital revolution has made us all producers and distributors of content, shifting the center of gravity of culture from institution to individual. Cultural policies must acknowledge this paradigm shift and move from a logic of supply to a logic of accompanying practices. Attentional changes would have a superb impact, as long as people's cultural rights are respected, because they no longer accept being bored by bad shows. I know it's a bit brutal, but I'm pointing to a reality that the cultural sector struggles to admit: a significant part of subsidized artistic production doesn't find its audience not due to lack of education of the latter, but due to lack of real interest in audiences on the part of artists and institutions. There is no address. The real demand is in interest for the people we're addressing. So it's very good that viewers are no longer duped, because they have more knowledge than before.

## **Rethinking mediation: from magistracy to exchange**

This transformation implies radically rethinking cultural mediation. It's no longer about unilateral translation of legitimate knowledge, but about dialogue, sharing experiences and know-how. The observation mission must enable making common culture from different referentials, recognizing the diversity of cultural approaches and practices.

It's about creating spaces of trust where audiences can express their tastes, their rejections, their ways of doing, without being judged. It's by sincerely taking interest in these "uses," including acceleration, zapping, multitasking, that cultural institutions can rebuild links with citizens and reaffirm their relevance. Cultural mediators must learn to value these skills developed by audiences: transmedia navigation, personal curation, creation of interpretation communities.

The challenge is to build a true cultural democracy, where each person is recognized in their capacity to contribute to collective cultural life. For its promoters, cultural rights aim to guarantee everyone the freedom to live their cultural identity, understood as *"the set of cultural references by which a person, alone or in common, defines themselves, constitutes themselves, communicates and intends to be recognized in their dignity"*. This requires a profound questioning of cultural hierarchies and authority postures.

## **The urgency of a new alliance: working with collective intelligence**

The artist, like the institution, must learn to "work with," to compose with collective intelligence, to see in these emerging practices not a threat, but an opportunity to reinvent art and culture. The data is eloquent: More than half of 15-24 year-olds visit video and cinema sites and applications daily (55.9% versus 37.5% for the general population). This generation is not breaking with culture, it's redefining the modali-

ties of access and practice.

Creators who manage to embrace this transformation, who accept seeing their works live differently in audience practices, who understand that acceleration can be a form of homage—we only accelerate what we want to see to the end—those will find engaged, creative, faithful audiences. The others will remain prisoners in their ivory tower, lamenting the decadence of modern times while progressively losing their social relevance.

The future belongs to a culture of remix, appropriation, creative transformation. A culture where the viewer is no longer passive but active, where the work is no longer closed but open, where speed is no longer enemy but ally of depth. It's this culture that we must build together, artists and audiences reconciled in a new creative alliance.

## **Toward an ecology of chosen attention**

Viewing acceleration is ultimately just a symptom of a deeper transformation: the emergence of a new ecology of attention where everyone becomes an active manager of their cognitive and temporal resources. Yes, our media space is saturated with content, young people spend about 4.7 hours per day watching long formats, so the ability to modulate one's reception speed becomes a cultural survival skill.

**This practice forcefully affirms that our time has value, that our attention is precious, and that we have the right to invest it according to our own terms. It constitutes a form of resistance to the**

**attention economy that seeks to capture us, retain us, consume us. By accelerating, we regain control, we affirm our sovereignty over our cultural experience.**

Cultural institutions and creators who manage to recognize and value this new form of sensitive intelligence, who accept seeing in acceleration not a degradation but a legitimate modality of aesthetic experience, those will be the artisans of a truly democratic, inclusive and living culture. Because as the Fribourg Declaration reminds us, this Declaration is entrusted to persons, communities, institutions and organizations who intend to participate in the development of the rights, freedoms and responsibilities it enunciates. The accelerated eye is not the degraded eye: it's the augmented eye, the critical eye, the creative eye. It's the eye of our time.

## CHAPTER 2: LEGITIMACY AND RECOGNITION

Who decides what deserves to be called “culture”? On what criteria are certain practices valued while others are relegated to the rank of minor entertainments or insignificant leisure activities? These questions, rarely posed explicitly in the cultural sector, nevertheless profoundly structure our action and determine, often without our awareness, who we include and who we exclude. This chapter proposes to confront these questions with clear-sightedness, not for the pleasure of deconstruction, but to open paths toward a more just and more effective professional practice.

The first section, “Legitimizing cultural practices unknown to us,” establishes a simple but essential principle to integrate: we cannot know *a priori* the cultural practices of people foreign to our universe. Each person names “culture” a different anthropological reality; for some it will be the image arts, for others built or intangible heritage, for still others practices we do not even suspect exist. This diversity is not a problem to solve but a richness to recognize. Therefore, the only solution for creating connection with others and respecting them is to legitimize practices we do not know, without presupposing that they would be inferior to our own. This posture is particularly necessary with regard to younger generations, whose cultural practices are too often judged less “noble” than those of adults. Cultural history should nevertheless make us humble: it is made of objects which, one day, are not legitimate and which, the next day, become so. It is therefore less a matter of relativism than of anticipation and bridge-building.

The second section, “The myth of recognition through cultural democratization,” tackles one of the ideological foundations of the French cultural sector: cultural democratization. In its declared ambition to make great works accessible to the entire population, it conceals a cruel paradox: many artists whose contribution could be qualified as essential remain forever excluded from the process of institutional recognition. This exclusion does not stem from a deficit of talent but from a social game in which certain people refuse or do not know how to participate. Observation of the artistic milieu reveals, it seems to me, this empirical rule: recognized artists·e·s devote approximately half of their resources to creation proper, and the other half to the methodical construction of their place in the social space—exhibitions, competitions, networks, frequenting the places where professionals·le·s circulate. The true key to recognition lies not in the intrinsic value of the work but in self-legitimization: recognized artists·e·s dare precisely because they already feel legitimate, without waiting for external validation. It is not so much the public or the institution that consecrates the artist, but the artist who, by self-legitimizing, legitimizes their public. I formulate this hypothesis to open toward an emancipatory perspective: cultural rights and cultural democracy offer an alternative to this system of domination, by postulating the equal legitimacy of each person to contribute to cultural life.

The third section, “The non-institutional cultural institution,” extends this reflection through the observation of spontaneous cultural practices that develop outside any institutional framework. When people organize at home sharings of readings, music, or dance, without any link to any official organization or public funding, these practices constitute genuine cultural institutions: they are collective, organized, located in

space and time, invested in by the participants·e·s, memorized in memories that durably mark lives. Apartment theater, exhibitions in private homes, artist tours “passing the hat” via social networks testify to the vitality of these forms. Far from representing a makeshift solution in the face of budget restrictions, they embody a form of concrete political engagement: each person·e possesses the power to institute the culture we need, without waiting to be taken care of. This capacity for action does not exempt us from defending public funding, but it reminds us that culture is too important to be held prisoner by corporatism that drain it.

This chapter will be particularly useful to professional·s·le·s who question the unthought aspects of their own practice, the implicit hierarchies they sometimes reproduce despite themselves, the way their criteria of “quality” can exclude rather than include. It will also interest artists who suffer from a deficit of recognition and seek to understand the social mechanisms that keep them on the margins, not to conform to them, but to emancipate themselves from them. Finally, it will offer elected officials·e·s and cultural policy leaders keys to understanding why cultural democratization has failed to achieve its objectives and what it would concretely mean to shift to a logic of cultural democracy founded on cultural rights.

# Legitimizing unfamiliar cultural practices

## **Anthropology of the future.**

*To foster intercultural dialogue, we need to legitimize cultural practices that are unknown to us, without ranking them above our own. This openness is essential for building bridges between different realities, as shown by the example of young people's cultural practices, which are often considered "less noble".*

## What is culture?

Cultural practices are extremely diverse in terms of their subjects, methods and very definitions. For some, it's just the visual arts; for others, it's built heritage; for still others, intangible heritage. But what built or intangible heritage are we talking about, and according to what criteria? The field is vast and diverse.

If we want to provide cultural offerings that resonate with people who are foreign to our universe - in their culture as well as in their cultural and heritage practices - it's obvious that we can't know these practices *a priori*. We are each enclosed in our own universe, in our own "filter bubble", as we say today.

## Connecting with the otherness of the future

Consequently, the only way to create links with others and respect them is to legitimize practices we don't know - and above all, not to presuppose that they are inferior to those we have mastered.

This phenomenon is particularly visible with regard to young people, whose practices are often deemed less noble than those of adults.

This approach might appear to be a form of cultural relativism, or even a denial of the value of what must be passed on. Not at all: cultural history is precisely made up of objects which, one day, are not legitimate and, the next day, become so. On the contrary, it's about anticipating and building bridges between a re-

ality that exists but is still unknown to us, and our  
own, different reality.

# The myth of recognition through cultural democratization

**Rethinking artistic value beyond systems of domination.**

*Artistic recognition is less about talent than about a social game that some refuse to participate in. A reflection on alternative paths to creative legitimacy.*

## The meritocratic illusion of cultural democratization

Cultural democratization, in its stated ambition to make great works accessible to all humanity, conceals a cruel paradox. Many artists, whose contribution to art could be qualified as essential, remain forever excluded from this process of institutional recognition. These creators, fully conscious of their status as artists, encounter an invisible wall that separates them from the pantheon of “official artists”.

This exclusion often generates profound bitterness, that of never gaining access to the system of consecration of great works, that imaginary temple where each creation should, according to the democratic myth, find its place according to its merit. Yet, we must acknowledge that many of these works would amply deserve such recognition. As Pierre Bourdieu observes in *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1992), “the value of the work of art is not inscribed in the work itself but in the field of production and circulation of symbolic goods.”

The temptation would be to classify these artists in the category of outsider art, for example, but this would be a conceptual error. Outsider art, as defined by Jean Dubuffet in 1945, designates artistic productions created by people foreign to official artistic culture, autodidacts, marginals, the mentally ill, prisoners, mystics. However, I am speaking here of artists who fully envision themselves as such, who claim this creative identity, but remain on the margins of the recognition system.

## **Hierarchization as a principle of domination**

We could then relate these artists to what we call “amateur” creation, which reveals the profoundly hierarchical nature of the art system. Indeed, this categorization postulates an intrinsic qualitative difference: amateurs would produce works of lesser value than professionals, the latter being supposed to work more, better, with more talent, better culture, better training, a better CV and better integration into the professional milieu. This hierarchization serves to exclude amateur production from the outset from the cultural democratization process, and places it alongside what has the value of being shared. Moreover, we can see this clearly in artistic practice workshops, in which amateur artists participate; their productions never enter any patrimony whatsoever, they are considered inferior.

But on what criteria are these hierarchies established? The case of Vincent van Gogh remains emblematic: a genius artist unrecognized during his lifetime, he embodies the exception that proves the rule. His posthumous recognition stems from a succession of sociological coincidences rather than a “natural” recognition of talent. How many other Van Goghs have passed and will pass into total oblivion? This lottery of posterity feeds the illusory hopes of numerous artists who dream of future recognition, which will most likely never come, even if it may reassure them.

Recognition thus becomes a quantitative or institutional criterion, varying according to the subjective perceptions of each artist (professional or amateur). Certain creators whom we consider fully recognized may

themselves feel insufficiently valued, for example. The criteria of one's own recognition are nothing universal or objective; they stem from pure subjectivity shaped by the social and personal expectations of each individual.

## **The double investment: creation and social strategy**

What strikes me most in observing the artistic milieu is the distribution of time and energy among "recognized" artists. An empirical rule seems to emerge: they devote approximately 50% of their resources to creation proper, and the remaining 50% to the methodical construction of their place in the artistic social space.

This second half comprises organizing exhibitions, participating in competitions, pursuing higher education in prestigious schools, patiently building a network of social relations, assiduous frequentation of spaces where cultural sector professionals evolve. As Howard Becker emphasizes in *Art Worlds* (1982), "*art is collective action*" that requires the collaboration of numerous actors beyond the sole creator.

**The true key to recognition does not reside, contrary to the romantic myth, in the intrinsic value of the work, which would be recognized by a transcendent legitimating instance. It lies in the very absence of the need for recognition, coupled with a natural appetite for social relations and the desire to socially embody the role of artist, which differs radically from the simple act of creating.**

## **Self-legitimation as the key to paradoxical recognition**

**“Recognized” artists dare precisely because they already feel legitimate. They do not wait for external validation to act. They have granted themselves not only their artistic legitimacy (that which allows them to create), but also their social legitimacy as artists, a fundamental distinction that many neglect.**

This self-recognition allows them to invest the social field with pleasure rather than out of obligation. They participate in the hierarchization system not as victims but as consenting actors, deliberately choosing the narratives and typologies to which they wish to belong. I do not claim that the quality of their creation is negligible, it effectively represents 50% of the equation. A “bad artist” will certainly encounter difficulties even with excellent social skills, but never absolute blockage.

**The true obstacle lies less in the absence of external recognition than in the lack of self-legitimation. Those who wait for others to validate them condemn themselves to an impasse.** Here’s why: spectators, the public, the milieu, already established in their own sense of legitimacy, have in reality no reason to risk recognition toward someone who has not first recognized himself. This process is almost like a social game: it highlights qualities of presence and self-affirmation more than purely artistic competencies. Paradoxically, the recognition mechanism is often reversed: “unrecognized” artists solicit public validation, but the public refuses them, as I just ex-

plained, while artists who fully assume their own social value implicitly offer the public a space of security and validation. It is in this way that the public can experience confirmation of its own taste or aesthetic judgment: because the artist, in recognizing himself, has already extended this recognition to them. In other words, it is not so much the public that consecrates the artist as the artist who, in self-legitimizing, legitimates the public. It is the public that needs to be legitimated by an artist who feels legitimate, not the reverse!

## **Toward an emancipatory cultural democracy**

Faced with this observation, what can we say to those who feel unrecognized? Let us observe the time they devote to social connections: it will almost always be derisory, or if it exists, it will be marked by mistrust, fear, even resentment toward those from whom they expect recognition. Their attempts at social action lack authentic openness to others, imprisoned as they are by this impossible expectation.

It is here that the perspective of cultural rights and cultural democracy offers a liberating alternative to cultural democratization. As Patrice Meyer-Bisch advocates, cultural democracy *“recognizes the equal dignity of cultures and everyone’s right to participate in the cultural life of their choice.”* It postulates the equal legitimacy of each person to contribute to the life of the city, without prior hierarchization.

**In this horizontal and open framework, facilitated today by digital networks, even the most dis-**

**creet artist can find their audience. If they accept to see their situation from this angle, their identity need for recognition will fade. They will know that they are intrinsically legitimate, like each person, and that their creation possesses its own value, outside the system of domination. Even with a single spectator or reader, the creation will have enriched the human bond, and art, as a shared experience, will have accomplished the essential.**

## **Emancipating from the myth to embrace one's place**

I establish no moral hierarchy between these different approaches. I do not claim that *unrecognized* artists would be more "pure" than others. My empathy simply goes toward these creators who suffer from a fantasy of participation in a system that, fundamentally, has nothing particularly noble about it. I invite them to love their place as it is, to fully taste its value.

These artists whom bitterness gnaws could, by changing perspective, appreciate their unique position in cultural democracy. Perhaps then, relaxed and freed from their impossible expectations, they would leave the door a little more open to the discoverability of their works. Not to participate in the system of domination, but to definitively free themselves from it and create on their own terms, in full consciousness of their intrinsic legitimacy.

For in the end, as John Dewey reminds us in *Art as Experience* (1934), "*the work of art is not complete until it operates in the experience of others than the one*

*who created it.*" This completeness requires neither institutional recognition nor critical consecration, simply the authentic encounter between a creation and a gaze, even if unique, which today's communication systems fully authorize, the digital space being intrinsically a space of cultural democracy.

# The Non-Institutional Cultural Institution

**For a citizen reappropriation of creation.**

*Rethinking culture beyond institutional walls: how spontaneous practices redefine our relationship with creation and question established cultural policies.*

## **The legitimacy of spontaneous cultural practices**

When people organize in their homes, among themselves, or with a few strangers, sessions for sharing readings, music, dance, even karaoke, in an organized or improvised way, without any link to any institution, official organization, or public or private funding, these cultural practices are completely legitimate. They constitute true cultural institutions: they are collective, established, organized practices, situated in space and time, invested in by the participants, and then stored in memories that can leave a lasting mark on their lives.

These practices can achieve remarkable quality. Someone might admirably sing a childhood song from their country, with an authenticity that no professional performer could match. I do not postulate any cultural hierarchy, but I observe the richness of these practices in respect for the cultural rights of everyone, as defined by the Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights (2007).

I myself have regularly organized creative evenings where the principle is simple: each person brings a creation to share for a few minutes. We are all at once artists and spectators, in a resolutely multidisciplinary approach—reading, cinema, performance, theater, photography, cooking, whatever we want. This practice aligns with what Nicolas Bourriaud called “relational aesthetics,” where art becomes a pretext for creating social bonds and shared experiences.

## The emergence of a parallel cultural movement

One could object that I am a culture professional. It's true, but I observe these practices among many people far removed from the institutional cultural sector. Moreover, some subsidized cultural venues draw inspiration from these spontaneous dynamics, implicitly recognizing their value.

The in-home theater of the Théâtre 71 de Malakoff in the 1980s paved this way. Today, the Théâtre de la Poudrerie in Sevran operates without a fixed location, taking over the apartments of volunteer residents or public spaces. Another example, the application **Hor-mur**, structures these practices into a cultural social network, creating a minimal economic model through ticketing. Or artists like the singer Ingrid Courrèges organize apartment tours via social media, working by “passing the hat” in a voluntary donation economy.

These non-institutional institutions naturally integrate amateur, professional, and participatory practices. The apartment exhibitions, which I have often organized or visited, attest to the importance of these moments for their participants. The engagement and concentration there equal, or even surpass, those observed in official museums or concert halls. These special moments create connections around creation, which is precisely the fundamental role of a cultural policy.

## Rethinking cultural

## **autonomy in the face of institutional constraints**

The cuts in public funding for culture deserve to be fought, but to defend a truly democratic culture, not to perpetuate a domineering and condescending one. The French tradition of cultural policy, despite its noble intentions, often reproduces patterns of symbolic domination that Pierre Bourdieu extensively analyzed in *Distinction* (1979) or that Michel Schneider criticized so aptly, profoundly, sharply, and humorously in *La comédie de la culture* (1993).

Everyone has the power to institute, to breathe energy into non-institutional cultural institutions. If public funding decreases, let's seize our creative capacities. Wherever we have the power, let's establish the culture we need. This approach echoes the notion of "cultural empowerment" developed by Paulo Freire, where communities regain control of their cultural expression.

Instead of waiting to be taken care of, let's reinvent our practices, whether we are professionals or not. This approach does not mean accepting budget cuts without acting. On the contrary, it is the most effective way to resist: to build concrete connections, create precedents, sow ideas. By building these networks, we become stronger to also defend the public funding necessary for institutionalized culture.

## **Cultural action as**

## **concrete political engagement**

One might consider it scandalous for private initiatives to substitute for what should be a public cultural service. But what real pressure do we have on public officials who are often disconnected from the cultural realities on the ground and from their missions as representatives of their constituents' needs? Our political action can be immediate and concrete. We have this power of refoundation.

If, during a transitional period, cultural practices become predominantly amateur, if the professional sector temporarily shrinks, where is the fundamental problem? Culture is what creates social bonds, and we can create it ourselves. Professional artists already spend most of their time seeking funding rather than creating. If they earned their living differently, it could nourish their creation and pull them out of a sometimes sterilizing insularity.

I am not advocating for the abandonment of legitimate claims on the use of public funds. But the posture of the complainant waiting to be taken care of is not the most politically engaged one, I would like to emphasize. A claim can defend corporatist interests without being truly political. The political, according to Hannah Arendt, is concrete engagement in the life of the city, the creation of spaces of shared freedom.

## **Cultural vitality versus corporatism**

The example of street art perfectly illustrates this dynamic. Born in illegality, without an economic model,

with artists buying their own spray cans and risking fines and prison, this movement eventually came to be recognized and integrated by the establishment and the art market. Why? Because it spoke to people, created debate, provoked—in short, because it was alive.

This spontaneous culture produces changes at all levels of our institutions. As Michel de Certeau noted in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), popular cultural practices constantly divert and reinvent imposed frameworks. Nothing prevents us from becoming the main actors in cultural practices that do us good personally and collectively.

Even without an apartment, even in situations of extreme precarity, anyone can propose cultural practices. There are no conditions on the possibility for each person to create a cultural institution that participates in cultural policies. This message is for every citizen, but also for every culture professional: instead of dedicating our energy to potentially sterile claims, let's organize more shows, events, and exhibitions in our homes and elsewhere.

## **For a living and shared culture**

Who can stop us from creating? No one, except our own blockages, our ego problems, our sterilizing corporatist mindsets. Yes, I am hard on cultural corporatism, because it defends the “how” while forgetting the “why.” It transforms culture into an economic sector to be protected rather than a living force for social transformation.

Culture is too important to be a prisoner of corpo-

ratisms that dry it up. As Antonio Gramsci wrote, culture is the privileged terrain of hegemony, but also of counter-hegemony. By creating our own non-institutional cultural institutions, we participate in this battle for the meaning and values of our society.

Let's reinvest in a cultural policy undertaken by each person. We will then see, progressively, institutionalized culture trying to catch up with and support these spontaneous initiatives. Because true culture is not that which is imposed from above, but that which emerges from the deep-seated need of communities to create, share, and make meaning together. It is in this creative tension between the instituted and the instituting that the future of a truly democratic and living culture is at stake.

# **PART II - DEMOCRACY AND POWER IN CULTURE**

This second part delves into the heart of the political stakes of cultural action. It offers a historical and critical analysis of the relationships between culture and power in France, from the creation of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1959 to the contemporary crises that are weakening the sector. It then opens concrete perspectives for refounding cultural action on truly democratic foundations.

The first chapter, “History and Cultural Policy,” traces the history of the French cultural sector from a rarely adopted angle: that of colonial heritage. This is not a provocation but a documented historical observation: the “hussars” who built the Ministry of Culture were largely former administrators of Overseas France, who transposed their methods of colonial administration to metropolitan territory. The *“good old bush method: the tour, the contact, the palaver”*, as Émile Biasini wrote, served in the colonial context to impose French culture on colonised populations. The *maisons de la culture* were conceived as *“cultural departure bases, centres of diffusion and influence”*, exactly as colonial posts spread *“French civilisation”* in Africa. This logic of vertical imposition, from top to bottom, has profoundly structured French cultural policies.

This chapter also analyses the progressive rupture between culture and political power. The golden age of cultural democratisation rested on an implicit pact: elected officials found in cultural venues spaces for exercising and representing power, while citizens saw them as markers of social advancement. This pact came undone under the combined effect of two phenomena: the progressive exclusion of working classes from subsidised cultural venues, remarkably documented

by Marjorie Glas, and the digital revolution that gave rise to a disintermediated culture where majority cultural practices completely escape the control of traditional political power. The absence of the Minister of Culture at the Avignon Festival is not a scandal but a symptom: the festival has lost its structuring political function.

This chapter finally examines the “*forgotten lesson of health totalitarianism*”. The near-unanimous submission of the cultural sector to the liberty-restricting measures of the Covid period revealed, in my view, a truth that may be disturbing: the subsidised cultural sector, heir to colonial methods of control, remains more a docile instrument of power than a defender of democracy on the ground. This analysis is not comfortable and may be debated, but it seems to me necessary to understand why the sector finds itself so weakened today in the face of political attacks.

The second chapter, “Towards a Cultural Democracy,” opens perspectives for refoundation. It begins by addressing the concrete implementation of cultural rights, too often perceived as theoretical and unrelated to fieldwork. Cultural rights, defined in the Fribourg Declaration of 2007, define objectives and directions, but their application requires methods from other fields: non-violent communication, new pedagogies, popular education techniques, etc. I emphasise the importance of emotions and human relationships: what primarily underlies the social effects of relationships between professionals and audiences are emotions, well before reason; this is where the primary implementation of cultural rights lies.

This chapter then addresses difficult questions

that the cultural sector often prefers to avoid: welcoming radicalised individuals in cultural venues, the intrinsically political dimension of all culture, the need to implement a “*cultural dissemination*” that brings culture closer to inhabitants rather than making them come to centralised institutions. I propose a “*narrative revolution of territories*” that recognises the paradoxical power of fragile narratives against the muffled tyranny of institutional narratives.

Finally, this chapter develops the concept of “*authorising creation*”: an artistic practice that authorises everyone to create, that reverses the paradigm of the artist-demiurge to make the creative act a democratic process accessible to all. This approach, experimented with for thirty years in very diverse contexts, shows that it is possible to radically democratise access to creation without renouncing artistic standards.

This part will be particularly useful to professionals seeking to understand the historical roots of the current crisis and to situate their action within a perspective of transformation. It will interest elected officials who wish to refound their cultural policy on truly democratic foundations, moving away from the vertical model inherited from the past. It will offer everyone conceptual and practical tools to move from cultural democratisation, which presupposes a legitimate culture to be disseminated to “ignorant” audiences, to cultural democracy, which recognises the equal dignity of all cultures and the right of each person to participate in cultural life on their own terms.

## CHAPTER 3: HISTORY AND CULTURAL POLICY

To understand the current crisis in the French cultural sector, we must trace its origins and examine its foundations without complacency. This chapter offers a historical journey through French cultural policies, from the creation of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1959 to the contemporary ruptures that call into question the entire edifice. This is not the story usually told: it reveals troubling continuities and blind spots that illuminate present difficulties.

The first section, *“The French cultural sector facing the urgency of refoundation”*, draws a historical parallel rarely articulated: the “hussars” who built the Ministry of Culture under André Malraux were largely former colonial administrators who had been reassigned. Émile Biasini applied to elected officials across French territory *“the good old bush method: the tour, the contact, the palaver”*—methods that in colonial contexts served to impose French culture on colonized populations. The houses of culture were conceived as *“starting bases”* to disseminate a *“universal”* culture defined by Parisian elites, exactly as colonial outposts disseminated *“French civilization”* in Africa. This transposition of colonial methods is not a polemical metaphor but a documented historical fact, thanks to the work of Marie-Ange Rauch, which we must also avoid instrumentalizing. It explains the vertical imposition logic that still structures French cultural policies today, and their difficulty adapting to a world where citizens no longer want to be “educated” but recognized in their own cultural practices.

This section also analyzes the paradigm inversion un-

derway: where 1981 marked the model's apogee with the budget doubling under Jack Lang, 2025 seems to sound the death knell of this system. Cultural institutions, once central and symbolically dominant, have become marginal compared to digital practices. Citizens devote an average of 35 hours per week to online cultural practices, versus a few hours at best in traditional institutions. This marginalization is not merely quantitative: it is the revenge of the "particularisms" that the hussars sought to erase. Digital disintermediation allows popular cultures to express themselves without passing through the institutional filter. Faced with this observation, I propose "*the virtuous scattering of the cultural sector*": not reproducing the colonial model by extending it, but dismantling it to make culture a transversal dimension present everywhere.

The second section, "*Culture and political power: from a marriage of convenience to a finalized divorce*", goes even further back in history to understand the true foundations of public support for culture. From Louis XIV to the Fifth Republic, culture has always been supported because it constituted a privileged instrument of national influence and power legitimation. The creation of the royal academies under Louis XIV formed a coherent system of control and promotion of the arts in service of power. This instrumental conception never really disappeared: it simply dressed itself in democratic justifications—emancipation, social cohesion—that mask its real function. The very architecture of the Italian-style theater materialized this political function: a social microcosm where public and private affairs were negotiated.

This section then traces the progressive rupture of this pact. The golden age of cultural democratization rested on a convergence of interests: elected officials

found in cultural venues spaces for exercising power, while baby boomers saw in them markers of social ascension. Two phenomena eroded this model: the progressive exclusion of working classes from subsidized cultural venues, analyzed by Marjorie Glas, and the digital revolution that gave rise to a disintermediated culture entirely escaping political control. The absence of the Minister of Culture at the Avignon Festival illustrates this rupture: the minister intuitively understood that the festival, despite its intact prestige, is no longer an important place of political power.

The third section, *“Culture and politics: the forgotten lesson of sanitary totalitarianism”*, addresses a highly controversial subject that the cultural sector prefers not to face head-on. The near-unanimous submission to the liberticidal measures of the Covid period revealed a disturbing truth: the cultural sector, heir to the control methods mentioned above, remains more a docile instrument of power than a defender of democracy. While Belgian cultural centers collectively refused to close in order to continue their democratic mission, their French counterparts obeyed without protest, and even went beyond what the law regulated, particularly regarding identity checks. This analysis is uncomfortable, but necessary: the same professionals who today worry about the rise of the National Rally accepted yesterday measures with totalitarian overtones. If the RN comes to power, those who obeyed the extreme center will obey the extreme right—it is the same psychological mechanism of submission to authority, so well analyzed by Stanley Milgram in the 1960s. The independence and political courage of each individual must be at the heart of cultural action, not as discourse but as daily practice.

This chapter will be particularly useful to profession-

als seeking to understand why the cultural sector finds itself so weakened today and what the historical roots of this fragility are. It will interest elected officials who wish to refound their cultural policy by moving away from an obsolete vertical model. It will offer everyone an opportunity to examine their own practices in light of this history, not to feel guilty but to do things differently tomorrow.

# France's cultural sector faces the urgent need for a rethink

**From 1959 to 2025, history repeats itself... in reverse.**

*French cultural sector funding is crumbling. Malraux's "colonial" heritage (1959) is obsolete in the face of digital technology and political attacks. Vital urgency: decolonize or disappear.*

## A troubling historical parallel

The French cultural sector is currently going through a crisis that strangely echoes the one that preceded the creation of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1959. At the time, as [Marie-Ange Rauch](#) (historian, researcher specializing in the history of public theaters and social and union organizations and collective mobilizations in the performing arts in France) recounts in “Les hussards du Ministère de la Culture” (1998), André Malraux inherited “administrative segments taken essentially from the Ministry of National Education”, in a context where “National Education, from which we had torn away the State Secretariat for Fine Arts, hated us” and where “Finance wished us no good”.

However, it should be recalled that this ministry was not a creation *ex nihilo* imposed from above. Performing arts workers, from all trades, had been calling for a supervisory ministry since the 1920s, constantly being shuttled between National Education and the PTT. This creation therefore responded to an old and legitimate need of the cultural sector.

While 1981 marked the beginning of an apogee with the doubling of the budget under Jack Lang (going from 0.47% to nearly 1% of the State budget), 2025 seems to sound the death knell for this model. We are witnessing a reverse movement today: where the “hussars”, these former colonial administrators who had been reconverted, had built a cultural administration from almost nothing, we now see this same project in danger in the territories.

## Transposed colonial methods: a two-faced domination

It is important to understand that these administrators from Overseas France brought with them their methods of administering colonized territories. As Marie-Ange Rauch points out, Emile Biasini applied with elected officials on French territory “the good old bush method: the tour, the contact, the palaver”, methods which, in a colonial context, served to impose French culture on colonized populations.

However, it would be reductive to summarize the ministry’s action to only the methods of colonial administrators. The vision of history, art, and France, the extraordinary intelligence and personality of André Malraux were the breath that pushed his team to work without sparing their efforts. Malraux’s intellectual charisma played a determining role in the survival and development of the ministry.

This transposition of colonial methods to the metropolitan territory nevertheless reveals a troubling continuity: **the same logic of vertical cultural imposition, from top to bottom, was applied to French citizens.** The houses of culture were conceived as “cultural departure bases, centers of diffusion and influence”, exactly as colonial posts spread “French civilization” in Africa.

Biasini himself expresses it clearly in a 1959 report: “the evolution of Africa and the future of the Community will necessarily pass through the overcoming of African particularisms, and therefore through a return to the universal values defended by French culture”.

This vision, deeply colonialist, was transposed as is in France: to overcome popular “particularisms” to impose a “universal” culture defined by the elites.

Let us not forget either that this approach was not uniform across the entire territory. Many artists worked in their time for a popular theater in the noble and political sense of the term, there are always exceptions that confirm the rule.

## **The betrayal of democratic values: the Covid turning point**

This logic of cultural domination found its culmination, unfortunately logical, during the Covid crisis (2020-2022). Faced with liberty-destroying and unconstitutional measures, the subsidized cultural sector revealed its true nature: not as a defender of democracy, but as a docile instrument of the power in place.

While Belgian cultural centers collectively refused to close to continue their democratic mission, their French counterparts obeyed without flinching. This voluntary submission sent a clear message to political leaders: the cultural sector, heir to colonial methods of control, remains a tool of domination more than emancipation.

## **The paradigm**

## **reversal: the end of a domination system**

More fundamentally still, we are witnessing the collapse of this system of cultural domination. We are at the beginning of a new phase, comparable in importance to that of 1981 when the ministry's budget doubled. But this time, the movement is reversed: cultural institutions, once symbolically central and dominant, **have become marginal in the face of digital practices**. Citizens devote an average of 35 hours per week to online cultural practices, compared to a few hours at best in traditional institutions.

This marginalization must however be put into perspective. The Ministry of Culture never obtained funding commensurate with expectations, 185 million in 1962 against 9 billion for Youth and Sports, and owed its survival only to its determination to exist. The current difficulties are therefore not solely the result of an intrinsically flawed model, but also of structural budgetary constraints that prevented it from fully meeting the ever-increasing expectations placed upon it.

The illusion of the sector's good health persists nevertheless. As with French cinema, we are led to believe that everything is fine. Yes, there are theater admissions, but it's mostly for American films that then refinance French cinema. Apart from a few exceptions that confirm the rule here too, French cinema does not meet its audience. It is refinanced, so much the better, but there is a real issue that we refuse to see. This illusion masks the urgency of refoundation: if we remain in defense of the past, we rot in place and become increasingly fragile in the face of future political leaders who question, sometimes legitimately, our role.

This marginalization is not just a quantitative question. It is **the revenge of the “particularisms” that the “hussars” wanted to erase**. Disintermediation allows popular, regional, and community cultures to express themselves without passing through the filter of institutions. Artists are now in direct relationship with their audiences via digital networks, short-circuiting the vertical legitimization system inherited from the colonial model.

## **Overcoming the colonial heritage: towards a true cultural democracy**

The current crisis forces us to face this problematic heritage. The model of vertical cultural imposition, whether it applied to colonies then to French “provinces”, is definitively obsolete. The “hussars” had the mission to “make accessible the capital works of humanity”, a historical formulation, still defended by high-level cultural officials, which poorly hides a paternalistic and domineering vision.

Nevertheless, we must guard against systematic denigration of the Ministry of Culture which, as Marie-Ange Rauch points out, “has for too long served as a smokescreen for its adversaries”. Critical theories, leftist in appearance, can fuel the arsenal of liberal thought and serve to justify the pure and simple dismantling of the public cultural service. Criticism must therefore remain constructive and not play into the hands of those who wish for the disappearance of the ministry and cultural policies, necessary for democracy.

**The issue goes far beyond the cultural sector: not reinventing ourselves means weakening democracy itself. For culture is one of the spaces where the common is forged, where representations are discussed, where possible futures are invented.** If we remain inactive in the face of ongoing transformations, we abandon this essential democratic terrain.

Our mission today must be radically different: no longer to impose a “legitimate” culture defined by Parisian elites, but **to recognize and value the diversity of cultures present in the territories**, with **cultural rights at the center**. This implies definitively abandoning the colonial posture of the one who brings “civilization” to the “natives” (whether African, provincial or suburban). But it also requires **rethinking the artistic forms themselves, not just the economic or organizational models**: the works, the postures, the training, everything must be questioned so that art and culture continue to do good to those who make them, receive them and participate in them.

## **Virtuous scattering: a decolonization from within**

Faced with this observation, I propose « **the virtuous scattering of the cultural sector** », a notion that may seem paradoxical but which responds to the urgency of the situation. It is not about reproducing the colonial model by extending it to all sectors, but on the contrary about dismantling it. Culture must no longer be a territory to conquer and administer, but a transversal dimension present everywhere: in bank-

ing, transport, construction, education, etc.

This scattering is virtuous because it recognizes that we are at the beginning of a new historical phase, as important as that of 1981 but in the opposite direction. Where Jack Lang had concentrated and institutionalized, we must disseminate and liberate. This dissemination is not a new form of cultural colonization. It is on the contrary the recognition that culture is already everywhere, in all social practices, and that we must stop trying to lock it up in institutions that reproduce the logics of domination.

This proposal must however be accompanied by an exercise of shared responsibility. As Rauch reminds us, we must “establish a balance sheet with shared responsibilities between all collaborators, all administrations, all organizations and all actors in artistic and cultural life.” Scattering must not serve as an excuse to dilute responsibilities or abandon any coherent cultural policy.

## **Citizen responsibility against colonial logic**

Public funding creates duties, but not those imagined by the “hussars”. As I wrote, “we are not at the service of regional directorates of cultural affairs”, we are at the service of citizens who pay their taxes.

This citizen responsibility sometimes implies disobeying absurd orders, refusing the vertical logic of neo-colonial command, masked behind biopower. Belgian cultural centers understood this by refusing to close.

The corporatism of the French cultural sector on the contrary reveals the persistence of a colonial mentality: defending one's privileges as an administrator rather than serving the administered.

It must however be recognized that the abandonment of popular education by the ministry was not a deliberate ideological choice but resulted from harsh budgetary constraints. There was not really a rejection but "a tightening of its objectives, at the risk of making painful choices". Responsibilities are therefore shared between different ministries, and it would be unfair to attribute all failures to the Ministry of Culture alone as well as to subsidized professionals.

## **Concrete paths for cultural decolonization**

- 1. Definitively abandon the overhanging posture and cultivate cooperative humility.** Let us stop seeing ourselves as those who bring culture to the uncultured masses. This neo-colonial vision must be radically abandoned. Citizens have their own cultures, rich and legitimate. And as in the liberated company, old skills remain useful but in new non-dominant roles. Cultural institutions can become expertise at the service of projects initiated by others, in a logic of cooperation rather than prescription, in the sense of cultural rights, which are now enshrined in law.
- 2. Sincere and voluntary evaluation as an exercise in humility.** *Document our fail-*

ures, recognize that we have sometimes re-produced logics of domination. This sincere evaluation is the exact opposite of the neo-colonial certainty of its civilizing superiority. Concretely: let's document the processes, let's be interested in the individual paths of people (no longer abstract "audiences"). Let's identify what fundamentally distinguishes our proposals from private cultural practices. This evaluation must be shared among peers and with citizens themselves.

3. **Recognize the legitimacy of all practices and overcome the amateur/professional distinction.** Netflix, TikTok, YouTube are not "inferior" practices to be corrected, but legitimate cultural spaces. The contemptuous attitude towards these practices reproduces exactly the colonial contempt for "indigenous" cultures. This amateur/professional hierarchy, central since Malraux, has become obsolete in the digital age. TikTok and digital platforms have already operated this revolution that the institutional sector refuses to see. But the recognition of the diversity of practices must not lead to an absolute relativism that would deny any specificity to demanding artistic creation.
4. **Move from a territorial logic to a network logic and abandon vertical communication.** The "hussars" administered territories. We must think in terms of horizontal networks, connections, circulations, without a dominant center. On social networks, let's stop "posting" like institutions, but become sources: let's create rich con-

tent on our sites, which people can appropriate and share. Peer recommendations are 10 times more effective than institutional communication.

5. **Transform institutions into shared and open resources.** No longer fortresses of legitimate culture, but open spaces where citizens come to freely draw for their own cultural projects. Let's offer content creators the use of our spaces, our technical expertise. Let's accompany audiences in their digital practices. The physical theater can nourish a multitude of digital scenes.
6. **Create new economic models adapted to the digital age.** Piracy is not a danger but a missed opportunity. If the global license law had been adopted in 2012 rather than the repressive Hadopi law, we would today have a viable economic model for the dissemination of culture in digital networks. We must imagine financing systems that recognize new forms of cultural circulation and creation, rather than clinging to outdated intellectual property models.
7. **Train differently to invest all professional territories.** The "hussars" were trained at ENFOM to administer colonial territories. We must train new cultural actors to invest all professional territories, not just traditional cultural institutions. Culture must irrigate banking, transport, construction, education, etc., not as a new form of colonization, but as a recognition that the cultural dimension is already present in all human activities.
8. **Experiment with new actors and new alliances.** Refoundation can only happen by

welcoming new actors, by leaving the closed circle of the traditional cultural sector. We must create spaces for experimentation where digital creators, social entrepreneurs, activists, self-taught artists can co-construct new cultural proposals. These experiments must be real, risky, and not simple communication operations disguised as innovation.

## **From civilizing mission to democratic humility**

The passage from “cultural democratization” (bringing culture to the people) to “cultural democracy” (recognizing everyone’s culture) is not just a semantic change. It is **the passage from a colonial logic to a truly democratic logic.**

**The “hussars” saw in African or regional “particularisms” obstacles to overcome. We must on the contrary see in cultural diversity a wealth to cultivate. No longer a “universal” French culture to impose, but a multitude of cultures in dialogue.**

## **The margin as a space of freedom**

Jean-Luc Godard said that “it is the margins that hold the page together”. The marginalization of traditional cultural institutions is perhaps not a catastrophe but a liberation. Freed from their colonial role of cultural im-

position, they can finally become spaces of freedom and experimentation.

But this requires definitively abandoning the heritage of the “hussars”: their certainty of holding legitimate culture, their method of vertical administration, their contempt for popular cultures. It is only at this price that the public cultural sector can reinvent itself.

## **Decolonize to survive**

The history of the Ministry of Culture teaches us a crucial lesson: a system built on colonial methods carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. Cultural domination, whether exercised in Africa or in France, always ends up arousing the resistance and emancipation of the dominated.

The current crisis is not an accident but the logical outcome of a system of cultural domination. Citizens have found in digital practices spaces of freedom escaping the control of institutions. They voted with their feet, or rather with their clicks.

Faced with this emancipation, **we have two choices: either we remain entrenched in the colonial model inherited from the “hussars”, and we will disappear with it; or we embrace a true cultural decolonization, recognizing the equal dignity of all cultural practices.**

As Marie-Ange Rauch writes, “the fight is obviously far from over.” But this fight must not be waged in sterile guilt or systematic denigration. It is rather about building, with lucidity but without complacency

for liquidating theories, a new model of cultural policy that definitively surpasses the colonial heritage while preserving the ambition of a renewed public cultural service.

**The time is no longer for nostalgia for the lost cultural empire, but for the courageous invention of new forms of cultural cooperation, horizontal and respectful. It is only on this condition that the public cultural service can regain its legitimacy: no longer as an instrument of domination, but as a humble facilitator of a truly shared culture.**

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*Thanks to [emmanuel vergès](#) for introducing me to Marie-Ange Rauch's enlightening work.*

# **Culture and political power: from a marriage of convenience to a consummated divorce**

**From Louis XIV to Rachida Dati: anatomy of  
a rupture between subsidized culture and  
political legitimacy.**

*Culture is no longer the theater of power. Once an instrument of political influence, it now struggles to justify its public funding. How can we renew democratic dialogue in a context where cultural practices have profoundly evolved, under the effect of social, economic and technological transformations?*

## **The observation of a crisis: when elected officials desert culture**

French cultural sector professionals are going through a period of profound questioning in the face of significant budget cuts decided by local elected officials from all political sides. If we make a comparison, in the campaign for the 1977 municipal elections, culture occupied a preponderant, even paramount place in the programs of all candidates, across all political tendencies. This centrality of the cultural question in local political debate already contrasted with national campaigns, but it testified to a consensus on the symbolic and social importance of public cultural action.

Today, in 21<sup>st</sup>-century electoral campaigns, whether municipal, regional or national, the subject of culture is almost systematically not even mentioned. This absence is not a simple oversight or negligence: it reveals a profound transformation in the relationship between culture and political power. How should we interpret this shift? Who bears responsibility for this evolution? More fundamentally, is this truly a problem to be solved, or might it not rather be an opportunity for a renewed understanding of the mutations affecting the roles and functions of culture and cultural professionals in a world that has undergone radical transformations?

Antonio Gramsci writes in his *Prison Notebooks* (1951): “*the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: during this interregnum the most varied morbid phenomena are observed*”. His analysis perfectly illuminates the current situation of the subsidized cultural sector,

caught between an exhausted historical model and an uncertain future.

It is appropriate to consider these changes, certainly violent and destabilizing for the actors in the sector, as a moment of crisis, in the etymological sense of the term (from the Greek *krisis*, meaning decision, judgment). This crisis could be an opportunity for collective learning to reshape practices and relationships differently, rather than mobilizing for a corporatist and backward-looking « fight », which is known to be doomed to failure. Indeed, citizens no longer feel concerned by the « defense » of this sector, now considered « non-essential » since 2020, and recognized as such by the majority of the professionals themselves, due to the almost total absence of mobilization against the liberticidal political measures of that recent period. Thus, instead of seeking scapegoats among the elected officials, accused of political choices that constrain creative freedom, it seems to me richer in terms of action perspectives to adopt a sociological perspective, in order to start by trying to deeply understand the social phenomena at work that are transforming the positions of all the actors involved.

Of course, we can only understand and sympathize with the dismay of artistic teams and cultural venue managers who see their subsidies drastically reduced, often brutally and without prior consultation, forcing closures of venues, companies and other layoffs. It is precisely this brutality that characterizes a moment of crisis. Let us recall Michel Foucault, who wrote in *The Will to Knowledge* (1976):

« Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of

exteriority in relation to power.”

“There is therefore no, in relation to power, place of the great Refusal — soul of revolt, focus of all rebellions, pure law of the revolutionary. But resistances that are special cases: possible, necessary, improbable, spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, violent, irreconcilable, quick to compromise, interested or sacrificial; by definition they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations”

»

**In my view, this resistance can and must, if it wants to be transformative in reality, take the form of creative reinvention rather than simple defensive opposition.**

## **Culture as an instrument of power: a French history**

To understand the deep reasons for the disappearance of culture from the political concerns of local, regional or national elected officials, we must first deconstruct a founding myth. Contrary to what one might believe, this eclipse is not the result of a despotic project by the right driven by far-right ideas, aimed at destroying a culture that would potentially disturb their conservative values. The explanation is both simpler and more complex: **subsidized culture has never had the primary function of citizen emancipation**, even if this justifying narrative has im-

posed itself since the creation of the Ministry of Culture in 1959 under the aegis of André Malraux.

Pierre Bourdieu, in *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), already demonstrated very well how “*taste classifies, and classifies the classifier*”. He also wrote:

« “Objectively and subjectively aesthetic position-takings, the choice of furniture, clothing or makeup, are so many occasions to experience or affirm the position occupied in social space as a rank to be held or distance to be maintained.”

»

Bourdieu’s analysis reveals the real social function of culture: a tool of social reproduction, of reaffirmation of the symbolic places of power and of exclusion through well-meaning contempt for those who do not master legitimate cultural codes.

This is not about questioning the sincere generosity of many artists who aspire to share their creation with as many people as possible. However, we must acknowledge that this generosity is often accompanied by ambiguity: the desire to share mingles with the need for recognition and admiration. As Rousseau already said in his *Letter to d’Alembert on Spectacles* (1758), theater can be “*a school of morals*” but also a place of vanity where “*one goes less to see than to be seen*”.

This ambivalence does not invalidate the real emancipatory effects that certain works or certain cultural experiences can produce. But we must recognize that th-

ese moments of authentic emancipation constitute more the exception than the rule in the overall functioning of the French subsidized cultural system.

## **From Louis XIV to the Fifth Republic: culture in service of national glory**

Contemporary justifications for public funding of culture, democratization, emancipation, social cohesion, are only a posteriori constructions intended to legitimize, within the framework of a post-revolutionary democracy, a practice whose historical foundations are quite different. Historical reality, which traverses political regimes, from absolute monarchy to the current Republic, reveals that **culture has always been supported, encouraged and subsidized because it constituted a privileged instrument of national and international influence, in other words, an eminently political, identity and diplomatic issue.**

Marc Fumaroli, in *The Cultural State. Essay on a Modern Religion* (1991), traces this genealogy:

« “French cultural policy, invented by Richelieu and systematized by Louis XIV, was in service of the glory of the king and the kingdom. It was the first and for a long time the only one in the world to conceive culture as an instrument of power.”

»

This instrumental conception of culture was not hidden: it openly displayed itself as participating in monarchical grandeur. Under Louis XIV, the creation of the French Academy (1635), the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (1648), the Royal Academy of Dance (1661), the Royal Academy of Music (1669) and the Royal Academy of Architecture (1671) constituted a coherent system of control and promotion of the arts in service of royal power. The French language itself became an instrument of influence: spoken in all European courts, it conveyed a vision of the world, an aesthetic and, consequently, political power.

It is important to understand that culture supported by power is not limited to shows or novels: it encompasses language itself, the representation of the world it carries, the intellectuals who think and transmit it. **Culture transcends simple artistic production to become a global system of representation and legitimization of power.**

But today, cultural actors and artists, frightened, want to defend “creative freedom” against political decisions that harm it, notably censorship. What exactly is this so-called freedom? The example of Molière in the 17<sup>th</sup> century perfectly illustrates the subtle dialectic between power, allegiance, freedom and transgression, which is a strategy of true-false freedom, still at work today, yet in the process of breaking down. Molière’s plays, which explored with remarkable freedom the social criticism of his time while touching on universal questions, were financed by the very king whose autocratic power they seemed to criticize. This apparent contradiction actually reveals the great political intelligence of power holders, whether divine right monarchs or elected officials by universal suffrage: their capacity to integrate transgression into

the very heart of their legitimization system.

As Michel de Certeau analyzed in *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume I: Arts of Doing* (1980):

« “If we want to identify the force and ways of doing of power, we must look twice, because it marks itself all the better as it conceals itself more. The visibility of power is inverse to its effectiveness: the more subtle it is, the more it imposes itself without noise, the more it invades daily life under the cover of evidence or neutrality. [...] The property of power is precisely to mask its procedures under the appearance of nature, common sense or necessity.”

»

Thus, the grip of power is not manifested only by visible constraint, but especially by the installation of norms that seem natural. By financing its own critics, power demonstrates its magnanimity and openness, thus reinforcing its legitimacy. This instrumentalization does not cancel the aesthetic or critical value of works, Molière’s plays remain masterpieces of universal scope, but it reveals the historical complexity, up to today, of relationships between artistic creation and political power. We know how much the appointments of artists to the direction of major cultural institutions are far more political than artistic choices.

This echoes Michel Schneider’s analysis in *The Comedy of Culture* (1993), where he vitriolically analyzes the mutual interests between artists and cultural institutions (after resigning from his position as director of music at the Ministry of Culture):

« “There is in France a Ministry of Culture, a singularity in a democracy. Since 1981, its interventions have multiplied: events, merchandise, consumption, culture seems diverse and lively. Isn’t it the opposite? Fever indicates malaise. Beyond a critique of court culture, with its customs, grimaces, flaws and ridiculous aspects, we must analyze the tensions that always exist between art and politics, culture and power. For, conducted by the left or the right, cultural policy conceals risks. The arts perhaps have the ministry they deserve, and the ministry the artists who justify it. That art divorces from meaning, form, beauty, that it no longer says anything to anyone, that there are no longer works or audiences, what does it matter, as long as there are still artists and politicians, and they continue to support each other: a subsidy for a signature at the bottom of an electoral manifesto. The curtain falls, we must judge the play. Ministry of Culture? No, government of artists. But we do not govern culture, and it is not a means of government. Nothing is worse than a prince who takes himself for an artist, except an artist who takes himself for a prince.”

»

## **Theater as symbolic place of power: a political architecture**

To understand why, in 1977, all candidates for municipal elections placed culture at the forefront of their programmatic concerns, we must analyze the social and political function of cultural venues in France during the Thirty Glorious Years. Influential constituents, those who could be called “influencers” before the term existed, assiduously frequented cultural venues. More significantly, the elected officials themselves, regardless of political affiliation, were regulars at these spaces.

This attendance was not motivated by a disinterested love of theater, dance or cinema, but by acute awareness that these places constituted privileged spaces for the exercise and representation of power. The very architecture of the Italian-style theater materialized this political function: the organization into lateral boxes and the hierarchization of audiences according to the height of seats created a social microcosm where public and private affairs were negotiated, all enhanced by the pageantry of high-quality artistic productions.

Richard Sennett, in *The Fall of Public Man* (1977), analyzes this function of theater as public space par excellence, and brings nuances to its modalities:

« 18<sup>th</sup>-century theater was indeed a place where society came to look at itself, a mirror of social life, where rank distinctions were both ostentatiously

present — through reserved seats, dress, customs — and, paradoxically, momentarily abolished in the collective experience of the spectacle. The audience, by sharing the performance, lived a moment where individuality gave way to collective belonging, where social distance was replayed and neutralized in apparent sociability. Thus, theater was not only entertainment, but a stage where society experimented with its own accord and tensions.”

»

The symbolic place of political power was therefore cultural space, and more specifically the theater hall. An apparent paradox was also played out there: on stage, actors could sharply criticize the powerful, who applauded them from their boxes. This configuration benefited all actors in the system: the artist gained recognition for their critical engagement, the politician demonstrated their open-mindedness and capacity to accept contestation, thus legitimizing their power within the democratic framework.

**This is why culture occupied a central place in political programs almost 50 years ago: it constituted the symbolic place par excellence of power, the space where political legitimacy was negotiated and represented in a democratic society.** In 50 years, the world has been transformed, and the paradigm that structures the function of culture in society has indeed changed.

## **The golden age of cultural democratization: between emancipatory utopia and social reproduction**

The baby boomers, the generation born in the immediate post-World War II period, benefited from the exceptional economic conditions of the Thirty Glorious Years to experience unprecedented social advancement. Cultural practices constituted an essential marker of this social elevation, which transcended traditional political divisions.

It is important to note that this aspiration to elevation through culture concerned just as much, if not more, popular milieus, politically organized, notably around the French Communist Party. Communist municipalities were among the most ardent promoters of ambitious cultural policies, driven by a conception of elevation that was not primarily economic but intellectual and moral.

Jack Lang, in *A Cultural Policy for Europe* (1987), testifies to this era:

« “In the 1960s and 1970s, culture was perceived as a fundamental right, a tool of collective emancipation. André Malraux’s houses of culture coexisted with popular education initiatives, creating a territorial network unique in the world.”

»

The ideal was that working classes could access theater and thus broaden their sensible and intellectual horizons, discover universes escaping both their laborious daily life and the nascent grip of television, which remained a luxury good for many modest households. The feeling of intellectual and moral emancipation provided by frequenting artistic works in these progressive municipalities validated, in the eyes of citizens as well as elected officials, the merit of volunteer and costly cultural policies.

Citizens encountered their elected officials during shows, openings, festivals. Culture thus wove a network of political sociability, creating what Jürgen Habermas called in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) an enlarged “bourgeois public sphere,” where the different components of local society met and dialogued. This dynamic combined vertical approaches of academic cultural democratization, major shows presented to spectators, and more horizontal approaches of popular education, what we today call cultural democracy, in fruitful complementarity.

However, even if this model presented undeniable virtues and created a virtuous circle of mutual enrichment, we must not obscure its also intrinsically politicking dimension: these cultural spaces, these quality shows and these enriching sociocultural activities remained supported by political leaders precisely because they constituted places of exercise and representation of power.

## **The great disconnection: the progressive exclusion of working classes**

The idyllic picture I have just painted now belongs to the past. Two concomitant movements have progressively eroded this model of consensual cultural policy. The first is remarkably documented by Marjorie Glas in *When Art Chases Away the Popular* (2023). She analyzes the progressive loss of the social vocation of public theater in favor of aesthetic distinction logics. She illuminates the processes of professionalization, institutionalization and hierarchization that participate in the symbolic eviction of working classes from cultural venues and questions the capacity of theater to fulfill a true social role today.

« “Founded on the belief in the social utility of theater, its political function and its openness to all audiences, public theater has progressively refocused on itself and its internal issues. The heroization of the artist has gone hand in hand with the marginalization of the profane. To result in the erasure of the popular audience — and even of the audience altogether — in professional and aesthetic issues.”

»

A gap has therefore progressively widened between subsidized cultural venues and their potential audiences, also accentuated by the multiplication of televi-

sion channels and the emergence of new forms of popular entertainment. New citizens, whether children of working families who had not experienced the social advancement of the previous generation or populations from recent immigration, found themselves structurally disconnected from cultural proposals perceived as foreign to their reference universe.

Didier Eribon, in *Returning to Reims* (2009), testifies well to this fracture:

« “The world of legitimate culture appeared to me as a hostile universe, where everything reminded us that we were not in our place: the way of dressing, speaking, holding oneself, up to the implicit references that dotted conversations and referred us to our ignorance.”

»

These new cultural outcasts do not even feel legitimate to cross the threshold of places whose codes completely escaped them, and which painfully reminded them of the school institution, itself experienced as a space of stigmatization behind its democratic proclamations. Progressively, subsidized cultural venues maintained their funding while losing their real social anchoring, particularly visible in left-wing municipalities, which had made popular culture their standard. Today, many citizens are not even really aware of the existence of these places, which seem completely foreign to them.

**In parallel, a new generation of elected officials emerged, from different social milieus and not having internalized the frequenting of subsidized cultural venues as a marker of political respecta-**

**bility. These new political leaders found other spaces of activism and sociability, more directly political and less mediated by cultural practice.**

Faced with this disaffection, subsidized cultural venues paradoxically accentuated their disconnection by proposing increasingly smooth, consensual and depoliticized works, in the illusory hope of seducing a broader audience. This “please everyone” strategy had the opposite effect: by losing their critical and provocative force, these cultural proposals also lost their political and social relevance.

## **The digital revolution: the emergence of disintermediated culture**

The second phenomenon, more recent but with even more radical effects, has completed the transformation of the French cultural landscape. The appearance of Minitel at the beginning of the 1980s timidly inaugurated the era of online cultural and communication practices. The arrival of the Internet in the 1990s, then the explosion of social networks from 2004, now twenty years ago, have provoked a Copernican revolution in cultural practices.

Henry Jenkins, in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006), prophetically described this transformation:

« “We are witnessing the emergence of a participatory culture that transforms

the passive experience of media consumption into active production of content and meanings. The circulation of media content now depends on the active participation of the public, which no longer merely consumes media but also contributes to their creation, distribution and interpretation.”

»

Today, majority cultural practices unfold in digital spaces. We watch films there, listen to music there, interact with our peers there, create there, perform there. The boundaries between amateurs and professionals blur: anyone can potentially become an artist, develop an audience, even make it their profession. These digital sharing spaces embody a radical form of cultural democracy, where perseverance and work allow anyone to build their place in a disintermediated ecosystem.

**Symbolic value no longer resides in institutional validation but in links woven between peers, in mutual recommendations, in belonging to communities of interest.** These communities, formerly mainly anchored in circumscribed geographical territories, are now recomposed in digital spaces according to affinity logics that transcend national, generational and sociocultural boundaries.

To illustrate this with a specific example, lovers of baroque music on period instruments can now meet, exchange, share their practices and discoveries, whether they reside in Tokyo, São Paulo or in a village in the Massif Central. Culture, thanks to these digital networks, experiences unprecedented vitality. **Artistic creation has never been so abundant, crea-**

**tion and diffusion tools never so accessible, possibilities for alternative economic models never so diverse.** So what crisis are we talking about?

However, and this is the central paradox of our era, **all this cultural effervescence completely escapes the control and influence of traditional political power, and is even often voluntarily unknown and despised by subsidized culture actors, who refuse to legitimize it, because they feel in danger (even though they are also consumers of it).** It relies on infrastructures developed and controlled by digital capitalism multinationals that have perfectly understood the fundamental anthropological need for culture and that provide tools to satisfy it, while capturing the economic value thus generated.

## **The Rachida Dati symbol: chronicle of a consummated rupture**

The summer of 2024 offered an amusing illustration of this rupture between culture and political power. Rachida Dati, then Minister of Culture, was sharply criticized for not going to the Avignon Festival, breaking with an uninterrupted tradition since the creation of the ministry in 1959. All her predecessors, without exception, had made this summer visit an obligatory ritual of their function.

Let us adopt a sociological gaze to analyze this absence: if Rachida Dati did not deem it necessary to go to the Avignon Festival, it is not out of personal contempt for theater or ignorance of the symbolic im-

portance of the festival, it is because she intuitively understood that the Avignon Festival, despite its intact prestige, is no longer today a place of political power. It remains a prestigious space for artistic diffusion, but it has lost its structuring political function.

In her logic as a minister, and not as an art lover, **Rachida Dati prioritizes her presence in the true contemporary places of political power, which are no longer theaters and festivals. Her absence is therefore not an act of defiance but the simple recognition of a fact: institutional culture is no longer the privileged symbolic place of political power.** She has moreover announced, without specifying a date, that she would go to the Avignon festival during the 2025 edition, a symbolic concession that changes nothing to the fundamental diagnosis. She will go “for pleasure,” one could say, and not out of political necessity. This distinction is capital for understanding the transformation underway.

## **Refounding the democratic pact: cultural rights as a new compass**

Faced with this diagnosis that might seem desperate, what perspectives are offered to defenders of public funding for culture? For I remain, despite this lucid analysis, a fervent supporter of public support for arts and culture, not out of nostalgia for a bygone model, but out of conviction that culture can and must play a refounded role in our democratic societies.

The Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights (2007) of-

fers a precious conceptual framework for this re-founding: *“Cultural rights aim to guarantee everyone the freedom to live their cultural identity, understood as the set of cultural references by which a person, alone or in common, defines themselves, constitutes themselves, communicates and intends to be recognized in their dignity.”*

This approach through cultural rights allows us to go beyond the traditional political instrumentalization of culture to place it in direct service of citizens and their emancipation. As Jean-Michel Lucas writes in *Cultural Rights, Stakes for Public Policies* (2017): *“Cultural rights are not rights to consume culture but rights to make humanity together, by recognizing everyone’s cultural dignity.”*

**Subsidized culture must therefore undergo its transformation: abandon its historical role as an instrument of power legitimization to become a tool of horizontal democratic construction. This transformation requires a revolution in practices and representations. The disintermediation at work in digital spaces must inspire parallel disintermediation in physical and institutional spaces.**

The most lucid elected officials understand this necessity. Their role is no longer to instrumentalize culture in service of their personal or partisan power, but to support the construction of a democratic society carrying humanist values. Many political leaders sincerely carry these values and are ready to accompany this transformation. But to do so, they need artistic teams and cultural leaders ready to make the same mutation.

## **Narrative as new legitimacy: rethinking the evaluation of cultural action**

What cultural actors and elected officials mutually need is a new grammar to think and evaluate the social impact of artistic creation. We must understand that the objective is no longer to produce prestigious shows that enhance political power, this era is definitively over. Subsidized culture must reinvent itself in social connection, in scrupulous respect for cultural rights, in active inclusion of all.

To do this, we need new narratives of cultural experiences supported by public power. But what is the contemporary narrative of a cultural project?

- For a show in a theater, it is no longer only the description of the artistic quality of the proposal or the talent of the performers, it is the narrative of transformative experiences lived by spectators, of how the work modified their relationship to the world, to others, to themselves.
- For territorial action conducted “outside the walls,” in peripheral neighborhoods or with populations distant from cultural institutions, the narrative necessarily becomes collective. It is built with residents, listening to them, respecting their own cultural references. It can include the evolution of the project itself, the questioning it has aroused among artists, the way the encounter with otherness has transformed and enriched the initial artistic proposal.

These narratives require time, attention, humility. They demand accepting to also tell failures, misunderstandings, unconscious prejudices that may have been deconstructed through encounters. As Édouard Glissant writes in *Poetics of Relation* (1990): “Act in your place, think with the world.”

**Today’s elected officials have a vital need for these narratives to justify, to their constituents and their elected peers, the maintenance of public funding for culture. Without these narratives, they can no longer legitimize an investment in what appears as a sector disconnected from immediate social and political utility. They need to understand how culture today serves to build the democratic common.** The Ministry of Culture equipped itself in 2021 with a delegation to cultural democracy, which will become a directorate, so there is support in these approaches. There is anyway necessity, beyond funding questions, that subsidized culture continues to serve a democratic common good and no longer only the space of bourgeois reproduction it has become, despite hypocritical discourses that claim the contrary, to receive their subsidies. For this, its forms must imperatively reinvent themselves.

## **Towards a new alliance: culture and democracy**

There is urgency to recognize with lucidity that institutional culture is no longer intrinsically linked to political power. This awareness, far from being a defeat, opens new perspectives. If culture is subsidized by public money, that is, by tax levied on all citizens,

each cultural actor benefiting from this funding has the ethical and political responsibility to demonstrate how their action serves the democratic common good.

Many artistic teams already magnificently embody these values and develop exemplary approaches on the ground of inclusion, co-creation, recognition of everyone's cultural dignity. The resource exists, collective intelligence is there. But we are going through a moment of crisis, of painful transition between an old world that never finishes dying and a new world that struggles to be born fully.

Certainly, some cultural venues will continue to function according to the old model, serving as markers of social distinction for a bourgeoisie concerned with its cultural reproduction. These places will not disappear and will probably continue to receive funding. But they will have lost their political centrality to become conservatories of socially situated cultural practices.

**The real issue is elsewhere: in the invention of new forms, new practices, new places, not necessarily physical, where the cultural democracy of tomorrow will be built. If cultural actors persist in defending only the traditional model, if they are content to denounce subsidy cuts without proposing a new vision, they will confirm in the eyes of elected officials their disconnection from contemporary democratic issues.**

## **From instrumentalization to emancipation**

The history I have just retraced, from Louis XIV to our

days, reveals the permanence of a consubstantial link between culture and political power in France. This link, forged under the Old Regime and perpetuated in various forms until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has today broken under the combined effect of profound socio-cultural transformations and the digital revolution.

This rupture is neither an accident nor a catastrophe: it is the symptom of a broader mutation of our democratic societies. Culture can no longer be the instrument of legitimization of political power in a world where sources of legitimacy have diversified and complexified. But it can become, and this is the contemporary issue, a privileged space for building the democratic common.

For this, cultural actors must accept to radically rethink their practices, their objectives and their evaluation methods. They must move from a logic of descending cultural supply to a logic of co-construction with citizens. They must substitute for the search for abstract artistic excellence the quest for concrete social and democratic relevance, enter into an *aesthetics of relation* as an artistic requirement, which is much more difficult than simple aestheticizing requirement.

Elected officials, for their part, must understand that support for culture no longer falls under power strategy but the patient construction of a more just, more inclusive, more democratic society. Hannah Arendt describes well the process between culture and politics in *Between Past and Future* (1961), without yet integrating cultural democracy, which follows from it if we translate her argument to contemporary reality:

« Culture, which is what subsists in the world in the form of works, needs a

public space to appear and be transmitted. For culture and politics belong to each other: it is not knowledge or truth that is at stake, but judgment and decision, the judicious exchange of opinions concerning the sphere of public life and the common world. Without spectators — citizens disposed to judge — there is no judged culture, no living politics. Works like human actions need to be seen, discussed, evaluated, carried by collective memory, and this is what founds the reality of the common world.”

»

If cultural actors assume this new responsibility, if they become the patient artisans of the democratic narrative of their actions, then many elected officials will remobilize to support a refounded culture. No longer to establish their personal political power, but to bring about, together, a living and inclusive cultural democracy.

# Culture and politics: the forgotten lesson of sanitary totalitarianism

## Reflections on the submission of the cultural sector in the face of authority.

*In 2025, the French cultural sector is alarmed by the rise of the Rassemblement National. However, its behavior during the Covid period reveals a troubling propensity for submission that questions its capacity for future resistance.*

## The cultural sector's contradiction regarding the Rassemblement National

The French cultural sector, traditionally rooted in left-wing thought, is today expressing growing concern about the rise of the Rassemblement National. Professionals are wondering: how can we work with RN elected officials? This question, as recently highlighted in an article from *Haute Fidélité*, center for contemporary music in Hauts-de-France published in the OPC media (Extreme right and culture, an unthinkable Faustian pact? -> <https://www.observatoire-culture.net/extreme-droite-culture-pacte-faustien-inenvisageable/>), evokes this anxiety and the related contradictions: “*Should culture compromise with the extreme right or maintain a line of resistance?*”

Yet what I observe in this posture is a preconception disconnected from recent reality. These same professionals who are worried today have, for the most part, accepted without protest the authoritarian decisions made during the Covid period. Decisions devoid of common sense, stigmatizing and brutal, without real health basis, based on lies quite obvious to anyone who at the time had the awareness to fight against their fears, and serving a capitalist opportunism that made people believe it was for their own good.

This collective psychological manipulation is reminiscent of what Alice Miller described in *For Your Own Good* (1984): “*Totalitarian education always begins by making individuals believe that the violence they suffer is exercised in their own interest.*” For those who

tried to build their own critical apparatus during this period, the evidence of this manipulation was blatant.

Moreover, let's remember that, already today, a significant share of large private contemporary music venues belongs to investors or entrepreneurs close to the radical right.

## **Accepting sanitary totalitarianism**

The violence of this extreme-center that manifested in arbitrary and baseless closures of cultural venues, generalized surveillance, stigmatization of the unvaccinated and their professional exclusion, was generally accepted without protest by the cultural sector. Even more disturbing, this acceptance went beyond what the law authorized. I'm thinking particularly of health pass controls, coupled with identity checks in certain cultural venues, a practice prohibited by law, except during the two months of the vaccine pass in early 2022.

The cultural sector thus collaborated in an unprecedented enterprise of surveillance and stigmatization. No doubt out of fear, no doubt because they believed the official discourse. They thought they were on the side of good while participating in something quite different. Hannah Arendt had warned us: totalitarianism occurs when it is accepted by citizens themselves as being good. Yes, we went through a period with totalitarian overtones. And everyone is responsible for their blind obedience.

The consequences were disastrous: accentuation of inequalities, unprecedented deterioration of mental

health, particularly among young people and children, deterioration of public health, for which we will pay the price for a long time, stratospheric debt of the country, benefiting, once again, major shareholders. Thus, major global shareholders doubled their fortune in two years, unprecedented in the history of capitalism. A resounding success for some, a disaster for the majority. I don't claim at all that everything was orchestrated, even though similar scenarios had been discussed, such as during Event 201 in November 2019, and that the H1N1 episode of 2009 already constituted a rehearsal, which didn't take hold at the time for lack of popular support, while the speeches of the health minister at the time, Roselyne Bachelot, were exactly similar, almost word for word, to the speeches of the health minister during the Covid period, Olivier Véran.

## **The boulevard offered to the extreme right**

Today, the RN is demonized. This party is, in my personal opinion, indeed concerning and dangerous. But we refuse to face the fact that totalitarianism has already been here and we have already supported it. This willful blindness opens, in my view, a boulevard for the RN.

If the RN has the intelligence to build arguments based on fear, as the extreme-center government still in power has done, it will be able to bring many people into its project of violence against others. This stigmatization has already taken place: the unvaccinated were ostracized by digital surveillance systems de-

ployed on an unprecedented scale and with massive popular consent. Families have unfortunately divided permanently, and still are, because of this totalitarian system, between those who *collaborated* and those who *resisted*.

Stanley Milgram's "Obedience to Authority" experiment in the 1960s sheds light on this phenomenon: as soon as an authority is recognized as such, the individual feels absolved of responsibility and can commit the most ignoble acts out of obedience. This is exactly what happened during the Covid period. If the RN gains control of public funding, particularly cultural funding, those who obeyed the extreme center yesterday will obey the extreme right tomorrow, that's obvious. We will see jackets turn inside out one by one, we will see today's heroes become tomorrow's collaborators, these "reasonable" people, these "honest folks" as Georges Brassens said with such poetry. Submission to authority, whatever it may be, remains the same psychological mechanism. The key, even if one has been manipulated, even if one has collaborated believing they were doing good, is to expand one's consciousness, to do differently tomorrow. That's why I'm writing this; not to make people feel guilty, but on the contrary, to be more tolerant, forgive and move forward.

## **Rethinking the political independence of the cultural sector**

What truly frightens me is this total lack of political consciousness in the cultural sector, this blind obedi-

ence to the power in place, masked by supposedly politicized discourse. Today, the RN does not yet have executive power. If it obtains it, we will see many jackets turn inside out, suddenly presenting things as “positive and constructive”.

The independence and political courage of each person must, in my view, be at the heart of cultural action. It’s not about obeying the injunctions of the Ministry of Culture or the State, but about defending a vision of the world. The discourses of the cultural sector all speak of freedom, emancipation, creativity. These discourses must be consistent with actions. It’s never too late; no one is perfect, but everyone has the duty to grow, to refine their critical thinking, that is, their nuanced singular thought.

Let’s take a simple example: in a cultural project intended for children, if we impose something on them “for their own good” without really giving them space to express themselves or helping them understand why, or if we pretend to listen to them to better appropriate and professionalize the ideas that come from them, we are also reproducing a pattern of domination. It’s a project of submission to authority, on a small scale. This awareness must manifest at all levels. As Paulo Freire wrote in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968): “*No one liberates another, no one liberates themselves alone, people liberate themselves together.*”

## **Toward a democratic reinvention through**

## culture

**The political consciousness of the cultural sector must be exercised at all levels. It must be embodied in the actions themselves, in respect for others and in the contributive place we give them when we hold the power and responsibility of a project funded by the common good.**

It is only in this way that we can create truly democratic spaces, laboratories for democratic reinvention through cultural actions. If we are not already doing this in the field, in our daily practices, it is logical that we obey those who hold power, whatever their injunctions may be.

Recent history has shown us our collective fragility. Five years ago, the cultural sector largely failed. There is no reason the same thing won't happen again if the RN gains more direct political power in France. Democratic vigilance begins with critical examination of our own practices and our own submissions. Only at this price can culture play its role of awakening consciousness rather than collective sleep and submission to the inhuman.

## CHAPTER 4: TOWARDS CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

Following the historical and critical analysis of the previous chapter, this chapter opens concrete perspectives for refoundation. It is no longer simply about understanding what doesn't work, but about proposing ways to do things differently. How can we move from cultural democratisation, that vertical model which presumes a legitimate culture to be disseminated toward ignorant audiences, to a genuine cultural democracy that recognises the equal dignity of all cultures and each person's right to participate in cultural life on their own terms? This chapter proposes conceptual tools and practical methods to bring about this transformation.

The first section, "*Cultural Rights and Professional Postures*", tackles a recurring criticism levelled at cultural rights: their overly theoretical character, too far removed from the ground. Yet the 2007 Fribourg Declaration offers a precious framework for rethinking cultural action. But cultural rights define objectives and directions; their application requires methods drawn from other fields. This text emphasises a dimension too often neglected: what underpins the social effects of human relationships is emotions, well before reason. For cultural rights not to remain "groundless," they must be enriched by methods such as non-violent communication, progressive pedagogies, popular education techniques, among others. The bond is the instrument of dignity: a cultural venue may have been designed according to the most democratic principles, but if the staff who operate it daily cannot tolerate visitors making noise or failing to respect entirely subjective rules, cultural rights will remain a dead let-

ter. Supporting professionals in their relational postures is therefore central. This is what we call “psycho-social competencies.”

The second section, *“Welcoming Radicalised Persons in Cultural Venues”*, addresses a question that the sector often prefers to avoid. What exactly do we mean by “radicalised persons”? Are people who vote for the far right radicalised? What about those who vote for the far left? And those who attend church every Sunday? The analysis shows that each of us manifests a form of radicality and violence, consciously or not. If cultural venues were only to welcome perfectly benevolent and neutral people, they would have to close their doors to everyone. Yet these spaces, funded by public money, must embody democratic exemplarity: being inclusive to the highest degree, respectful of all differences, even those that disturb us. Only on this condition can art and culture once again become living spaces, not places where a single way of thinking is imposed, however well-intentioned it may be.

The third section, *“What is a Cultural Policy? Why is Culture Political? And What is Political in Culture?”*, lays the theoretical foundations of this reflection. All culture is political because it imposes rules of belonging and worldviews. Cultural policy, by legitimising specific cultures, produces profoundly political effects, even when elected officials from the right and left programme the same shows. The illusion of cultural diversity must be deconstructed: no cultural policy can truly support diversity, because it proceeds from choices, necessarily restricted. Recognising this structural closure paradoxically allows us to better identify possible openings and existing biases, rather than deluding ourselves about a false diversity. Cultural rights then constitute a tool for opening: actively taking an interest in citizens whose cultures are foreign

to us, accomplishing this work for which we are paid by everyone's taxes.

The fourth section, *"Implementing Cultural Dissemination"*, proposes a concrete strategy in response to the crisis of cultural democratisation. Rather than bringing audiences to centralised institutions, it is about bringing culture closer to residents. Performances in apartments, artist tours "passing the hat" via social networks, initiatives like the Théâtre de la Poudrerie which operates without a fixed venue: these practices embody a "gentle revolution" that restores meaning to the encounter between artists and audiences. I also develop the idea of a *"narrative revolution of territories"*: faced with the soft tyranny of institutional narratives, we must multiply fragile, situated narratives, carried by cultural workers and residents. Without a democratic narrative, there is no cultural democracy.

The fifth section, *"For a Narrative Revolution of Territories"*, deepens this reflection on the power of narratives. Territories are defined by what is told about them and by them. Institutional narratives, often top-down and formatted, fail to mobilise because they leave no room for citizen voice. Conversely, fragile narratives—testimonies of lived cultural experiences, documentation of territorial practices, horizontal sharing—weave the narrative fabric that will support public cultural policies tomorrow. The call is simple and ambitious: to write, from one's own position, and to disseminate, so that a common memory may be written, crossing boundaries, fragile, but tenacious.

The sixth section, *"Authorising Creation"*, constitutes the practical heart of this chapter. It develops a concept forged over thirty years of artistic practice: certain works carry within themselves the authorisation for anyone to take the risk. When spectators say after

seeing a film “*it made me want to make films*”, this is not a disappointing reaction—it is the mark of an “authorising creation,” which carries in its very form a social generosity. This approach stands in opposition to industrial creation, which we can admire but cannot reproduce. The “Le Fil” evenings, which I organised for ten years, systematised this practice: each participant offers a creation to the others; there is no passive audience. The concept of “authorising creation” reminds us that art is not primarily a matter of individual genius or institutional recognition, but of sharing, of bonding, and of mutual authorisation to exist fully in the common space.

This chapter will be particularly useful to professionals seeking to concretely transform their practices, to move away from a position of superiority and enter into genuine dialogue with audiences. It will interest elected officials who wish to refound their cultural policy on truly democratic bases, understanding the practical implications of cultural rights. It will offer artists a reflection on the political dimension of their creation and on what it means to create authorising work. Finally, it will give everyone tools to participate in building a territorial cultural democracy, where every voice counts and where every narrative contributes to weaving the social bond.

# Cultural rights and professional postures

## **Tools for the concrete implementation of cultural rights.**

*Cultural rights, stemming from the Fribourg Declaration (2007), represent a major advancement for cultural democracy. However, their practical implementation remains a challenge, as they are often perceived as too theoretical. This text explores how emotions, human relationships, and methods such as nonviolent communication can bring these rights to life. Let's discover how a human-centered professional ethic is essential for the successful application of cultural rights.*

## **From Concept to Practice**

Cultural rights, particularly through the Fribourg Declaration of 2007, are, in my view, a major breakthrough and an extremely valuable tool for understanding and evaluating cultural projects. They offer constructive pathways for implementation in the spirit of cultural democracy. However, cultural rights are often seen as highly theoretical, specialized, and disconnected from the realities of cultural action. Yet, their very purpose is the concrete application of rights. Law is not a purely theoretical science; it is a legal framework represented by texts whose goal is to be applied within human communities as a legal basis for action. In his text “Clarifying the Cultural Meaning of Human Rights: Lessons Learned from the Deployment of Cultural Rights” (Nectart Journal #20, January 2025), philosopher Patrice Meyer-Bisch, who is almost the founder of cultural rights having spearheaded the drafting of the Fribourg Declaration, addresses cultural rights in their essence and their political and anthropological dimensions. However, the subject of their practical implementation is not discussed. This is not a criticism on my part. The purpose of my contribution is precisely to provide this complement. I propose focusing on the application of cultural rights in the context of human relationships, a topic that is too often overlooked in the philosophical and legal approach to cultural rights.

## **Reason and Emotion**

Indeed, cultural rights are often approached from the perspective of social meaning and reason. Yet, what

primarily underpins the social effects of human relationships are emotions, far more than reason. Therefore, it seems essential, for the effective application of cultural rights, to shed light on the modalities of human relationships carried out by agents. Humans cannot be reduced to rational social agents who, based on the information they receive, make sensible decisions. Humans receive information, experience emotions themselves, and evoke emotions in others. In my view, it is primarily at the emotional level that the implementation of cultural rights succeeds or fails, whether in cooperative cultural relationships among professionals or in interactions with beneficiaries in the context of cultural participation.

Thus, to prevent cultural rights from remaining “detached from reality,” as they are often criticized for being, they must, in my opinion, be enriched by scientific methods such as pedagogy, nonviolent communication, therapeutic work, etc. If we want cultural rights to be applied in a truly humanistic way, we must focus on their practical implementation, which goes beyond the framework of cultural rights themselves. These rights define objectives and directions, but their application requires methods from other fields, such as art, popular education, liberated enterprises, new pedagogies, or nonviolent communication, for example.

A remarkable initiative in this regard is that of the Réseau Culture 21, where Christelle Blouët has integrated techniques from popular education to support the values of cultural rights in relational modalities. This is a demanding and coherent dynamic, to which I propose adding other dimensions.

## The Link, Instrument of Dignity

Cultural rights aim to cultivate and defend human dignity. At their core lies the link, the relationship. Imagine a cultural space designed and co-constructed with input from all levels of agents, but which, over time and with staff changes, ends up being operated by individuals who, for example, cannot tolerate visitors making noise or not following rules. These rules, often subjective, vary from person to person. Each individual interprets the criteria of decorum differently, depending on their sensitivity. Some may be more sensitive to noise, others to the presence of people in spaces, and still others to disorder. These agents, often hired by external contractors, may feel pushed to their limits when faced with cultures different from their own. How could they implement cultural rights as defined at the institutional level if these values have never been conveyed to them in a way that resonates with their sensitivity?

In his text, Patrice Meyer-Bisch refers to humans as a “resource,” an unfortunate term as it evokes a dehumanizing conception, inherited from the history of the concept of “human resources,” well-documented by Johann Chapoutot in *Libres d’obéir* (2020). The concepts of human resources and management, developed after World War II in all major global corporations by consultants who were later revealed to be former Nazis, treat humans as a resource akin to coal or electricity—a deeply dehumanizing vision rooted in the logic of concentration camps. For a genuine implementation of cultural rights, we must move away from this logic and place humans back at the center. Cultural rights, which advocate for the respect of others’ dig-

nity, must empower agents in their roles. These agents, funded by the common good (taxes), must be able to maintain their humanity and prioritize people over processes. Otherwise, despite their good intentions, their actions risk being tainted by a lack of respect for humanity.

## **Working on the Ground of Humanity**

This is why, in my view, we should adopt a more minimalist approach to the institutional implementation of cultural rights at the macro level and focus efforts on supporting agents. It is essential that they internalize the concepts of cultural rights and apply them through effective and compassionate methods, such as nonviolent communication, which postulates an almost therapeutic approach to representing the other, or new pedagogical techniques that give everyone a voice. These techniques, without exception, rely on the acceptance of relinquishing power over the other, which corresponds to stepping away from processes and returning to the humanity of the other. This requires sufficient self-confidence to welcome what the other brings and transforms within us, rather than perceiving it as a threat.

To work is to set oneself in motion, to transform internally. The etymology of the word “work” does not come from “tripalium,” an instrument of torture, but from an older root, that of the word “travel” in English, meaning journey, transformation. To work, therefore, is to move, to transform, to create new neural connections. For this to be possible, there must be a climate of emotional trust within the group. If we are in a state of fear or apprehension, our nervous sys-

tem goes into protection mode, preventing any new connections or learning. Thus, the prerequisite for any work is the absence of fear in relationships.

The modalities of relationships and professional postures are therefore central to the psychological and neural implementation of cultural rights. I speak here of professional postures because it is the professionals who, within the framework of their work ethic, have the responsibility to recognize and apply these rights. Professionals, whether public or private agents, are funded by taxes or citizens' purchases and therefore have a responsibility toward them. In Patrice Meyer-Bisch's texts, cultural rights are often associated with the individual action of each person, who should grant these rights to themselves. I understand and share this theoretical perspective, but in practice, it is the professionals who carry these rights and have the mission to offer others a framework in which their rights are respected.

## **For Democracy, Cultivate Ethics Rather Than Morality**

For cultural rights to be implemented, professional work must be guided by ethics, that is, by a sense of the "good" rather than the "right" in a moral sense. This sense of the "good" is based on openness in relationships with others, respect for their dignity at every moment, and awareness of each person's social position. It is not about hypocritical egalitarianism but about genuine openness to one another.

Implementing ethics in professional postures is an essential endeavor, complementary to political efforts for cultural rights, and perhaps even more fundamental for the democratic mission.

# Welcoming radicalized people to cultural venues

**For a truly inclusive cultural democracy.**

*Do cultural venues filter their audiences, consciously or unconsciously, according to criteria of radicalism? This question reveals our contradictions about violence and extremism. Proposals for exercising democracy.*

## What is a radicalized person?

A question immediately arises: what exactly do we mean by “radicalized persons”?

Let us consider some examples. Are people who vote for the far right radicalized? What about those who vote for the far left? And those who go to church every Sunday? It might be more accurate to distinguish between radicalization and violent radicalization. But what exactly is violence? Physical violence immediately comes to mind.

Yet many people considered non-radicalized exercise physical violence on others. Think of parents who physically punish their children - they are not therefore labeled as radicalized. Consider bosses who humiliate their employees, or bankers who freeze the accounts of people in need over a modest overdraft. It is clear that violence and radicalization constitute two distinct realities.

Are we then seeking to exclude from cultural venues those whose violence stems from their radicalism? Reading Monique Pinçon-Charlot and her concept of “violence of the rich,” we understand that any wealthy person could be considered radicalized and violent, their wealth constituting in itself a form of extreme social violence. We should therefore be more specific and speak of direct violent radicalization: acts of physical violence, beatings, murders, incitement to hatred...

But when a left-wing person states “we must fight against the far right,” encompassing ideas, political leaders, activists and voters, is this not hate speech, an incitement to violence? This formulation differs rad-

ically from “we must fight for democracy,” which constitutes an inclusive discourse. Violent radicalization certainly maintains links with extremism. However, the concept of “extreme center” developed by historian Pierre Serna invites us to take a new look at the elites in power who present themselves as moderate and centrist: their radical extremism hides under a velvet glove.

This velvet, moreover, is not always present. One need only observe the repression of the Yellow Vest movement or the management of the Covid crisis, marked by violence, stigmatization, scapegoating, humiliation and public shaming, all in the name of order or public health. These practices are part of a discourse of war and are accompanied by exceptional measures to the democratic regime, legally justified by this warlike rhetoric. We are indeed dealing with violent, institutional radicalism, masked by hypocrisy and integrated in a totalitarian way by most citizens as “normality.”

At the end of this overview of various forms of radicalism, one conclusion emerges: each of us, consciously or not, manifests a form of radicalism and violence. If cultural venues were to welcome only perfectly benevolent people, they would have to close their doors to everyone, except perhaps to very young children who have not yet been influenced by the dominating cultures in which we are immersed.

## **Reinvesting the institution with its**

## **democratic role**

Let us emphasize the idea that cultural venues have a fundamentally democratic mission: their role is to offer unconditional welcome, to respect everyone's culture and ideas. When people feel that their culture, whether perceived as radical or not depending on the lens adopted, is neither stigmatized nor reduced to an enemy position (enemy of whom, of what anyway? Conflicts are defined according to multiple perspectives), they can truly open up.

These cultural spaces exist precisely to share what we have in common as human beings, despite our deep dissensions and fundamental disagreements. We are all citizens, we all contribute through our taxes to the funding of these institutions, they belong to all of us.

## **For a culture of democratic welcome**

Cultural venues, funded by public money, must embody democratic exemplarity. They must be inclusive to the highest degree, respectful of all differences, even those that disturb us. It is on this condition that art and culture can once again become living spaces, not places where a single thought is imposed, even if it is well-meaning and convinced of its universal superiority.

This claim to universality recalls the old well-meaning colonial demon, whose human and social ravages we see every day. On the contrary, it is about creating safe spaces where everyone knows they will be neither judged nor stigmatized for who they are or for their political choices, but welcomed in places dedicat-

ed to sharing the sensible. For the sensible, regardless of our ideas, our cultures or our supposed radicalities, constitutes our common heritage as human beings.

This vision calls for a refoundation of cultural policies, of artist training and of the political positioning, in the democratic sense, of artistic approaches. It concerns both the modalities of public participation and our capacity for openness to others. An authentic openness, and not a thought that claims to be superior and more universalist than others.

This claim to universality is an illusion, we know it well, even if the West persists in believing that it holds the best way of thinking about the world and that it philosophically surpasses all other cultures. This is a profound error. So let us open the doors, broaden our perspectives, develop sensitivities, multiply projects and postures to cultivate a democracy where pluralities can truly express themselves.

Perhaps then these places of culture, the word takes on its full meaning, will become fertile grounds where new spaces of encounter will germinate, creating bonds and mutual enrichments to, who knows, contribute to the foundations for a better world.

# **What is a cultural policy? Why is culture political? And what is political in culture?**

**A critical approach to cultural policies through the lens of cultural rights.**

*All culture is political because it imposes rules of belonging and world-views. Exploring this dimension illuminates the democratic stakes of cultural policies.*

## Why is culture necessarily political?

The answer is obvious. A culture represents a worldview that has been shaped and shared. Whether legitimate or transgressive, official or secret, artistic, sporting, academic or geographical, culture constitutes what unites human beings within diverse communities: Olympique de Marseille supporters, Dalida fans, baroque music lovers, choir members, World of Warcraft players, or manga enthusiasts with their countless sub-communities.

Culture thus creates communities. It may seem difficult, at first glance, to discern a political dimension in these unifying cultures. Stuart Hall, a figure of *cultural studies* and British sociology professor of Jamaican origin, renewed the understanding of culture by insisting on its conflictual and political dimension. According to him, culture is not simply a set of practices but a “terrain of struggle” where meanings and identities are negotiated. In his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), he writes:

«Culture is that place of sharing, negotiation and sometimes conflict where meanings are constructed and contested. It is a terrain of struggle where different groups attempt to impose their own worldviews, their values and their identities.

»

Stuart Hall reminds us that cultural belonging, far from being neutral, is always traversed by issues of

power and recognition, both collectively and individually. Thus, when I evoke the unifying function, I am not limiting myself to its collective social dimension. I also include its intimate personal dimension: that feeling of belonging to a community of lovers of a certain musical style, for example, which persists even when we don't personally know any other lover of this music. We nevertheless identify with this community through its shared culture.

## **The political dimension inherent to all culture**

How does this cultural belonging take on a political dimension? Every culture contains, consciously or not, a set of rules that evolve over time. As Pierre Bourdieu demonstrated in *Distinction* (1979), these rules constitute a "habitus" that structures our practices and representations. Sarah Thornton, in her book *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (1995), shows how "subcultural capitals" function as systems of distinction within alternative communities themselves. For those who freely choose their cultural belonging, these rules are not perceived as constraining but rather as emancipating.

Let's take the example of punk culture. If I identify with this community and share its codes, my way of dressing and my lifestyle become conscious choices of belonging that participate in the construction of my identity. Naturally, I can simultaneously belong to the punk community and that of baroque music lovers: cultures never mutually exclude each other.

Cultures generally show themselves to be very wel-

coming to newcomers. If someone shows interest in industrial metal music by buying records or streams, the actors of this culture - musicians, producers, distributors - will gladly accompany them in their deeper discovery of this musical universe. This openness exists, however, only on condition of respecting the implicit codes of the culture in question. Nancy Duxbury, a Portuguese professor and researcher specializing in cultural policies and sustainable development, shows that cultural openness is inseparable from respect for the codes and values specific to each community:

«The processes of inclusion and exclusion in cultural participation are often implicit, embedded in social norms and expectations that determine who is considered a “legitimate participant” in a given context. These mechanisms, although subtle, profoundly shape access to culture, recognition of diverse voices, and the ability of newcomers to integrate into established cultural practices.

*Article “Cultural Policies for Sustainable Development: Four Strategic Paths” (International Journal of Cultural Policy, vol. 27, 2021)*

»

Transgressing these rules leads to integration difficulties. One can then feel dissident, marginal, or marginalized, sometimes by oneself, sometimes by others, often by both simultaneously. A double phenomenon can occur: we may have the impression of not respecting all the rules of a culture we wish to integrate into, feeling a problem of legitimacy, while others perceive

us as perfectly integrated. Conversely, we may feel fully adherent to a culture while being rejected by certain community members, who feel we take up too much space or don't meet their expectations. Each community indeed has its spaces of power, its hierarchies and its internal conflicts.

## Cultural rules as political system

This analysis progressively reveals, I hope, the political dimension of culture, because we see that belonging to a culture depends on respecting its rules. Now, **a set of rules constitutes precisely a political device: an organizational system allowing the functioning of a collective, of which culture forms the symbolic cement, that is, what unites and represents the members of the community.** This perspective aligns with the work of American sociologist Howard Becker (1982) on "art worlds" as cooperation systems organized around shared conventions. He writes:

« All collective activities, and art is no exception, are organized around conventions, that is, tacit or explicit agreements about how things should be done. These conventions make cooperation possible between different participants, each knowing what others expect of them and what they can expect from others.

*Howard S. Becker, Art Worlds, 1982.*

»

Becker shows that art and culture, far from being simple additions of individual practices, are the product of cooperation between multiple actors, united around shared conventions that structure their collective activity, which relies on the acceptance and reproduction of common rules.

Even voluntarily apolitical cultures intrinsically contain this political dimension. Consider the culture of public theater, bringing together lovers of contemporary authors, innovative stagings and new theatrical aesthetics. This culture, which perceives itself as open and intended for open-mindedness, democratic, progressive and inclusive, nevertheless imposes a complex set of rules, particularly behavioral, during performances.

These rules go far beyond the simple framework of the performance hall. The way of behaving at the theater reveals representations of the world and establishes implicit hierarchies. It notably presupposes the privileged place of the artist, the admiration due to them, and their role as society's scout. Behind the spectator's postures lies an entire system of organization and social roles. These are not simple behavioral conventions but a full and complete worldview, a genuine political system.

## **The revealing example of cinema: France and India**

The comparison between French and Indian film cultures perfectly illustrates this political dimension. In Indian theaters, films last several hours and spectators talk, eat, debate, leave and enter freely. In

France, silence is the rule. This difference reveals radically different conceptions of the role of art and the artist.

In India, cinema integrates into daily life as a form of community dialogue. In France, we adopt a position of spectator certainly active in their reception, but silent, experiencing the film as a parenthesis in daily life. These approaches differently define the value given to the spectacle. In India, the emphasis is on community gathering around a work that takes this into account: films adopt a slower pace, multiply information repetitions, knowing that attention will not be constant. This approach is in no way perceived as problematic.

These are indeed two distinct relational and democratic policies. Note that I'm speaking here of mainstream Indian cinema; other cinematic forms coexist in India, carrying other cultural policies.

## **Cultural policy: an eminently political choice**

I hope to have demonstrated the intrinsically political character of all culture. Let's now address the notion of "cultural policy," where the terms are reversed. This refers to choices made with public money to support and disseminate certain cultures to citizens who finance them through taxes.

Cultural policy may seem independent of partisan politics, because elected officials from both right and left often program the same shows and share the same artistic tastes. Yet, by legitimizing and bringing

into existence specific cultures, themselves carriers of particular worldviews and democratic systems, these choices produce profoundly political effects. **Cultural policy therefore constitutes a political and not cultural choice, contrary to appearances.** Left or right elected officials carry a common political culture, because they defend the same institutions, inherited from the French Revolution, which was a “bourgeois revolution,” a “notaries’ revolution” based on property rights. The institutional, legal and ideological bases are common references of both the French right and left: national sovereignty, equality before the law, citizenship, individualism, secularism, and the nation-state. Of course, each camp proposes a different reading and implementation, but none of them are either libertarian or anarchist for example! So the programmed shows can never be anarchist. Or if they are, they will be framed in cultural protocols (if only the customs of entering the theater, paying for the seat, silence in the hall, etc.) that are anything but anarchist, so these artists and shows will be instrumentalized by the bourgeois reproduction system.

Let’s take the counter-example of Isabelle Attard: in her book “How I Became an Anarchist” (2019), she traces her path of political transformation from her activist origins, daughter of an ecologist and archaeozoologist by training, to her adherence to anarchism. Elected as an EELV ecologist deputy in 2012 in Calvados after local engagement in Bayeux, she discovers with disgust the dysfunctions of the parliamentary system, which she calls a “particle accelerator” for her awareness. This experience at the National Assembly, marked by corruption and the impossibility of changing the system “from within,” pushes her after her mandate toward a period of introspection where she immerses herself in the texts of Malatesta, Proudhon, Louise Michel and Murray Bookchin. She discovers

that anarchism, far from the chaos associated with it, means absence of domination and organization without centralized power, in perfect coherence with ecology and feminism. Inspired by concrete examples of self-management like the Paris Commune or Rojava, she now campaigns in Brittany within local anarchist collectives. She campaigns to deconstruct prejudices and encourage everyone to question political dogmas that present themselves as the alpha and omega.

## The illusion of cultural diversity

It is often claimed that cultural policy supports creation and diversity. This assertion is at best wishful thinking, at worst a lie. As Tony Bennett analyzes in *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), cultural institutions participate in the construction of an “exhibitionary complex” that normalizes certain practices while excluding others. The work of Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre on the “enrichment economy” (*Enrichment: A Critique of Commodities*, 2017) shows how cultural policies participate in the selective valorization of certain cultural goods and practices.

Those who claim there is diversity in cultural proposals financed by public service either lack lucidity and a minimum of critical distance, or knowingly conceal reality. **The reality is that a cultural policy cannot truly support diversity, because it proceeds from necessarily restricted political choices. It is impossible to simultaneously embrace all representations of the world.** Each vision, even an open one, can radically oppose others, and these different political visions generate fundamentally distinct cultures.

**Recognizing this structural lack of cultural diversity paradoxically allows us to better identify possible openings and existing biases, rather than deluding ourselves about false diversity and manufacturing in good conscience a dominating hypocrisy.**

Faced with the argument of good conscience and professionalism of cultural actors, I oppose the observation of the flagrant disconnection between public cultural proposals and a large part of citizens. The worldviews conveyed by these cultural policies radically differ from those of the majority of the population. This problematic joins the analyses carried by the cultural rights movement, which criticizes the paradigm of “cultural democratization” in favor of a “cultural democracy,” recognizing the legitimacy of all cultural expressions and weaving links between them.

One could accuse me of advocating a race to the bottom or demagoguery, arguing that it’s easy to propose what pleases the greatest number. This is not at all my position. My proposal is rather to disseminate real diversity through new links woven voluntarily and tirelessly. Because nothing pleases everyone. Even football, which gathers crowds and unleashes passions, leaves some indifferent and repulses others. No cultural policy can reach all citizens or allow real diversity in the political sense of the term: let’s scatter it, in terms of artistic forms, forms of financing and forms of mediation; let’s invent, instead of reproducing.

**Toward a democratic opening: cultural**

## rights

How then to reconcile an ethical aspiration for truly diversified cultural policies with an attachment to the democratic model, which allows for funding from tax collection? (let's not forget that, all taxes combined, including VAT for example, which is invisible but very present, the "poor" pay on average 50% of their income in taxes today, compared to 26% for the "rich")

The first step consists of becoming aware of the political closure inherent to any cultural policy. The second involves respecting the cultural rights of all citizens. This approach is in line with the work of Patrice Meyer-Bisch on cultural rights, which derive from fundamental human rights, and echoes the *Fribourg Declaration* (2007), which a group I'm part of is updating, which affirms that "everyone has the right to choose and have respected their cultural identity in the diversity of its modes of expression."

For those who occupy positions of power, this means actively taking interest in citizens whose cultures are foreign to us and rest on different political bases from ours. It's about accomplishing this work of openness for which we are remunerated by the taxes of all citizens, and not just for the benefit of those who share our culture.

Cultural rights thus constitute a tool for openness, transformation and mutual enrichment. They can progressively evolve the paradigms of cultural policies toward forms we cannot yet imagine, necessarily diversified and specific according to the cultures encountered, respected and recognized as authentic cultural and political enrichments. We will all grow from this, and cultural professionals, mediators and artists first, if they accept the questioning, sometimes very pro-

found, of some of their certainties or expert postures. And we will secure future funding for the cultural sector, which can refound its political purpose there, in the sense of a contribution to the life of the city.

# Implementing cultural dissemination

## **Towards a decentralized and participatory cultural network.**

*Faced with the crisis of cultural democratization and a growing disengagement of public action in the cultural domain, new forms of artistic distribution are emerging. These initiatives, carried out outside traditional circuits, reveal a genuine capacity to reweave the link between creation, territories and citizens. Among them, apartment performances or those in atypical venues embody a “soft revolution” that restores meaning to the encounter between artists and their audiences.*

## A culture closer to residents

These alternative formats, often implemented directly by artists without the intermediation of subsidized or private institutions, allow for the creation of unprecedented proximity relationships. By settling in apartments, gardens, workshops or cafés, culture becomes an integral part of daily life. This direct contact surface between art and society enables the formation of local artistic communities, woven at the intersection of residents, businesses, associations and living spaces, emerging ones that deserve in my opinion to be supported and developed.

It should be noted that this approach, although updated today, is not new. Apartment theater, from the 1980s, had already been explored under the impetus of progressive institutions like the Théâtre 71 of Malakoff (92). However, these experiences remained within an organized, supervised, often institutional framework. Today, in a context of cultural disintermediation, artists themselves can take charge of the production, distribution and animation of these events.

Sociologist Bernard Lahire, in *The Culture of Individuals* (2004), reminded us that:

« Cultural democratization also involves the invention of new spaces for encounters between works and audiences.»

»

## The return of the street performer: the example of Ingrid Courrèges

Singer Ingrid Courrèges perfectly illustrates this new situation. Marginalized for her critical positions during the Covid-19 crisis, she developed a “hat-passing” tour model, in venues chosen by the hosts themselves. Thanks to her TikTok community, she manages to bring together an audience that shares her values of freedom, independent thinking and creativity. Accompanied by her husband and equipment, she embodies this new figure of the modern street performer, from the Latin *saltare in banco*, “to jump on the bench,” a nomadic artist capable of transforming any place into a temporary stage, into a space for listening and exchange.

This direct encounter between art and daily life reactivates the transformative power of the artistic gesture. As André Malraux wrote:

«Art is the shortest path from man to man.»

»

Making a living room, garden or workshop into a scenic space is not trivial: it’s a way of shifting perspectives, symbolically restructuring lived space, opening a poetic breach in everyday life. As a practitioner myself of these approaches for 15 years through **participatory itinerant projections**, I can testify to the strength of this artistic and sensitive sharing at the heart of neighborhoods.

## **Towards a citizen and decentralized cultural network**

It is now time to sustainably structure this type of initiative. Thanks to the possibilities offered by digital tools and peer-to-peer logic, we have the means to build an alternative, decentralized and solidarity-based cultural network. The idea would be to create a collaborative platform, based on open source and self-managed principles, connecting artists and hosts around a common agenda.

This would not be an “Airbnb of culture,” a formula that should be avoided so as not to induce a commercial or consumerist logic, but rather a shared artistic hosting community. A cooperative-type application, allowing free encounters between cultural proposals and curious citizens, according to ethical, transparent and equitable rules.

As economist Françoise Benhamou emphasizes in *The Economics of Culture* (2017):

«Alternative models of cultural distribution constitute an appropriate response to contemporary mutations in cultural practices.»

»

Such a platform would also reactivate the notion of territorial networking: individuals who have already hosted a performance could, in turn, relay other artistic proposals in their neighborhood, their city or their professional network. It’s an entire organic cultural cartography that could thus emerge, like a living network where local appropriation becomes a driving

force for artistic circulation.

## **Restoring a political place to culture**

Paradoxically, this bottom-up dynamic could spark renewed awareness among political decision-makers. Seeing citizens spontaneously invite artists to their homes, organize tours, co-produce events, is to highlight a profound, often neglected need: that of a lived, shared, essential culture. This movement could challenge local authorities too quickly tempted to treat culture as an adjustment variable, to consider it as “non-essential.”

Finally, it is important to emphasize how much this evolution encourages artistic forms that are lighter, more mobile, more permeable to the constraints of reality, and therefore more resilient. Less spectacular perhaps, but more anchored. As Michel de Certeau affirmed in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980): “*Space is a practiced place.*”

Through their simplicity and accessibility, apartment performances (and more) reinvent our living spaces as territories of expression and sharing. They remind us that culture is not a closed building but a movement, a living link between individuals. It’s up to us to ensure that this link becomes a genuine collective infrastructure, enabled by digital networks, serving a cultural project for all.

The collaborative digital resource platform for amateur artists [Azimut](#), which I built collaboratively for [MPAA](#), which is at the beginning of its emergence, is a first exploration laboratory, at this precise location on

the subject of amateur artistic creation, but the connections are numerous.

# For a narrative revolution of territories

## **The urgency of a horizontal cultural democracy.**

*What if true cultural power resided in the stories we write, daily, from our positions, with our words? Each territory produces a narrative. Not the frozen and smooth one communicated by institutions alone, but a living, multiple narrative, inscribed in human experiences. Faced with top-down discourses, it is time to organize a democratic revolution of territorial cultural speech. To rebuild an authentic cultural democracy, we must recognize the power of these sensitive narratives, fragile perhaps, but essential to the very legitimacy of cultural policies, and foster their emergence.*

## Rethinking territory beyond traditional boundaries

What is a territory today? The answer goes far beyond classic administrative divisions. A territory is first and foremost an instituting and institutional identification of a human collective within a geography that can be physical or digital. This definition encompasses both a neighborhood and a region, a collective of inhabitants and a university, a festival anchored in a given place and time, and a Telegram or LinkedIn community.

As Pierre Rosanvallon describes in *The Parliament of the Invisible* (2015), we live in an era of “expressive democracy” where individual narrative becomes a political act. This perspective invites us to recognize that the essence of a territory lies in the sense of belonging shared by its members, whether permanent or temporary. Territory is not just a place, but a network of relationships that necessarily produces a narrative, even implicit, that says “this is who we are.”

At the heart of each territory is invariably a communicating instance, more or less institutionalized. From members of a Facebook group spontaneously sharing information to the structured communication service of a metropolis, these instances shape the territory’s image. But a fundamental problem arises: the institutional narrative, distinct from daily reality, influences tourism, economic partnerships, and media perception, and often creates a gap with residents’ lived experience.

## **The soft tyranny of institutional narratives**

Documents publicly emanating from a territory—texts, images, videos, books—powerfully imprint its image, often durably. This documentary imprint, as Dominique Cardon reminds us in *Digital Culture* (2019), is crucial because “*algorithms shape our access to information by privileging certain formats and certain sources*”.

In this informational architecture, text reigns supreme. Contrary to what one might believe, it is not images but written words that constitute the essence of memorial traces. Information transmission, via search engines, artificial intelligence, or aggregators, still relies today primarily on textual processing. Automated systems index, categorize, and redistribute information by massively relying on text, giving writings major strategic reach.

The report from the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE), “Towards Cultural Democracy” (2017) emphasizes that cultural policies must integrate these narratives to strengthen citizen participation. Yet too often, official narratives mask or weaken minority, spontaneous, partial narratives—those very ones that bear the imprint of true cultural democracy.

## **Democratization versus democracy: the heart of the**

## problem

We must clearly distinguish between democratization and cultural democracy. As Patrice Meyer-Bisch explains in *Cultural Rights, Finally in the Spotlight?* (La revue de l'Observatoire n°33, 2008):

« “Cultural democracy assumes recognition of the diversity of cultural expressions and active participation by all in cultural life, unlike democratization which imposes a legitimate culture from above.”

»

Democratization narratives, carried by top-down academic or official processes, already have their automatic communicational force. They circulate easily in established channels, benefit from institutional legitimacy, and impose themselves in the public space. But these narratives, while necessary, often lack the warmth of personal testimonies and the credibility of horizontal recommendations.

Conversely, democratic narratives—those that emerge from lived experience, shared daily life, ordinary cultural practice—struggle to exist. People live their moments without necessarily making them into narratives, which explains their rarity. This absence is not trivial: it deprives our territories of narrative richness essential to their democratic vitality, for the present and especially for the future.

## **The paradoxical power of fragile narratives**

Democratic narratives possess incomparable force, precisely because they are fragile. Their power comes from their intrinsic fragility: as citizens, we often feel illegitimate faced with authoritative speech, but it is precisely this humility that makes these narratives authentic and recommendable.

In today's disintermediated digital space, this horizontality amplifies their impact. A democratic narrative circulates through peer-to-peer recommendations, humanized and valued, because it comes from someone "like me." As Patrick Germain-Thomas notes in his article *Cultural Democratization, Illusion or Utopia in the Making?* (Quaderni, 2020), digital mediations promise greater inclusion, thus supporting the idea of horizontal circulation of narratives.

Writing from oneself, without authority, without mandate, without authorization, requires courage. One always feels too small, always late, always insufficient. But if we renounce these narratives, that of the territory will be written without us. Crafting these narratives requires constant effort, because we always doubt our legitimacy, but this is the very principle of democracy: a horizontal point of view that does not impose itself. The institution, to exercise its function as defender of democracy, must support these narratives.

## **A concrete practice**

## of democratic writing

My recommendation for institutions is therefore clear: encourage each territorial agent, each citizen, whatever their position, to communicate and write the meaning of what they perceive on the territory. This invitation goes far beyond the framework of official communication services to embrace a logic of cultural democracy where everyone contributes to the elaboration of the common narrative.

Concretely, this means:

1. **Systematically documenting:** always referencing places, dates (specifying the year), and the personal meaning of artistic, cultural, territorial, or heritage actions, both for the author and for citizens, ephemeral or settled.
2. **Renewing texts:** in the contemporary attention economy, theorized by Yves Citton in *For an Ecology of Attention* (2014), the relevance of content depends on its freshness and its ability to inscribe itself in current informational flows. We must renew, without fear of repetition, because we add nuances and diversified viewpoints.
3. **Multiplying distribution channels:** social networks, personal or group emails, WhatsApp groups, blogs, newsletters... No matter the medium, what matters is that it be situated, anchored in lived and shared experience.
4. **Emphasizing the democratic dimension:** everything done at human scale, in co-decision, exchange, welcoming the other, circumstance. These “mundane”

experiences deserve to be told, to be symbolically enhanced.

## **The crucial issue of public funding**

This narrative mobilization is not just an abstract democratic exercise. It touches the very heart of the legitimacy of public cultural policies. Thanks to these narratives, we can contribute to refounding a cultural democracy on territories, essential for legitimizing public culture funding, present and future.

In a context of growing budgetary constraints, only a culture truly anchored in citizen practices and narratives will be able to durably justify its funding by the community. This funding, crucial for social bonds detached from commercial stakes, is today under-recognized, while its future rests precisely on this democratic dynamic.

As several reports remind us, ambition remains unfinished without active citizen participation. Democratic narratives illuminate this invisible territory of lived culture, testifying to a discreet fecundity that escapes the usual radars of evaluation.

## **A narrative ecology for our territories**

We speak here of a true narrative ecology of territories: a system where each voice counts, produces meaning, and acts as a ferment of mutual recognition. A territory is above all what is told about it, and by it.

Without democratic narrative, no cultural democracy. And without cultural democracy, public culture funding runs the risk of being subjected to purely commercial or instrumental logics.

This ecology requires devices, certainly simple, but recurrent, that call for writing, for collecting testimonies, support dissemination, accompany people. It assumes considering that democratic speech is not a marginal exercise, but essential to cultural governance.

## **Call to action: writing to exist democratically**

Our future absolutely needs our narratives. Each testimony, each documentation of democratic cultural experience, each horizontal sharing of territorial practice contributes to weaving the narrative fabric that will support tomorrow's public cultural policies.

I strongly invite organizing to be able to produce and disseminate these narratives in all possible instances, renewing them regularly to maintain their effectiveness. This narrative responsibility falls to each of us: territorial agents, engaged citizens, cultural actors. Our silence would amount to abandoning the field to purely commercial and top-down logics. Our voice, fragile but authentic, constitutes the foundation on which a true territorial cultural democracy can be built.

The invitation is therefore simple and ambitious: write. Everyone, from their position. And disseminate. So that, little by little, a common memory is written,

traversing, fragile, but tenacious. A memory carried by culture agents, inhabitants, enlightened amateurs, passersby. It is this multiplication of situated narratives that will make, tomorrow, the democratic strength of our cultural policies. And it is on this that their long-term legitimacy depends.

# Authorizing Creation

**For a radical democratization of the creative act.**

*How can artistic creation become a political act of collective emancipation? By carrying within itself, in its form and process, the authorization for everyone to risk themselves in it.*

## **Learning by doing, or the genesis of my practice**

My desire as a young man, child, adolescent was to make films. I started with a small plastic Super 8 camera, investing my pocket money in buying it, then in the film rolls that I put in my camera and sent to be developed by mail, even though my parents weren't wealthy. What I'm describing here was 45 years ago. Today, for someone who wants to film, everything is available: cameras everywhere, in phones, tablets, cameras, webcams, laptops. You can even find cameras in any dumpster.

Quickly, when I started creating, I realized I wasn't alone. I met other people driven by the same desire. Creation thus became very quickly quite collective. Once you've made a film, you have to show it, and that too was within my reach. I very quickly organized screening sessions at my home, if only to share together the films we had made. When I arrived at university, these approaches became more public, and even more collective.

I was immediately in the concrete act of doing: making films, learning technique, doing together, receiving from others and bringing to others, this infinite richness of exchange. By organizing short film screenings and then film festivals, I received enormously. That's why I did it: to offer and receive, to give and receive. As Marcel Mauss says so well in his *Essay on the Gift* (1925), "*to refuse to give, to neglect to invite, like refusing to take, amounts to declaring war; it is refusing alliance and communion.*" My stake was immediately in the possible connections around me, not in a politics of creation that would be a tool to manufac-

ture one's social domination or enter the circle of dominants legitimized by an institution.

## **Multidisciplinarity as a refusal of hierarchies**

I went to the end of the process that interested me by creating, by sharing creative approaches and by showing. All of this was always connected. I always envisioned myself in this reality in action of the place of creation that creates concrete links where I am. In these enterprises, I certainly met people who were more individualistic and less multidisciplinary in their practices, and why not, besides, everyone can enrich themselves on different levels. But me, I was always in this multidisciplinary: I wasn't assigned to a single role.

I created, I shared, I knew the technique, I showed others' works and mine, I connected people. I wasn't just a "director," besides, I prefer the word "filmmaker" to the word "director," because director designates a technical function in a professional organization method of cinematographic creation. My subject is not the professional milieu; my subject is making films and showing them, helping others make their films and showing their films too. All of this belongs to the same order for me.

In the numerous workshops I've been leading for a very long time, cinematographic creation workshops, but also poetic, literary, pictorial, photographic ones, as much as possible, I also participate in them. I risk myself with the participants in creation. I'm not just the teacher; I'm also in the same place as them, I must also dare to take the risk of expressing myself

and exposing my expression to others. This approach echoes what Paulo Freire describes in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968): “No one educates anyone else, no one educates himself alone, people educate each other through the mediation of the world.”

## **The framework that authorizes: a politics of horizontality**

This participation completely changes relationships. There is no domination, there is someone who holds a framework, and the framework is what authorizes. This framework ensures that everyone in the group will create something, that’s what it’s for. If I apply this framework to myself too, well it authorizes even more. By risking myself like the others, by letting them know that it’s not easy for me either, because it’s extremely difficult to express oneself, this benefits the framework, it authorizes them even more.

If I proceed this way and it seems very important to me, if I see how effective it is, it’s because, very often, since my youth, when people saw my films, they told me: “*Ah, it made me want to make films.*” This reaction always surprised me. I sometimes felt almost offended that they didn’t tell me they had admired, experienced emotions, learned. No, they told me: “*It made me want to make films.*” I wondered what this meant, it destabilized me a bit.

This is what I call today **authorizing creation**. Recently, as I devote myself more to writing after having made hundreds of films of all kinds, I received an email from someone who, responding to a newsletter of mine, began to write, to authorize themselves to

write, to invent a concept, to share it with me. This brought me back to those people who, so often, told me after seeing my films that it had made them want to make some. Everything connected in me.

## **The work as a trace of a democratic process**

In reality, this reaction is not at all disparaging to my works. Works carry within them their manufacturing process, and their context of enunciation. In my multidisciplinary approach where I went from creation to distribution in the same gesture, the works created in that context carry it. They can circulate beyond, of course, but in them, they carry this simplicity of gesture, a gesture of direct connection, a film made to be seen by other people we know.

Jean-Luc Godard said you have to make films to show them to your friends. He was quite right. And it's not because of that that the circle of friends can't expand. But at the start, a work must be addressed, otherwise who will it interest? We can see this clearly on social networks with precise communities that are interested in precise subjects. Everything is addressed.

Take the example of theater directors' interviews who create YouTube or TikTok channels to talk about their art in the absolute: this interests no one, and besides no one goes to see them, because it's not addressed. On the other hand, these same directors, if they meet after their show or during round tables with spectators who are interested in their work, there is an address, they speak to someone and it can be fascinating. Digital space is not an abstract universal space;

it's a space of human connection like any other, of a very singular nature certainly, but it's a space of connection that requires an address just as much.

## **The distinction between authorizing creation and industrial creation**

What I understand today is that *authorizing works* carry this quality within them. There are other works made for the "general public," for major festivals, validated in their script by banks, manufactured by an industry. All of this is not authorizing. One can admire it, appreciate it, but one cannot, if one wanted to, do the same thing oneself, right away. Authorization is the authorization to do now.

In the early 80s, Orson Welles, during a public meeting at the Cinémathèque française, responded to students who told him they wanted to make films but didn't have the means. He told them that if they really wanted to make a film, they could steal a camera and go shoot. He authorized, beyond the question of social legitimacy. **This is authorizing creation: a creation that in itself carries this social generosity, not through its discourse or the story it tells, but through its very form.**

A poetry written on paper in a few minutes and read to those present, if it touches them, if it does them good, can authorize them to risk writing too, right away. They saw me write it, they saw it was possible. As Jacques Rancière emphasizes in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987), "equality is not an end to be

*achieved, but a starting point, a supposition to be maintained in all circumstances."*

## **The "Le Fil" evenings, or the institution of authorization**

For ten years, I organized creative evenings at my home that we called "Le Fil evenings." The principle of these small groups of five to twenty people is that everyone publicly offers a creation to others during the evening. There is no passive spectator, we are spectators of others' creations, but everyone proposes something. It's multidisciplinary: films, readings, music, theater, performances, collective proposals, circus... It can be simply offering to read a text or singing a song we love.

I invite people I know, but also those I know less, or not at all. I suggest to people that they invite other people, so that there's no insiderism, so that we're not in a frozen institution, but in an unknown where our creation goes to meet, without institutional stakes. It's an opening so as not to be in a dual relationship.

Sometimes, people I suggest coming tell me they want to come just to be spectators. I tell them no, that's not the principle. If we come, even modestly, we also offer a creation to others. I have thus almost systematized, instituted authorizing creation in these evenings. This approach joins what Joseph Beuys called "social sculpture," from the 60s: "Every man is an artist", not that everyone should become a painter or sculptor, but that everyone can contribute to shaping society

through their creativity.

## Cultural policies and democratic space

I don't want to create hierarchy, because industrial creation has its place, we've always said about cinema that it was both an art and an industry, and that's true. But authorizing creation, more intimate perhaps, more direct, and so possible today with the technical means we all have in our pocket, has its full place, its full legitimacy and very great importance, no less than industrial art.

This is why I'm very comfortable on the subject of cultural policies, which are territorial policies. Financed by the common good from tax collection, they have the role of favoring democratic space. Favoring democratic space means favoring connections. Favoring connections means giving citizens the place to receive from each other and to contribute, including through artistic creation.

There's no amateur/professional subject here, these distinctions are from another age for me. These are institutional distinctions to legitimize places, and why not, but there's something more essential: authorizing ourselves to make society together. **This concept of authorizing creation seems to me a small key I discovered as I went along my artistic wanderings, a key to understanding how creation can create connection, can contribute to connection and not establish hierarchies.**

## **Technological anticipation in service of cultural democracy**

I founded with the Forum des images in 2005 the Pocket Films festival, which was the largest festival dedicated to creating films with mobile phones, at the moment when cameras appeared in these devices. We were at the beginning of a future democratization of cameras in everyone's pockets, something that seems obvious today, but which twenty years ago absolutely wasn't, since it didn't exist yet! No one permanently had a camera in their pocket to make images and send them to others, as is the case today.

I thus anticipated, before technology entered all pockets, an authorizing creation. Similarly, in 2011, I co-created the Short Film Festival at the request of the National Center for Cinema and Moving Image. Initially called "The Shortest Day," like the Music Festival, a national moment of labeled sharing with a common program, but open to all. Someone who wanted to show their family films in their living room could register and receive at home people who would have been enriched by their view of the world.

These initiatives are part of what Michel de Certeau called "*the invention of everyday life*" (1980), these practices by which users reappropriate the space organized by the techniques of sociocultural production. Authorizing creation participates in this democratic reappropriation of cultural space.

## **Towards a reversal of the cultural paradigm**

**This is my path. Right away, I was told that my way of creating was democratic because it also authorized others. Today, I realize this is one of the values of my works. There are others of course, aesthetic, narrative, thematic, artistic values. But there's also the democratic value of the work itself, this authorizing creation that has this power to inspire us, to encourage us to contribute, us too, to the connections that are the essence of our humanity.**

My proposition is to reverse the paradigm. This is exactly what cultural rights do, a concept that immediately resonated with my approach to art when I encountered it. Cultural rights place first the connection, that is, political space, the collective. For the collective to exist, each person must be able to contribute to it. In this framework, there are different types of works and art practices, but the basic principle, the initial substrate, is people respected in their dignity and authorized to contribute.

Creation must therefore be authorizing from the start. Both models can coexist, I don't want to completely tear down professional practices that will always have their full place. But they are no longer the only ones. And their place will always be in a democratic space anyway. There are a thousand different ways to contribute, and authorizing creation reminds us that art is not primarily a matter of individual genius or institutional recognition, but of sharing, connection and mutual authorization to exist fully in the common space.

# **PART III - DIGITAL STRATEGIES AND SOVEREIGNTY**

The digital revolution has profoundly transformed cultural practices. Citizens now spend an average of 35 hours per week on online cultural activities, while traditional institutions struggle to maintain attendance. Faced with this transformation, the cultural sector oscillates between two pitfalls: defensive retreat, which consists of ignoring or dismissing these new practices, and mimetic adaptation, which reproduces the mistakes of institutional communication on social networks. This section proposes a third way: understanding the deeper logics of digital technology to build strategies that truly serve cultural missions, while preserving our sovereignty in the face of tech giants.

The first chapter, “Digital Presence and Content,” tackles the confusions that hamper cultural institutions’ online presence. The first confusion concerns the very nature of social networks: professionals reproduce their personal usage habits without strategic reflection. Yet a cultural institution cannot function like an individual user. When a cultural venue disseminates information, it communicates from the top down in a logic of cultural democratisation, and we know the limited reach of this approach. Conversely, horizontal exchanges between users, peer-to-peer recommendations, exert an impact roughly ten times greater. Horizontality constitutes the very essence of cultural democracy in which institutions, as they currently present themselves, have no inherent place.

This chapter also analyses the structural mismatch between cultural venues and the niche logics that govern social networks. Each account cultivates an ultra-specialised identity, while a cultural venue necessarily embraces a diversity of offer-

ings. The case of YouTube perfectly illustrates this misunderstanding: most institutions consider this platform as a simple video host, which it fundamentally is not. The vast majority of institutional YouTube channels display paltry view counts, demeaning for both the content and the venues. Yet hosting videos without using YouTube has been perfectly accessible for twenty years: a simple MP4 file can be uploaded to a website like any text or image. This approach offers several advantages: videos remain within the institutional ecosystem, without parasitic algorithmic suggestions or loss of heritage control.

The chapter proposes an alternative strategy: making the website the cornerstone of digital presence, not as a communication tool but as an official source of information and reusable media. Rather than chasing ephemeral likes, the aim is to create appropriable content that active users will have an interest in sharing and recommending. Editorialisation belongs to users, who will choose what moves them. This approach progressively builds a corpus that officialises and perpetuates the cultural life of the venue.

The second chapter, "Sovereignty and Artificial Intelligence," addresses two major issues for the sector's future. The first concerns the use of artificial intelligence in professional practices. Far from fears of being replaced by machines, the text shows that AI's true potential lies in its capacity for document synthesis and deduction. Fed with data specific to an organisation, AI can open doors to enriching activities, detect trends, and make proposals in a constructive and singular manner. But this power presupposes a new practice: documenting all the structure's activities

much more extensively. This documentalist competence becomes central, not to feed a bureaucracy, but to enable AI to help us be more precise, more profound, more constructive in relation to our professional objectives.

This chapter also proposes an innovative methodology for cultural surveys. Traditional questionnaires, essentially quantitative and statistical, are in my view largely useless for generating genuine innovations: the predefined framework acts as an invisible prison. Artificial intelligence allows us to envisage a radically different approach: spontaneous recorded dialogues, then analysed by AI to reveal what we would never have thought to look for. This open and non-directive methodology could transform our understanding of territorial cultural dynamics.

The second issue addressed in this chapter is that of digital sovereignty. The growing dependence on tech giants—Microsoft, Google, American platforms—places cultural organisations in a position of extreme vulnerability. This sovereignty is articulated around five issues: data control, technological independence, mastery of critical infrastructures, legal framework, and training in critical thinking. The pioneering example of Denmark, which is progressively migrating to free software such as Linux and LibreOffice, shows that another path is possible. Levers for action exist at all levels: family, associative, entrepreneurial, territorial.

Finally, this chapter develops the hypothesis of a “distributed cultural sector.” What if digital cultures showed us how to build the common through distribution rather than centralisation?

Platforms suggest that diversity is perhaps not the enemy of the common but its very condition: the more different content there is, the more everyone can find their place, their peers. The common would emerge not from top-down uniformisation but from a multitude of horizontal connections. This approach could take concrete forms: shared documentation protocols, open licences for productions financed by public money, territorial cultural APIs, “link weavers” trained to create bridges between separate worlds.

This section will be particularly useful to professionals seeking to rethink their digital strategy beyond ineffective recipes, to understand the sovereignty issues that condition the future of their organisations, and to explore the potential of artificial intelligence to enrich their practices. It will interest elected officials and cultural policy makers who wish to build a digital presence coherent with their democratic missions. It will offer everyone tools to navigate digital transformation without losing their autonomy or their sense of purpose.

## CHAPTER 5: DIGITAL PRESENCE AND CONTENT

Cultural institutions today maintain a presence on social media that stems more from obligation than from thoughtful choice. Yet when you question the managers who invest time and energy in this endeavor, their answers become hesitant. Does this presence generate more visitors? The answer is no. So why persist? “To exist,” someone once told me. But to exist for whom? To what end? In connection with what mission of the venue? This chapter proposes a way out of this impasse by fundamentally rethinking the digital strategy of cultural institutions.

The first section, “Beyond the Walls: Video as a Vector for Cultural Democracy,” establishes the framework for this reflection. We often believe that the essential issue with video in museums, for example, is its content. But its online interoperability, its discoverability, its digital heritage preservation, its place in social networks—that is to say, the concrete stakes of cultural democracy—seem secondary. In my view, this is mistaken. The subject of video extends far beyond the question of its on-site exhibition. The real issue is mediation: how do we practice mediation today? Audiences have multiple cultural practices linked to apps, the internet, and digital technology. These are indeed cultural practices: they discover content, take interest in subjects, develop passions, learn, interact, create, and exchange with one another. Audiovisual creation tools are becoming democratized, which is changing the anthropology of the relationship between amateur and professional. We can entrust visitors with part of the mediation, which disrupts the traditional boundaries of everyone’s roles. The internet is itself an im-

mense museum, accessible and used by everyone daily. We must harness its full potential for connection with the offerings we provide.

The second section, “Cultural Venues and Social Networks,” analyzes in depth the confusions that handicap institutions’ digital presence. The first confusion concerns the very nature of social networks: professionals reproduce their personal usage habits there, without strategic reflection. Yet an institution cannot function like an individual user. When a cultural venue broadcasts information, it communicates from top to bottom in a logic of cultural democratization, and we know the limited reach of this approach: as with a flyer distributed on the street, only one message in a thousand will truly be read. Conversely, horizontal exchanges between users, peer-to-peer recommendations, have approximately ten times greater impact. Horizontality constitutes the very essence of cultural democracy in which institutions do not inherently have a place as they currently conceive it.

This section also analyzes the structural mismatch between cultural venues and niche logics. On social networks, each account cultivates an ultra-specialized identity: the baroque specialist, the discerning cinephile, the Egyptology enthusiast. Yet a cultural venue necessarily encompasses a diversity of offerings. The case of YouTube perfectly illustrates this misunderstanding: most institutions consider this platform as a simple video host, which it fundamentally is not. The vast majority of institutional YouTube channels display derisory view counts, devaluing for both the content and the venues. Yet hosting videos without using YouTube has been perfectly accessible for twenty years: a simple MP4 file can be uploaded to a website like any text or image. This approach offers several decisive advantages: videos remain within the

institutional ecosystem, without parasitic algorithmic suggestions, and heritage control is preserved. Entrusting your content to third-party services, which moreover monetize our audience through advertising, means abandoning control of your heritage, and this is politically serious for cultural services funded by public money.

The third section, “Rethinking the Digital Content Strategy of Cultural Institutions,” proposes a constructive alternative. The aim is to make the website the cornerstone of digital presence, not as a communication tool but as an official source of information and reusable media. The challenge is not to be everywhere, but to be the reference in one’s area of expertise. Producing quality official content—subjective narratives of projects, in-depth educational dossiers, documented archives, expert analyses—constitutes a more lasting investment than daily posting on platforms whose algorithms constantly change. This reference content becomes durable resources that researchers, teachers, journalists, and enthusiasts can cite and share according to their own networks and timelines.

This section also develops the notion of appropriable rather than promotional content. Rather than locking content in a logic of control, institutions would benefit from adopting open licenses permitting reuse, translation, and pedagogical adaptation. This philosophy transforms audiences into active ambassadors. A teacher who can freely use high-resolution visuals for their course, a blogger who can fully cite an exhibition catalog, a researcher who can exploit open data—all these people become natural relays for the institution. Since social networks are places of disintermediation and peer-to-peer recommendation, a message emanating from a person will have much more impact than a

message emanating from an institution.

This chapter finally emphasizes the importance of documenting processes as much as results. Institutions generally produce content about their exhibitions and performances, but often neglect documenting their work processes and cultural outreach activities with audiences. Yet these behind-the-scenes aspects interest specific audiences, build distinctive expertise, and tell the story of the territory and its inhabitants. This is the transition from orality to writing, the constitution of a territorial digital cultural heritage.

This chapter will be particularly useful to professionals who question the effectiveness of their digital presence and seek to escape the exhausting race for likes and followers. It will interest communication managers who wish to refocus their strategy on lasting content rather than sterile social dispersion. It will offer directors of cultural structures arguments for rethinking the allocation of their digital resources. Finally, it will propose to all a reflection on what it truly means to “be present” on the web: not chasing after audience, but building a solid editorial authority that enables appropriation and organic dissemination by the audiences themselves.

# **Beyond walls: video as a vehicle for cultural democracy**

**When digital mediation transforms the  
relationship between citizens and heritage.**

*Video in museums represents a challenge of cultural mediation and the democratization of heritage. In the digital age, it transforms the relationship between audiences and institutions, allowing citizens to actively participate in the construction of heritage.*

## **Moving Beyond the Focus on the Artwork**

One might assume that the primary challenge of video in museums lies in its content. However, its online interoperability, discoverability, digital preservation, its place on social media, and online mediation—in other words, the concrete issues of cultural democracy—seem secondary. In my view, this is not the case. The subject of video in the museum field extends far beyond the question of its on-site exhibition. The challenge of video is the challenge of mediation: how do we mediate today? It's about understanding how citizens engage with cultural heritage.

As cultural professionals, we all want more people—and more diverse people—to come to museums, theaters, concerts, etc. Yet, these audiences have multiple cultural practices tied to apps, the internet, and digital tools. These are indeed cultural practices: they discover content, take an interest in topics, become passionate, educate themselves, interact, create, and exchange with one another.

We cannot ignore this aspect. While using videos in exhibitions is a good thing, it remains insufficient. Why? Because audiovisual creation tools are becoming more accessible, altering the anthropology of the relationship between amateurs and professionals, between visitors, curators, and mediators. We can entrust visitors with part of the mediation process, which disrupts the traditional boundaries of each role.

## **The Anthropology of Technology and Its Uses**

It is essential to consider this new paradigm and reflect accordingly. If we view video solely as a technique, it means we have failed to understand—or refuse to acknowledge—that a technique always has anthropological impacts. It changes the world, relationships, and life itself.

Concerns about SEO, discoverability, digital archiving, and the long-term preservation of online video productions are absolutely fundamental in a cultural and heritage-driven approach. Precisely because heritage and mediation go hand in hand. Video should not be merely a marketing tool to attract audiences to physical exhibitions but a true instrument of heritage and museum construction, incorporating its own accessibility. This is neither tedious nor complicated—in my opinion, it is inherent to the mission of museums and cultural institutions today.

The internet is, in itself, a vast museum, accessible and used by everyone daily. We must fully exploit its potential to connect with our offerings, which must radically transform by accounting for these major shifts in relationships and roles.

# Cultural venues and social networks

**How to turn audiences into ambassadors rather than chasing followers.**

*Cultural venues are on social media out of obligation, without a clear strategy or convincing results. We need to rethink their presence: no longer communicating vertically, but nurturing audience sharing.*

## **A presence to be questioned**

Cultural venues - theaters, cinemas, concert halls, museums and other institutions - now maintain a presence on social media that is more a matter of obligation than thoughtful choice.

Yet the real question is not that of the active and direct presence of cultural venues on these platforms, contrary to what one might think. The fundamental question is: why be present? When we question the managers of cultural venues who invest time and energy, and mobilize their teams in this approach, to ensure this digital presence, the answers become hesitant. Professionals struggle to justify this practice.

Let's clarify the question: does this presence generate more attendance? The answer is no. So what does it bring? Why persist? I once received this disconcerting answer: "to exist." But exist for whom? For what purpose? In connection with which mission of the venue? This injunction to digital "existence" reveals a profound confusion between personal use and professional practice of social media.

## **Confusion between personal and professional practices**

Cultural professionals generally reproduce their personal usage habits on social media, which can be explained by the lack of serious training on the subject. Often there is no real strategic reflection to guide professional practices vis-à-vis social media. Content is

produced and published as any individual user would do.

This coexistence between natural persons and legal entities on the same platforms works poorly. When a cultural institution, theater, cinema, museum, disseminates information, it proposes, it offers, it communicates from top to bottom in a logic of cultural democratization. However, we know the limited scope of this approach: like a flyer distributed on the street, only one message in a thousand will be truly read, precisely because it is unsolicited institutional communication.

Conversely, horizontal exchanges between users, what we call peer recommendations, have an impact on cultural consumption approximately ten times greater than that of institutional messages from the same venue. This is the power of recommendation. And digital platforms have understood this well: even outside of direct interactions between users, they systematically display “people who liked this book also liked” or “those who watched this series also watched,” artificially recreating this peer recommendation dynamic. This horizontality constitutes the very essence of a cultural democracy in which institutions have no intrinsic place.

## **The mismatch between cultural venues and niche logic**

How then can a cultural venue find its place in this ecosystem, and why should it? Let’s look more closely.

On the various social networks (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, or even WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal and Twitter/X) exchanges are organized around ultra-specialized niches. Each account cultivates a precise identity: the Baroque specialist, the discerning cinephile, the Egyptology enthusiast... This thematic specialization guarantees subscribers know exactly what type of “content” they will receive.

“Creators” can also create multiple accounts to cover different themes. However, a cultural venue has two handicaps: it cannot structurally issue recommendations, and its programming necessarily embraces cultural diversity. Even a venue dedicated to classical music will program contemporary, 20<sup>th</sup> century, romantic, baroque music, a diversity constitutive of its mission. Such a venue’s account therefore lacks a clear cultural identity. One could argue that this diversity, this eclecticism, this singular programming precisely constitutes its identity, but this approach remains insufficiently “niche” to fit into current social media usage.

Certainly, the absence of established uses does not prohibit working to transform them! But this requires real strategic work. Mechanically depositing the same content on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, three platforms with radically different logics, is nonsensical. Broadcasting the same message on several networks as one would broadcast an advertisement on several television channels demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of the potential of social media. That’s why I’m writing on this subject!

These platforms are not simple showcases for traditional communication. They are spaces for horizontal interaction, vast territories of recommendation, even collective creation on TikTok, debate on Twitter, visual

portfolio on Instagram, etc. The gap between the investment made and the results obtained, whether in terms of increasing attendance, making the venue known or promoting artists, confirms this fundamental inadequacy.

## **The “YouTube channel”: confusion between hosting and strategy**

The case of YouTube perfectly illustrates this misunderstanding and deserves attention before examining alternative strategies. YouTube, a community video platform launched in 2005, makes it easy to upload and share videos between users. Its value lies in this ease of sharing, combined with an adapted communication strategy, and not in simple viewing, for which many alternatives exist. **Video hosting is therefore not YouTube’s added value**, a thousand other solutions exist. Its specificity lies in the discovery, sharing and commenting dynamics it generates.

Yet most cultural venues consider YouTube a simple video host, which it fundamentally is not. This confusion produces dismal results: the vast majority of institutional YouTube channels display derisory view counts, devaluing both the content and the venues. The contrast between production investment and audience reached creates a damaging association, even if unfair, between low distribution and low quality. Without an elaborate sharing strategy, content gets lost in the ocean of 500 hours of videos uploaded every minute on the platform. Hope for spontaneous success is miraculous. The rare historical exceptions only con-

firm this rule.

Result: deserted channels that, to use the adolescent expression, cause “cringe” and discourage viewing. An effective YouTube strategy requires reflection and resources, with videos being only one element. In their current configuration, these channels harm more than they enhance cultural venues.

Yet this presence on YouTube seems essential. Why? To host videos, some answer. Inadequate answer: for twenty years, hosting videos without using a third party has been perfectly accessible. A simple properly encoded MP4 file can be placed on a website like any text, image or audio file. The browser natively plays these videos, exactly as it displays a JPEG or plays an MP3. And this approach has several advantages: videos remain in the institutional site’s ecosystem, without external redirection or parasitic algorithmic suggestions at the end of playback. Editorialization becomes possible, inviting coherent navigation in the venue’s digital universe. I repeat: YouTube is not essential for hosting videos.

Web providers maintain this confusion out of habit rather than strategy. From a heritage perspective too, self-hosting guarantees sustainability: site backups include videos, preserving this audiovisual heritage. Entrusting your content to third-party services, which moreover monetize our audience through advertising, means abandoning control of your heritage, and this is politically serious, especially for cultural services paid for with public money.

For one-off viral distribution, an exceptional moment to share widely, YouTube regains its relevance. But even then, content must be duplicated on the official site, with reciprocal links to bring the audience back to the institutional ecosystem.

INA, Arte, Netflix and many other media have understood: being media means hosting your content, remaining master of your distribution. YouTube is not a simple technical operator, even if its managers carefully cultivate this ambiguity. Replacing a deserted YouTube channel with a rich and editorialized site constitutes the relevant strategic choice.

The discoverability argument thanks to YouTube doesn't hold: video SEO always relies on the textual environment - keywords, titles, descriptions. An editorialized web page, enriched with related content, optimizes SEO much better than a video in a YouTube channel.

Digital discoverability is a matter of semantics. Rich structuring, diverse but coherent content maximizes the chances of being found. This logic also applies to artificial intelligences, which analyze the textual environment to synthesize and recommend. Videos integrated into an institutional site will be infinitely better referenced than in an external YouTube channel.

## **The website: cornerstone of a strategy built as an institution**

Should we therefore abandon social media? Absolutely not. But institutional identity must be preserved without competing with individual users. A cultural institution can offer natural persons exceptional resources: unique experiences, exclusive content, creative spaces, which they can share on their social networks.

A constructed strategy consists of providing active users with materials they will have an interest in sharing and recommending. The website then becomes essential, not as a communication tool, but as an official source of information and reusable and shareable media. A collective institution needs an official space, repository of authentic information. The richer this site, the more official information will gain in solidity and sharing potential.

Rather than posting directly on Facebook to harvest a few ephemeral likes, creating detailed articles, complete photo galleries on the institutional site proves more effective in the long term. No “like” button, just quality content, freely shareable and reusable.

The absence of immediate interaction may seem less gratifying, but this approach gradually builds a corpus that officializes and perpetuates the cultural life of the venue, via this “official narrative” available and enriched over the years. Instead of dispersing in the ocean of social media, this memory remains structured, accessible, in quantity and quality. For a given event, why limit ourselves to a “communication” approach? Twenty-five photographs are better than three. **The website is not a communication tool but a source.** Editorialization belongs to users, who will choose what touches them and share it in their own way.

## **Towards a strategy of cooperation and empowerment**

To activate this dynamic, for example let’s inform spectators that immediately after the performance, while

photos were prohibited during, they can access via a QR code distributed to them a professional selection of photographs, texts and resources about the show they just experienced. Those who enjoyed the experience will want to share it. Having quality official media available, some will appropriate them to create posts of much better quality than alone: retouching, remixing, personal storytelling. Their voice carries ten times more than that of the institution. A single authentic share by a spectator equals ten institutional publications, in terms of impact.

This appropriation creates a virtuous circle: the person returns, becomes loyal, and if their share resonates, thanks to the symbolic value of official information shared by a personal voice, they extend their own network while promoting the venue.

Let's go further. A beautiful theater, remarkable architecture, unique spaces constitute assets. Let's offer content creators the use of these settings, even the technical expertise of the teams, for their own projects, not necessarily related to the programming. The venue becomes a resource, a collaborative space allowing creations of a quality inaccessible alone. The impact can be considerable (and this is the case at the "Studio 13/16" at the Centre Pompidou). We as institutions stop chasing misunderstood practices to cultivate our own identity, an official source with high symbolic value enriching personal productions.

Let's also support audiences, especially teenagers, in their digital practices. The professional technical and artistic skills present in our venue, video, lighting, sound, staging, scenography, museography, among others, can nourish mutually enriching collaborations. Audiences bring their needs: "on TikTok, we would need adapted booths." Why not, if these booths are in-

stalled in the historic backstage of the theater?

**Users' needs become sources of cultural projects created with them, not for them.** This dynamic can inspire unprecedented artistic projects: collaborative shoots with artists, broadcast by participants themselves on their networks, for example. The physical stage then nourishes a multitude of digital stages.

The subject goes far beyond promotional communication. Considered in this depth, it effectively generates more attendance, not through disguised advertising, but through authentic cooperation between the specific qualities of cultural venues and the needs of active users of social media. And above all, it supports cultural venues in the deep respect of their audiences' cultural rights and helps them renew their proposals as well as their professions.

# Rethinking the digital content strategy of cultural institutions

**For a web presence that prioritizes editorial authority over social media dispersion.**

*Cultural institutions would benefit from concentrating their efforts on producing reference content rather than maintaining a dispersed presence on social media. A refocused editorial strategy allows them to build lasting authority and let audiences appropriate and disseminate content.*

## **Building institutional authority rather than chasing audiences**

Cultural institutions often invest considerable resources in a multi-platform presence, without measurable returns. This race for immediate visibility diverts resources that could be devoted to producing substantial content and supporting audiences to produce content themselves, with the strong contribution of our venues. The challenge is not to be everywhere, but to be the reference source in one's field of expertise.

The production of quality official content—subjective narratives of projects, in-depth educational materials, documented archives, expert analyses—constitutes a more sustainable investment than daily publication on platforms whose algorithms constantly change. This reference content, hosted on institutional websites, becomes lasting resources that researchers, teachers, journalists, and enthusiasts can cite and share according to their own networks and timelines. Search engines and AI will also leverage them. And it's a living heritage of the venue's cultural actions and their collective resonance that takes shape, gradually strengthening the venue's anchoring in its territory.

This approach aligns with the logic of « **the long tail** » theorized by Chris Anderson: on the web, well-referenced niche content can generate as much value over time as ephemeral viral publications. An in-depth article about a work, published five, ten, or even twenty years ago on a well-structured institutional site, continues to be found and shared, unlike an Instagram post that disappears into the feed after a few weeks,

sometimes a few hours.

## **LinkedIn as the sole strategic exception for the professional ecosystem**

While multiplying social presences dilutes editorial impact, LinkedIn constitutes a relevant exception for cultural institutions. This professional platform allows direct access to decision-makers, potential partners, and sector professionals—a strategic audience difficult to reach elsewhere.

On LinkedIn, institutions can share their in-depth reflections, positions on cultural policies, and methodological innovations. This professional content finds its natural audience among institutional actors, researchers, and cultural professionals. The platform favors substantial exchanges over superficial interactions, which helps build intellectual and professional legitimacy.

However, editorial investment on LinkedIn must remain measured and strategic. Rather than posting daily, it's better to favor spaced but substantial interventions: reasoned positions, detailed experience reports, sectoral analyses. This professional content reinforces the institution's expert positioning without dispersing editorial resources.

## **Creating**

## **appropriate content rather than promotional content**

The editorial strategy of cultural institutions should prioritize creating content that audiences can appropriate and transform, as well as supporting them in this process. Rather than locking content into a control logic, institutions would benefit from adopting open licenses allowing reuse, translation, and pedagogical adaptation.

This philosophy of appropriation transforms audiences into active ambassadors who fully benefit from it, as they gain from the institution's aura. A teacher who can freely use high-resolution visuals for their course, a blogger who can comprehensively cite an exhibition catalog from several years ago, a researcher who can exploit open data—all become natural relays for the institution. Their creative uses enrich and extend the reach of institutional content. And since social media are places of disintermediation (direct relationships between people), peer recommendations, and extremely focused niches, a message from a person will have much more impact than a message from an institution. This is why supporting audiences for their social media publications has a much greater impact than posting ourselves.

Formats must be designed to facilitate this appropriation: texts in open formats rather than locked PDFs, high-resolution images with complete metadata, downloadable videos with extractable subtitles, etc. And this content must be comprehensively indexed to remain discoverable over the long term. These apparently minor technical choices determine the content's ability to circulate and be reinvested by communities

of interest. And our physical venues themselves, as well as our staff, must be adapted so that people can create content there of much better quality than if they were alone, thanks to us.

## **Documenting processes as much as results**

Cultural institutions generally produce content about their exhibitions, performances, and collections, but often neglect documenting their work processes, as well as the processes of cultural actions with audiences. Yet these behind-the-scenes aspects interest specific audiences, build distinctive expertise, and tell the story of the territory and its inhabitants from a cultural perspective.

The documentation of conservation methodologies, exhibition creation processes, technical challenges encountered, and especially public cultural actions, therefore constitutes valuable knowledge capital. This “making-of” content interests participants in the actions and their communities, sector professionals, students in museology or cultural management, as well as curious audiences interested in the subjects. This transparency about professional practices and cultural actions reinforces institutional legitimacy and has a lasting political impact, as they create the written narrative of the territory, which anchors itself beyond individual memories. It’s the transition from orality to writing.

These process documentations can take various forms: articles on the institutional blog, detailed case studies, freely accessible methodological guides, etc.

The important thing is to systematize this documentary practice, considering it not as an additional burden but as an investment in knowledge sharing, building sectoral authority, and especially constituting a territorial digital cultural heritage. This therefore implies a different organization of working time. And with audiences, we can entrust people with the mission of being the “journalists” of the activity they’re participating in, for example.

## **Prioritizing editorial depth over publication frequency**

The obsession with publication regularity, inherited from media logic, often disserves cultural institutions. Publishing superficial content daily dilutes editorial impact and exhausts teams. It’s better to space out publications and deposit them on the institutional website, prioritizing depth and quality. On the other hand, work to build audiences’ confidence to publish themselves.

One in-depth monthly article, the result of genuine research and writing work, will have more lasting impact than thirty daily posts, for example. This substantial content can be repurposed: the main article on the site, selected excerpts for LinkedIn, formatted quotes for those who would like to share them. This “hub content” approach maximizes the initial editorial investment.

Editorial depth also reaches more engaged audiences. Enlightened enthusiasts, researchers, specialized jour-

nalists seek in-depth content they can't find elsewhere. By becoming the reference on specific topics, the institution builds editorial authority that social media algorithms cannot erode.

## **Structuring information for natural search and discoverability**

Information architecture on institutional sites largely determines their ability to be found and used. Excellent but poorly structured and poorly indexed content will remain invisible. Institutions must invest in rigorous information architecture: coherent taxonomies, complete metadata, permanent URLs, logical internal linking.

Natural search optimization (SEO) should not be seen as a marketing technique but as a service to audiences. Descriptive titles, structured summaries, relevant keywords facilitate content discovery by those seeking it. This editorial rigor benefits search engines, artificial intelligence (GEO), and human users alike.

URL permanence constitutes an often-neglected issue. How many links to cultural resources lead to 404 errors after a site redesign? Guaranteeing web address stability, implementing redirects during changes, maintaining accessible archives: these technical practices condition the ability of institutional content to remain lasting references in the digital ecosystem.

**Cultural institutions have everything to gain by refocusing their digital strategy on producing reference content rather than maintaining a dis-**

**persed social presence. By building solid editorial authority and enabling content appropriation, they create conditions for organic dissemination more effective than any community management strategy. This approach requires renouncing the illusion of control over content circulation to embrace the richness of creative reappropriations.**

# Social Networks and Cultural Institutions: Breaking the Strategic Deadlock

**Towards a digital policy that renounces communication in favor of citizen empowerment.**

*Local authorities are massively investing in their presence on social networks without questioning the relevance of this approach, and are generally losing resources in futile endeavors. Yet magnificent projects can be built there.*

## The preliminary question: why be present?

Before any reflection on the modalities of digital presence, a fundamental question deserves to be asked: for what reasons should a cultural institution be active on social networks? The usual answers—raising awareness of programming, attracting new audiences, communicating about events—come up against the recurring observation that presence on these platforms does not generate measurable additional attendance. The professionals questioned acknowledge this themselves.

The situation becomes paradoxical when venues are full. If the occupancy objective is achieved by other means, what exactly are we seeking through our presence in these digital spaces? The often-formulated answer, “to exist,” reveals a form of social injunction rather than a thoughtful strategy. This pressure for digital existence, well analyzed by sociologist Dominique Cardon in her book *Culture numérique* (2019), stems more from conformity to the norms of platform capitalism than from reflection on the missions of cultural public service.

It would be possible to make a radical choice: not to be there. The newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné* has demonstrated that a media outlet can thrive without a website or social media presence. This deliberate choice, far from being a handicap, builds a strong and distinctive identity. For a cultural institution, giving up digital dispersion could free up time and resources for more substantial actions. The question is not whether to be present, but what we want to accomplish and whether social networks are the appropriate

tool to achieve it.

## **Staff exposure: an institutional blind spot**

The current trend pushes to “embody” institutional communication by highlighting identified individuals rather than abstract logos. Platform algorithms indeed favor content carried by human faces. Community managers thus find themselves on camera, speaking on behalf of their local authority in short, dynamic formats. This evolution, while responding to platform logic, raises questions that institutions have not yet truly addressed.

What happens when an exposed staff member becomes the target of virulent criticism, harassment, or *bashing*? Cases already exist: civil servants are insulted, treated in degrading ways because they spoke on behalf of their institution. Yet no legal framework, no institutional doctrine provides for this situation. Staff members are exposed without protection, without support, without recognition of this risk in their job description. Michel Lallement, in *L'Âge du faire* (2015), had already pointed out the tension between personal commitment and institutional framework in new forms of work.

This situation calls for the creation of an explicit protective framework. Local authorities that encourage their staff to expose themselves should guarantee them legal support in case of problems, training in managing conflictual situations online, and recognition of this risk-taking in professional evaluation. As long as this framework does not exist, it is problematic to

push staff members to personally expose themselves in the name of a communication strategy whose relevance itself remains to be demonstrated.

## **The invisible time of digital work**

Producing content for social networks is time-consuming. Creating a quality video, even a short one, requires preparation, filming, editing, writing. For content to work on these platforms, it must be polished, rhythmic, adapted to the specific codes of each network. These skills cannot be improvised and the corresponding tasks take considerable time.

Yet this time is generally not taken into account in work organization. Mediators, communication officers, field staff are asked to produce this content “in addition to” their usual missions. This invisibilization of digital work, well described by Antonio Casilli in *En attendant les robots* (2019), creates additional mental load and degrades the conditions for carrying out other missions. It’s absurd: we devote time to activities whose impact we don’t measure, to the detriment of activities whose value we know.

A coherent policy would suppose either recognizing this working time, by explicitly integrating it into job descriptions with corresponding resources, or reducing digital ambitions to a level compatible with available resources. The worst situation is one where contradictory injunctions are maintained: be present everywhere, produce quality content, without dedicated resources or recognized time.

## **Training differently: learning from content creators**

The training offered to cultural staff in audiovisual production often remains anchored in methods inherited from cinema or television: heavy equipment, complex processes, multiple validation chains. These approaches, adapted to traditional professional production, are ill-suited to the requirements of social networks which favor reactivity, authenticity and technical lightness.

Content creators who succeed on these platforms have developed radically different methods: lightweight high-quality equipment, simplified workflows, formats adapted to mobile uses. A recent smartphone, a lavalier microphone, a stabilizer and a few applications are enough to produce content of excellent technical quality. These skills, empirically built by daily practitioners of platforms, are not, or are still very little, taught in traditional professional training.

If cultural institutions decide to engage on social networks, they would benefit from training their staff with experienced content creators rather than with traditional audiovisual professionals. This inversion of legitimacies is not trivial: it presupposes recognizing that amateurs, in the etymological sense of those who love and practice, possess expertise that institutional professionals do not have. This is a first step toward the logic of horizontality that social networks demand.

## **TikTok: refusal as a**

## political choice

Some local authorities have chosen not to be present on TikTok, citing the “toxicity” of the algorithm or the Chinese origin of the platform. This choice, presented as a precaution, deserves to be questioned. TikTok is today the most powerful social network in terms of cultural dissemination and the most innovative in its content discovery mechanisms and in the position it gives its users, because it is as much a creation tool as a distribution tool, which makes it absolutely unique. Its algorithm, far from being a simple addiction machine, constitutes an unprecedented tool for cultural democracy: it allows quality content, regardless of its author’s notoriety, to reach considerable audiences.

The security argument sometimes masks a form of cultural conservatism. What disturbs about TikTok may not be so much its algorithm as the freedom of expression it permits and the cultural forms that develop there. Leading cultural institutions—the Grand Palais, the TNB, the Paris Opera—have chosen to be present there, recognizing that this is where tomorrow’s cultural practices are being built.

Refusing to be on TikTok can be a deliberate choice, but one must then accept its consequences: cutting oneself off from the youngest audiences most inclined to constructive connections, giving up understanding emerging cultural forms, maintaining generational insularity. For cultural institutions whose vocation is to prepare the future, this position of avoidance constitutes a strategic paradox. Sociologist Yves Citton, in *L'Écologie de l'attention* (2014), reminded us that attention is the scarce resource of our time. Turning away from places where this attention is being built amounts to voluntarily marginalizing oneself. And other platforms, from Facebook to Instagram, Whats-

App or even LinkedIn, are no more virtuous than TikTok, far from it.

## **Supporting audience expression rather than communicating**

The real value that cultural institutions can bring to social networks does not lie in their own speaking out, but in the support they can offer to citizen expression. A spectator who shares their concert experience reaches their network with an efficiency incomparable to that of institutional communication. Peer recommendation, as shown by Pierre-Jean Benghozi in his work on cultural economics, exerts an influence ten times greater than that of institutional messages.

Cultural institutions have exceptional resources: spaces, technical equipment, artistic skills, access to works and artists. Rather than using these resources to produce their own communication, they could make them available to citizen content creators. Offering spectators the opportunity to film in professional conditions, providing the expertise of a lighting technician, organizing privileged meetings with artists: these resources would enable people to create content of much better quality than they could do alone. Everyone would benefit, in very large proportions.

This reversal of perspective fully aligns with the logic of cultural rights as defined by the Fribourg Declaration (2007): the right to participate in cultural life includes the right to express oneself and create. By supporting audience expression, cultural institutions would fulfill their mission of emancipation much better than by adding their institutional voice to the ambi-

ent noise of platforms.

## **Towards an institutional digital doctrine**

The absence of a clear doctrine on the use of social networks by public agents creates a problematic gray area. Some are encouraged to speak out, others are called to order. Some content is valued, others deemed inappropriate without explicit criteria. This uncertainty generates self-censorship and prevents creative risk-taking, which is the key to impact. This is also closely linked to the fact that social networks fall in the vast majority of cases under the responsibility of *communication* departments, when their power lies in *mediation*. Therefore, the appropriate people are not responsible for them in the organizational chart of responsibilities. Or else communication departments would need to be given much more control over the cultural and artistic content produced by the institution, and this content should be signed by the people who create it as creations. This also respects the cultural rights of public servants.

An institutional digital doctrine should therefore clarify several points: what can be said and what cannot, the protections offered to staff who speak out, procedures in case of problems, recognition of time devoted to these activities, training offered, objectives pursued and success indicators. This doctrine should not be restrictive but enabling; it should allow staff to engage with full knowledge rather than keeping them in uncertainty.

This clarification is all the more urgent as other digi-

tal projects are opening up, particularly around artificial intelligence. The same questions will arise: what uses are authorized, what protections are guaranteed, what objectives are pursued? Building a coherent doctrine on social networks will prepare institutions to approach new challenges with more serenity.

## **What a real strategy would look like**

A digital strategy worthy of the name for a cultural institution should start from a simple question: what do we want to accomplish that we could not accomplish otherwise?

- If the answer is “nothing in particular,” the conclusion is clear: better not to be there, or to be there minimally, rather than dispersing resources without a clear objective.
- If the goal is to reach new audiences, then the strategy must be based on what actually works on these platforms: peer recommendation, embodiment by identified individuals, thematic specialization. This means giving up classic institutional communication to invest in supporting creator audiences, in making resources available, in training protected and recognized ambassador-agents.
- If the goal is to build a memory, a living archive of the cultural life of the place, then the institutional website remains the most suitable tool: sustainable, controlled, searchable. Social networks can then serve as occasional relays to this substantive con-

tent, without claiming to replace it.

- And the most exciting objective is to invest in these digital spaces as spaces for mediation, creation, reinvention of relationships with audiences, inventing complementarities in echo to on-site offerings.

In all cases, a strategy presupposes deliberate choices, dedicated resources, success indicators and regular evaluation. The opposite of what is mostly practiced today: a default presence, without identified resources, without measurable objectives, through simple conformity to a social norm that has nothing to do with cultural policy.

## **For strategic humility**

Social networks are not communication spaces but spaces for relationships between people. This obvious fact, which the platforms themselves constantly emphasize through their algorithms that favor interpersonal engagement, remains difficult to integrate for institutions accustomed to broadcasting messages vertically.

Strategic humility would consist in recognizing that cultural institutions have no vocation to occupy these spaces in the same way as natural persons. Their role could be to remain in the background of the digital scene to better equip those who express themselves there: provide resources, support practices, protect exposed individuals, document experiences.

This position of facilitator rather than communicator is part of the broader movement of transformation in

the cultural sector: moving from a logic of prescription to a logic of support, from a dominating posture to a cooperative posture, from democratization through supply to democracy through participation. Social networks, by their very nature, compel us to this evolution. It would be time to stop resisting them and start understanding them.

## CHAPTER 6: SOVEREIGNTY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

At the end of 2025, just three years after ChatGPT's arrival, it is certain that we are at the beginning of a profound and irreversible anthropological change. Young people live with artificial intelligence; it has become part of their environment, their practices and references. The world is changing, whether we like it or not. At the same time, our growing dependence on tech giants places our organizations in an extremely vulnerable position. This chapter proposes to address both challenges together: seizing the potential of artificial intelligence to enrich our professional practices, while rebuilding our digital sovereignty against capitalist monopolies.

The first section, "Documentation and Artificial Intelligence," reverses the usual perspective on AI in the workplace. We fear being replaced by machines that would format life even more than it already is. But the real question, faced with a technological evolution that brings new human uses, is that of the evolution of human activities themselves. The real issue is not that jobs will be replaced, but that human activities are enriched, modified. Generative artificial intelligences initially produce extremely standardized, disembodied, statistical results, of little interest in a professional context. However, their true strength lies in their capacity for document synthesis and deduction. Fed with data specific to an organization, they can open doors to enriching activities, detecting trends, making constructive and singular proposals, to an unprecedented degree.

But this power requires a new way of working: docu-

menting all our organization's activities much more thoroughly. Photographing, writing accounts, recording audio, collecting and properly organizing all these materials so they can be processed by artificial intelligences. This is documentary work, a new skill for humans to cultivate across all professions. Then AI will enable us not to be more productive, but to be more precise, more profound, more constructive in relation to our professional objectives.

The second section, "Cultural Survey with Artificial Intelligence," proposes an innovative methodology for going beyond the limits of traditional surveys. Online questionnaires, essentially quantitative and statistical, are in my view nearly useless for generating genuine innovations. Why? Because the predefined framework acts as an invisible prison. The very essence of a survey consists precisely in discovering what we had absolutely not anticipated—that is its whole point. The protocol I propose relies on spontaneous dialogues between reception staff and visitors, recorded and then analyzed by artificial intelligence. No pre-established question grid, no restrictive directives. AI, precisely because no directive questions are asked of it, can generate thinking entirely outside our initial framework. This approach embodies a different philosophy of research: trusting the richness of spontaneous human exchanges and AI's capacity to extract meaning from them, without imposing any preconceived interpretive grid.

The third section, "Cultivating Digital Sovereignty," addresses a major democratic issue. Digital sovereignty refers to the capacity of a state, community, organization or individual to exercise autonomous control over its technological choices, data and digital infrastructure. This sovereignty revolves around five issues: data control, technological independence, control of

critical infrastructure, legal and regulatory frameworks, and education in critical thinking. The excessive dependence on Microsoft shown by a multitude of public services places the state and local authorities in an extremely vulnerable position. Microsoft's philosophy, since its creation, has been based on appropriating common goods to patent them and legally compel their purchase—a logic not unlike Monsanto's strategy of patenting living organisms.

Denmark's pioneering example shows that another path is possible: this country is gradually migrating to free software like Linux and LibreOffice, whose exceptional reliability explains why 95% of Internet infrastructure runs on them. The meteoric rise of the web itself can be explained by its status as a common good: CERN chose not to patent the fundamental concepts of the web, placing them under a free license. Everyone could thus create pages and servers for free, promoting their universal accessibility. This common good embodies the engine of human development.

The fourth section, "Toward a Distributed Cultural Sector," explores a stimulating hypothesis: what if digital cultures showed us how to build the common through distribution rather than centralization? Platforms suggest that diversity may not be the enemy of the common but its very condition. The more different content there is, the more each person can find their place, their peers. The common would emerge not from top-down uniformization but from a multitude of horizontal connections. Interoperability could be more than a technical question—it could be a philosophy allowing different systems to communicate without losing their specificity. The most successful digital commons have understood something essential: unity comes not from content but from method. Wikipedia does not prescribe what to write but how to write to-

gether. This approach could inspire “distributed residencies,” “territorial cultural APIs,” “weavers of connections” trained to create bridges between separate worlds.

The fifth section, “On the Proper Use of Artificial Intelligence in the Cultural Sector,” proposes concrete methodological approaches to support cultural organizations in appropriating these technologies. It seems essential to enable employees and actors in the cultural sector to share the stakes of AI in their common professional context, explore its potential, and implement responsible and cooperative uses. The program I propose combines training on environmental and political issues of AI, mapping of internal skills, identification of professional needs, and establishment of a mentoring system. This approach also allows cultural actors to position themselves strategically, in coherence with the values they defend, particularly in terms of societal responsibility and choice of tools respectful of sovereignty.

The sixth section, “AI in Service of the Democratic Transformation of Cultural Institutions,” extends and deepens these reflections by proposing a complete seven-step methodology. Inspired by industrial process management systems but entirely reinvented for the cultural sector, this approach operates a fundamental reversal: the goal is no longer to optimize production chains to reduce costs, but to reveal the real practices of audiences and staff to foster deep cultural democracy. The seven proposed steps—forming a collective for reflection, listening to the territory, mapping real practices, defining indicators of dignity, co-constructing with creative AI, experimenting with transformations, and conducting continuous and open evaluation—allow institutions to rediscover themselves through their territory’s perspective. AI is no longer a tool for

efficiency but a companion in discovery, in service of a humanist vision where robustness, in Olivier Hamant's sense, replaces the cult of performance.

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*This chapter will be particularly useful for professionals who wish to seize the potential of artificial intelligence without naivety, understanding both its contributions and its limits. It will interest directors of cultural organizations seeking to rethink their digital policy from a perspective of sovereignty and responsibility, and who wish to democratically transform their institutions. It will offer elected officials and territorial leaders arguments for investing in digital commons rather than increasing dependence on monopolies. Finally, it will offer everyone a reflection on what it means to build society in the digital age: not passively enduring technological transformations, but collectively orienting them toward enriching our practices, strengthening our autonomy, and democratically refounding our cultural venues.*

# Documentation and artificial intelligence

## **Rethinking professional practices.**

*Generative AI can profoundly enrich our professional practices. To exploit their potential for constructive synthesis and analysis, we need to rethink our relationship with the documentation of our activities.*

## Anthropological changes

With the use of generative artificial intelligences that is now democratized in personal and professional life, whether for research, translation, daily and life advice, learning, writing, creation, task automation, etc., I believe that **it is time at this stage to consider for organizations, and particularly cultural organizations, collective best practices in the use of these technologies**. I know that some do not yet feel concerned, as they do not yet use AI, but it must be noted that young people live with it, AI is now part of their living environment, their practices and references, so it's a beginning. In the middle of 2025, almost three years after the arrival of ChatGPT, it is certain that we are at the beginning of a profound anthropological change with no return, despite its **ecological risks**.

I think it is always useful to anticipate, not to stupidly “stay in the race” without knowing why we are running, but rather to understand how these technologies allow us to produce other things and differently, for the benefit of the human community.

All professions seem to be impacted in their future by artificial intelligence, we fear being replaced by machines that would format life more than it already is. But in my opinion, the real question, faced with a technological evolution that brings new human uses, is this evolution of people's uses and needs. It's not that professions will be replaced, it's that human activities are enriched, modified, not directly by technologies, but by the human uses that are produced by technologies, which meet sociology and living environments.

What is magnificent about humanity is its capacity to evolve, to enrich itself, to discover, always. Thus professions, concrete human activities, reinvent themselves. And to produce other things, we must work differently, technologies or not. Throughout time, new professions have been invented to make other things, because there was a need for these other things. And conversely, in a complementary way, the advent of new technologies has also made it possible to create other things. It is a dialectic between techniques and uses. We are today, with artificial intelligences, at a moment of choice, of precise positioning on what we want to do differently and how we want to do it.

## **The synthesis and deduction capacity of AIs**

Generative artificial intelligences initially give extremely standard, disembodied, statistical results, made of averages and not of biases. This is very uninteresting in a professional context, it remains anecdotal, even if it can boost productivity here and there. We see completely generic emails written by AI, insipid texts, distressing images of conformism... On the other hand, in organizations, one of the very great assets of artificial intelligences is their capacity to synthesize documents (written, images, audio, video, web). From these syntheses, artificial intelligences are able, thanks to their reasoning capacity, to propose action plans, really relevant, constructive and singular suggestions on the subject.

If artificial intelligences are fed with documents specific to an organization, they will be able, through their

inhuman capacity for synthesis, to open doors for enriching activities, open new avenues of work, detect trends, make proposals, etc. This is extremely rich.

But for this power of enrichment to exist, we human beings must adopt a new way of doing things, to be built: it is **to document much more all the activities of our organization**. This involves photographing, making narratives, recording audio, collecting documents and properly classifying all these corpora so that they can be processed by artificial intelligences, which will be able to deduce work paths that we would not have been able to find by ourselves. This is extremely rich and can allow for the renewal of many things, by building on the particular history of the organization and its activities, and by deepening the singularities of the professions in which we are engaged.

## New skills to develop

I insist again, this requires new vast documentation work, for the moment very little invested in professional practices. This involves scanning documents, naming files, classifying them properly, making audio recordings, applying quality voice recognition to them, archiving important email exchanges between people, keeping traces and versions of texts, etc. This is a new responsibility and it is the work of a documentalist, ultimately, which in my opinion is a new skill to be cultivated by humans. It is about preparing corpora, structuring them, so that AI can make the most of them.

It's simple to say, but it's not at all simple to implement, because yes, AIs have these immense synthesis

capacities, but they also have their processing capacity limits, depending on the choices of AI agents we make, and depending on the capacities we allocate to them. The way generative AIs work is to take all the documents together in their RAM, and if the documents are numerous this will require a very large memory (a capacity that not all AI services have), and by the joint presence of all these elements in memory, the AI can relate all this, make syntheses and deductions, which take everything into account, which exceeds human capacities.

We will often find ourselves at the limits of AI capacities, which means that we can see them produce quite deplorable results on this type of proposals. We must also learn to establish a path for AIs, successive syntheses by stages. For example, rather than directly giving the audio of a meeting in the corpus, first have voice recognition done for the meeting, but it's a very large document with a lot of "noise", many useless things. So, from this voice recognition of a meeting, we will ask an AI to make a synthesis of it, but a synthesis as complete as possible, because a synthesis that is too reduced would not provide a sufficiently singular corpus. Then, it will be these syntheses with which we can feed the AI to ask for advice on strategic paths, on new activities to develop, on which audience to contact, on what type of new articles to write, which book to publish, etc.

It is possible thanks to very detailed documentation, structured and validated by humans, that AI will allow us not to be more productive, but to be more accurate, to be deeper, to be more constructive in relation to the objectives of our professions. This modifies professions quite profoundly, because we are not used to detailing the documentation of our activities so much. But the contributions, in all domains, can be unprece-

dented, in the service of human beings.

# Cultural investigation with artificial intelligence

**Towards an open, non-directive methodology for revealing the unexpected.**

*How can we transcend the limitations of traditional cultural surveys? By combining spontaneous dialogues and AI analysis, a new approach could allow us to discover what we would never have thought to look for.*

## **The limits of traditional surveys: a simplistic worldview**

Cultural surveys are important for multiple reasons: understanding citizens' practices in a given territory, collecting their expectations, better supporting professionals, imagining new projects that respect cultural rights, improving reception and communication, and even enriching artistic creation. Surveys, which constitute the very heart of sociology, are a valuable tool for working on the meaning of cultural policies. Survey has nothing to do with polling. Moreover, there are numerous survey methods across different sociological currents, and we have the right to invent our own.

In the field of cultural surveys conducted around cultural venues to inform cultural policies, the preferred method remains the questionnaire, generally administered online. These surveys are either conducted by professionals in a territory or entrusted to a specialized agency. The fundamental problem with this type of survey, essentially quantitative and statistical, lies in the fact that the framework of thought is entirely determined by its designers.

To be more direct: these questionnaire survey methods are, in my opinion, 95% useless for generating genuine innovations. Why such inefficiency? Because the predefined framework acts as an invisible prison. Physically, when you face a questionnaire, your unconscious immediately understands that it cannot step outside the box. Certainly, free response spaces are provided to allow respondents to formulate proposals outside the framework, but these free responses will never have the same analytical impact as formatted re-

sponses, precisely because they cannot be typologized within the analysis grid.

Statistics, which forms the basis of these surveys, represents a form of thinking that is certainly interesting, but fundamentally simplistic. Even cross-tabulated statistics remain a reductive view of the world, extremely partial in what they can teach us, particularly about potential innovations.

Moreover, who actually responds to these online surveys? What are their motivations? These fundamental questions about the meaning and impacts of protocols generally remain unexplored in the survey itself. Added to this is the punctual nature and high cost of these systems, even though cultural expectations and practices in a territory can evolve rapidly.

Yet, the very essence of a survey consists precisely in discovering what we had absolutely not anticipated. That's its whole point. I am convinced that the quality of surveys, the openness of perspectives, and the richness of results largely depend on the method employed.

## **For a diversity of survey methods**

This is why, in the support sessions I facilitate for cultural sector professionals, I often encourage them to design their own survey methods, to evolve them, or even to solicit others to imagine new methods. The diversity of methods naturally generates a diversity of results—it's common sense. I also think that the survey process should be intrinsically linked to programming work, funding choices, and the development of

cultural policies. It should be a continuous process rather than rare, punctual surveys that are costly and freeze our representation of the context.

I have developed a survey protocol proposal using artificial intelligence, which could, in my opinion, produce particularly useful, perhaps surprising, and potentially transformative results. I have already conducted some marginal experiments with this approach, without having deployed it in its entirety, and the initial results suggest considerable potential.

## **An innovative protocol: spontaneous dialogues and recordings**

Here is the protocol I propose: in a cultural venue—let’s take a theater as an example—I suggest that reception staff engage, for a week for instance, in in-depth dialogues with visitors. This system somewhat formalizes the informal: we explicitly propose to discuss in this particular place, creating opportunities for exchange that go beyond usual interactions.

It is crucial to ensure that this week welcomes sufficiently varied groups and individuals, different types of audiences, different generations, different backgrounds. Ideally, it would even include conversations with people around the venue who don’t enter it, but let’s first focus on actual visitors.

Let’s imagine five people in this reception staff, each equipped with a portable dictaphone (and it’s impor-

tant to choose quality devices, as some models are inadequate). The instruction is simple: dialogue with visitors, more than usual, take the initiative to engage in conversations and exchanges. Discussions can be individual or in groups. No other directive is given. No pre-established grid of questions.

Visitors are of course informed about the recording and its purpose: “I have a small dictaphone attached to my clothing that’s recording us, would you agree to chat a bit?” This transparency constitutes the only necessary framing.

Naturally, since these exchanges take place in a cultural space and are conducted by reception staff, the venue itself is implicit in the conversations. However, to maximize the openness of exchanges, it is crucial to frame them as little as possible while encouraging them. Discussions can be about the theater, but not necessarily—the important thing is to let the conversation follow its natural course.

Each evening, the recordings are classified, archived, and identified according to their context: discussion with a group of children, exchange with a retired spectator, with a family, etc. Each recording must be carefully contextualized and documented. After this week of recording, voice recognition is applied to all conversations, thus producing a collection of textual documents, each contextualized, relating the exchanges. These can vary considerably in duration, from thirty seconds to an hour. Voice recognition, a reliable technology that has existed for about thirty years and has improved considerably recently, is not strictly speaking artificial intelligence.

## The analytical power of artificial intelligence

The next step consists of submitting the entirety of this “dataset” (as we say in the jargon) to an artificial intelligence. Claude or ChatGPT currently seem the most suitable for this type of analysis, notably thanks to their capacity to process vast volumes of documents and establish complex connections. A paid subscription is necessary to process such quantities of data, as free accounts are too limited.

The crucial aspect lies in formulating the request to the artificial intelligence. We must absolutely avoid asking specific questions so as not to filter responses through our own framework of thought and thus reproduce the restrictive logic of traditional questionnaires. We simply ask the AI to draw conclusions from these documents and formulate recommendations, without predefined objectives. This is where we touch on the singular power of these tools: their extraordinary capacity to connect a very large number of heterogeneous data points, to identify patterns invisible to the human eye, to formulate deductions from disparate elements. Certainly, AIs have their own filters and biases, as we have ours, but their mode of information processing differs fundamentally from ours.

They can analyze not only the explicit content of conversations, but also thought movements, underlying reasoning structures, implicit thematic recurrences. Thus, even a conversation apparently distant from cultural subjects can, through its thought structure or indirect references, nourish relevant ideas for the institution.

Artificial intelligence, by establishing multiple connec-

tions and precisely because no directive question is posed to it, can generate reflection totally outside our initial framework of thought. I am convinced that this approach would produce completely unexpected and relevant leads, precisely because it relies on real human exchanges, much less formalistic than a list of questions.

These proposals will often appear to us as obvious in hindsight, even though we would never have thought of them spontaneously. This is the whole strength of this approach: revealing what was there, before our eyes, but that we could not see because of our own cognitive limitations and pre-established frameworks of thought.

## **Perspectives and future experiments**

This method represents much more than a simple alternative to traditional surveys. It embodies a different philosophy of research in social sciences applied to the cultural sector: an approach that trusts in the richness of spontaneous human exchanges and in artificial intelligence's capacity to extract meaning from them, without imposing a preconceived reading grid.

The relatively modest cost of this approach (a few quality dictaphones, staff time, an AI subscription) makes it accessible to most cultural institutions. Its flexibility allows it to be adapted to different contexts and repeated regularly to follow the evolution of practices and expectations.

This would be an experiment worth conducting, which in my opinion could bring a lot, including many salu-

tary questionings. The initial trials I have been able to conduct at the margins of this approach suggest a transformative potential for our survey practices and, beyond that, for our understanding of territorial cultural dynamics.

# Cultivating digital sovereignty

**For a democratic reclaiming of our digital spaces.**

*Faced with our growing dependence on tech giants, digital sovereignty is becoming a major democratic challenge. It's time to act collectively.*

## The foundations of digital sovereignty

Digital sovereignty refers to the ability of a State, community, organization or individual to exercise autonomous control over their technological choices, data and digital infrastructure. It also encompasses the political independence necessary to freely organize access to fundamental resources: heritage, history, accounting, currency, communication networks and other elements constituting their identity and operation.

This sovereignty is structured around five major challenges:

### **First challenge: Data control**

This involves ensuring that citizen and company data is stored and processed in accordance with national legislation and internal organizational regulations, without creating excessive dependence on private actors, who are often capitalist multinationals. This approach does not exclude the use of third-party services, but requires the implementation of safeguard mechanisms, particularly through data duplication on servers under national or local control. When partnerships are established with actors with potentially divergent interests, the confidentiality of exchanges must be rigorously guaranteed.

### **Second challenge: Technological independence**

States, communities, organizations, families and individuals must ensure they minimize their dependence on technologies, software and equipment from capitalist monopolies. This vigilance must be exercised in all sectors: administration, health, economy, arts and culture, etc. The hegemony of Microsoft's Windows operating system perfectly illustrates this issue. Even

more concerning is the massive migration of institutional and administrative data to Microsoft's cloud services, which constitutes a deliberate choice of technological dependence, whose political consequences are undoubtedly not measured.

### **Third challenge: Control of critical infrastructure**

Whether for a country, an organization or an individual, control of communication networks, telecommunications and data storage spaces (data centers) is fundamental. In the pre-digital era, family archives were kept in filing cabinets in the attic. Today, this precious data is scattered between personal hard drives and cloud services like Dropbox.

Another crucial challenge lies in our ability to control our means of communication. A question arises: can citizens of a country or employees of a company communicate with each other without depending on an American multinational, even for basic local exchanges like email or telephone?

### **Fourth challenge: Legal and regulatory framework**

It is primarily at the national level that the ability to apply one's own laws to one's digital territory must be exercised. This involves legal instruments for data protection like the GDPR, effective taxation on digital services used in the territory, and in-depth critical thinking training for all public agents.

Unfortunately, many people, even in positions of high responsibility such as Chief Information Officers in administrations, favor pragmatic choices that sacrifice sovereignty. They believe they are gaining agility and achieving budget savings, without realizing that this short-term approach inevitably prepares a democratic

disaster in the medium term.

## **Vulnerabilities induced by the loss of digital sovereignty**

The excessive dependence on Microsoft shown by a multitude of public services, businesses and associations places the State, communities and public and private organizations in a position of extreme vulnerability. This situation is all the more problematic as Microsoft's philosophy, since its creation in 1978, has been based on appropriating common goods to patent them and legally compel their purchase. This logic is reminiscent of Monsanto's strategy of patenting living organisms to commercialize what should belong to everyone, going so far as to genetically modify plants to prevent them from producing seeds, thus guaranteeing a perpetual captive market.

Beyond this political dimension, let's imagine a scenario where Microsoft would be forced to abruptly cease its activities. Bill Gates being notoriously opposed to the current power in the United States, an American court decision could theoretically force Microsoft to interrupt its services for abuse of dominant position. This precedent exists: on January 20, 2012, the Megaupload site was closed without notice by the FBI. Although used by hackers, this service also hosted legitimate data from many companies for their large files. Overnight, no one in the world could recover their data.

This dependence on a single industrialist, particularly

radical in its capitalist practices, exposes us to considerable risks, far beyond what we imagine. The impression of technological magic, perfectly embodied by the term “cloud”, cultivates magical thinking where everything seems fluid and instantaneous. This illusion masks reality: these services can disappear at any time. I focus on Microsoft because the choice to use or not use this company’s services constitutes a political decision accessible at our level.

Another challenge, more complex for the ordinary citizen to grasp, concerns the very architecture of the Internet. Ophélie Coelho explains it brilliantly in her book *Geopolitics of Digital, Imperialism with Giant Steps* (2023): the network has gradually been built by private rather than public actors. This evolution has profound consequences: States themselves now depend on these industrial giants to dialogue with each other and build international politics. Yet communication and exchange constitute the very foundation of human community life. Coelho traces the origin of this dependence to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, during the laying of the first underwater transatlantic telegraph cables.

## **Rebuilding our sovereignty: a collective imperative**

Levers for action exist at all levels: family, friendship, association, business, state, territorial and municipal. Digital sovereignty, largely compromised today, must be lucidly acknowledged, and must be patiently rebuilt, stone by stone, with humility and pragmatism. The goal is not to instantly revolutionize our practices, but to develop an enlightened awareness of our choic-

es, to understand their motivations and anticipate their consequences.

### **Denmark's pioneering example**

Denmark has just adopted a courageous decision that will be gradually implemented from July 2025. Danish Digital Minister Caroline Stage Olsen announced that her ministry, gradually followed by others, will stop using Microsoft tools. Exit the Office 365 cloud that replaces local data centers, exit Word and Excel which will be replaced by LibreOffice, a free office suite, developed and improved by an international community, belonging to no one.

This transition illustrates a groundswell that cannot be accomplished abruptly, but requires collective awareness and courageous political decisions that most do not even perceive as political.

Regarding operating systems, Denmark is gradually migrating to Linux, which is free software of remarkable maturity and contrary to popular belief, often easier to use than Windows. Its lack of aggressive marketing is simply explained: belonging to no one, no company profits from its commercialization.

Linux's exceptional reliability, reinforced precisely by its status as a common good maintained by the global community, explains why 95% of Internet infrastructure and data centers run on it. Multinationals themselves rely on this free software to deliver their services, thus recognizing that no proprietary software can match its reliability for critical applications.

This situation potentially benefits everyone. Certainly, the change in habits and the lack of public investment, with administrations preferring to fund Microsoft rather than contribute to the development of free software, explain their lesser notoriety and sometimes

their perfectible ergonomics compared to commercial solutions.

### **The potential of the contributive approach**

This software could quickly surpass its commercial equivalents if political choices favored contribution to the common good. Take the example of a municipality adopting Linux and LibreOffice: it could create a service dedicated to improving tools, thus benefiting its agents and citizens, but also the entire global community through sharing improvements. If every city adopted this contributive enrichment strategy, individual effort would remain modest while collective improvement would reach unparalleled levels. These tools would quickly become superior to commercial solutions. But this requires an initial political will to invest in the collective.

The infrastructure already exists: the backbone of our digital systems relies on free software. The transition to their widespread use in civil society and by non-IT users is therefore perfectly achievable.

Caroline Stage Olsen expresses it accurately: “We will never move towards our goal if we don’t start somewhere”. This lucid humility must guide our action. Without a first step, no change will occur, and we will progressively become, at all levels of humanity, increasingly vulnerable and dependent on actors whose primary motivation remains financial profit, never the common good.

Microsoft is in no way a public service, even if it cultivates this appearance. It will never become one, except through nationalization, and even in this unlikely case, it would be an American public service creating a new form of international dependence.

## The evolution of interoperability

The question of format compatibility has long been problematic. OpenOffice ODT documents (LibreOffice's predecessor) were sometimes unreadable for users of other software. These blockages, deliberately orchestrated by industrialists to lock in their users, stem from a commercial strategy, not a technical limitation of free software.

The situation has considerably evolved: exchanging documents in DOCX format is now transparent or almost between different software. Microsoft has understood that opening its formats serves its business model and interoperability needs, even if its software and services remain closed.

The development of digital sovereignty, in my view, involves creating spaces of digital autonomy. Rather than entrusting documents to Google Docs, one can install at home a NAS (compact device connected to the internet box allowing remote access to files). One then has functionality equivalent to Google Docs or Google Photos, but with control over the storage location. This autonomy does not exclude complementarity: one can duplicate data on Google Cloud to secure it and have an external backup. One thus benefits from the services of large industrialists while avoiding dependence. The reverse approach also works: continue using Google Cloud out of habit while implementing a local duplication strategy to preserve sovereignty. These solutions, apparently complex, are becoming increasingly accessible to novices.

But will a multitude of autonomous systems provide services as fluid and simple as what Google, Microsoft and others do? This is indeed a crucial subject: the

possibility of interoperability between diverse systems. The answer is yes, dialogue between diverse systems is increasingly easy (the old incompatibilities so numerous that digital users have known so much, due to industrialists' commercial strategies, fortunately belong more and more to the past).

## **Rethinking our relationship to digital effort**

Let's reflect: wanting the storage of our digital data to require no effort and be entirely delegated to others reveals our acceptance of dependence. Consider the analogy with a physical library: we buy or build shelves, we install them, we transport our books in boxes, we arrange them. We concretely assume this responsibility, we live it, see it, implement it with effort.

Why should digital exempt us from all effort? This absence of effort signals our dependence: someone else assumes this effort in our place, making us dependent on their decisions.

**The objective of sharing this reflection is to demonstrate the gravity of this situation and the importance of consenting to this effort to preserve our sovereignty, our freedom and our capacity for existence, not in autarchy, but in free and respectful dialogue of our diversities, which existing computer systems today allow, we just have to choose them!**

## **The web, paradigm of the common good**

The phenomenal rise of the web is explained by its status as a common good. The fundamental concepts, web pages, formatting, hyperlinks, were invented by Tim Berners-Lee at CERN in 1989 to facilitate document sharing between researchers. CERN renounced patenting these innovations, placing them under free license. Everyone could thus freely create pages and web servers, promoting their universal accessibility and sharing.

This open architecture allowed continuous improvement by the community. The web was thus able to experience ultra-rapid, massive and truly international development, because its base constitutes a global common good that the international community has an interest in enriching and preserving as heritage belonging to everyone and no one. This common good embodies the engine of human development.

These fundamental principles may seem obvious to some readers, less so to others who perceive the functioning of the web as magical, without questioning the technical and legal foundations that enable it.

## **Path to building our sovereignty together**

I propose to initiate this movement by creating, in all our collective bodies, whether intimate (our inner dialogue), family, organizational (small, medium or large) or territorial, spaces for dialogue and collective reflection whose objective would be to cultivate, without dogmatism, a shared awareness of digital sovereignty

through our choice of tools and digital practices, regardless of our technical level.

These awareness moments would constitute an essential first step. They must be part of a democratic approach, avoiding expert speeches claiming to hold superior knowledge. In an authentic democratic society, each person makes an essential contribution from their own position. No contribution is minor; they are simply exercised at different levels.

**Digital sovereignty transcends technological choices alone. It engages cultures, ways of thinking, dialogue and exchange. Its construction therefore benefits from the contribution of each person, regardless of their technical competence. It is in this diversity that our collective strength lies.**

So there's a lot of tension about these issues at the heart of local authorities and the French state, which has nonetheless built a digital service *a priori* sovereign for public service, which works rather well: [La Suite numérique](#). If we use it, it must also go hand in hand with collaborative appropriation approaches such as I suggest.

# Towards a distributed cultural sector

## **Hypotheses on the commons and digital diversity.**

*What if digital cultures showed us how to build the commons through distribution rather than centralization? This hypothesis invites us to rethink cultural fragmentation not as a threat but as an opportunity.*

## **Digital technology as a laboratory for a new grammar of the commons**

Digital platforms seem to have succeeded in an audacious bet: creating shared meaning from dizzying diversity. YouTube hosts billions of videos in all languages, on every imaginable subject. TikTok sees traditional African dance coexist with quantum physics, grandmother's recipes with political activism. Yet this apparent cacophony produces vibrant communities, deep learning, effective transmission.

Could we see a lesson here? These spaces suggest that diversity may not be the enemy of the commons but its very condition. The more different content there is, the more everyone can find their place, their path, their peers. The commons would then emerge not from top-down standardization but from a multitude of horizontal connections between heterogeneous elements.

This hypothesis questions the traditional approach of the public cultural sector, inherited from a vision where the people had to be "elevated" toward a single legitimate culture. What if digital technology showed us that the commons could be built through aggregation of singularities, not through imposition of a model? Wikipedia doesn't have a unique style but millions of voices that converge thanks to shared protocols - perhaps a path to explore for the cultural sector.

## **Interoperability as a potential philosophy**

Interoperability could be more than a technical issue. We could see it as a philosophy allowing different systems to communicate without losing their specificity. In the digital world, it's embodied in open standards, public APIs, free formats that enable circulation without standardization.

What if the cultural sector adopted this philosophy? This could mean abandoning the temptation of the centralized system, of the single platform that would manage everything. Experience suggests that these digital cathedrals often become problematic spaces of power. Wouldn't it be more relevant to think archipelago: autonomous islands connected by light bridges?

This approach could take concrete forms:

- Shared documentation protocols allowing each cultural project to tell its story in a reusable format
- Systematic open licenses for all productions funded by public money
- Metadata standards facilitating cross-cutting discoverability of content
- Open APIs so that public cultural data can irrigate other spaces

## **Creating commons through method: a hypothesis to**

## explore

Digital commons seem to have grasped something essential: unity could come not from content but from method. Wikipedia doesn't prescribe what to write but how to write together. Free software doesn't dictate functionalities but contribution processes.

Could this approach resolve the apparent contradiction between diversity and coherence? We could imagine an explosion of cultural projects in companies, hospitals, transport systems, while building commons if these projects shared certain methods:

- **Open documentation as a founding practice?** Each project, wherever it emerges, could publicly document its processes, its learnings, its failures. Not in a logic of control but of sharing. This documentation could itself become cultural work, sensitive testimony as much as practical transmission. It could use web tools (blogs, wikis, social networks) to create a distributed collective memory.
- **Experience narratives as new artistic formats?** Digital technology has popularized hybrid narrative forms that could inspire us. These short, modular, shareable formats could tell the story of culture in the making. They could transform each participant into a potential narrator.
- **Communities of practice as new fluid institutions?** Rather than rigid structures, we could imagine flexible networks of practitioners who exchange, help each other, co-create. These communities could practice what we might call digital hospitality: welcoming newcomers, documenting for

those absent, archiving for future ones.

## Sketches for a distributed cultural sector

### 1. **“Distributed residencies” to experiment with?**

We could imagine light formats where an artist becomes a “distributed resident” not of a place but of a territory, with a mission to reveal and document the cultures already present there. The deliverable wouldn’t be an overarching work but perhaps a sensitive cartography, published online, of existing cultural practices. The artist could become a facilitator of the inhabitants’ own cultural expression.

### 2. **“Territorial cultural APIs” to build?**

Each territory could perhaps develop an open API listing all cultural projects, whether institutional, associative, entrepreneurial or citizen-led. This API wouldn’t be a simple directory but could become a living stream, directly fed by actors. It could perhaps enable unprecedented crossovers, fortuitous discoveries, improbable collaborations.

### 3. **“Link weavers” to train?**

We could envision new professional profiles, neither pure artists nor pure technicians, but intermediaries capable of creating bridges between separate worlds. These professionals could support distributed documentation, facilitate horizontal connec-

tions, animate hybrid communities of practice.

4. **A “right to shared memory” to establish?**

Any project funded by public money could include not only a right but perhaps an invitation to shared documentation. This documentation would no longer be seen as an administrative constraint but could become an essential part of the project, funded and valued as such. Participants would have access to traces of their participation, could contribute to the collective narrative, reuse the content produced.

5. **“Distributed narrative factories” to imagine?**

Light devices could go capture cultural narratives where they are lived without being spoken. These narratives, assembled on open platforms, could perhaps progressively build another cultural geography, more inclusive and vibrant.

## **Antifragility through distribution: a path to explore?**

Could distribution make the cultural sector more antifragile, in the sense Nassim Nicholas Taleb means it? A distributed system could have this remarkable property: shocks that weaken certain nodes strengthen the whole through collective learning. If a project fails, its documentation allows others to learn. If a crisis occurs, the diversity of approaches increases the chances that a solution will emerge.

This antifragility might involve:

- Accepting error as learning material
- Documenting failures as much as successes
- Multiplying small experiments rather than grand plans
- Building redundant networks rather than unique structures

## **Trust in collective intelligence: a necessary bet?**

The most difficult part of this transformation might be accepting to let go. Cultural institutions were built on the idea that they knew what was good for the public. What if digital technology invited us to bet on distributed intelligence, on knowledge that emerges from interactions rather than prescriptions?

This trust wouldn't mean abandoning all requirements. The most successful digital commons have rules, but these rules are collectively negotiated, evolving, transparent. They aim to enable productive coexistence of differences rather than imposing a single norm.

## **An open proposal to continue thinking together**

These hypotheses don't claim to propose a truth but to open paths. The mistake might be wanting to define *a priori* what the cultural commons should be. Digital

cultures suggest that the commons emerges, it isn't decreed. It's born from connecting diversities that find, along the way, their resonances and complementarities.

The fragmentation of the cultural sector could only be virtuous under certain conditions: documenting our experiences with generosity, opening our methods to discussion, weaving horizontal links without pre-established hierarchy, welcoming the unexpected as wealth. It's perhaps by cultivating these practices that we'll build a truly common culture.

Digital technology is neither the solution nor the model to copy. It perhaps simply offers us inspiration: we could make society differently, diversity could be a strength when accompanied by tools for connection, culture might not need cathedrals but living networks. It's up to us to invent, experiment, learn together the concrete forms of this new cultural deal.

This transformation would invite a form of creative humility: accepting not to control everything, trusting emergent processes, carefully documenting our tentative steps. It's perhaps at this price that the distributed cultural sector could become not a dilution but an enrichment of the commons, that is, the emancipation of each individual, going hand in hand with a refoundation of democracy in our new reality.

# Putting Artificial Intelligence to good use in the cultural sector

## **Methodological approaches.**

*By 2025, it seems essential to enable employees and stakeholders in the cultural sector to share the challenges of AI within their professional context, to explore its potential, and to implement responsible and cooperative uses, for a better execution of their professional missions. This also allows cultural stakeholders to position themselves strategically, in line with the values they uphold.*

## Initial ideas for an action-training program

How to begin with a conscious, responsible, and effective use of AI? I propose a draft training/support program.

### Common Core

Half a day. Understanding the history and challenges of AI at the environmental level, as well as economic, political, cultural systems of domination, etc. This would be a fairly playful and lively moment, where we create things, have fun, and keep traces of all this, which also creates connections. We conclude with the various possibilities of AI, whether in content generation or in agency (i.e., AI that performs tasks on our behalf, or allows us to automate tasks). We thus end with concrete leads within the specific context of the cultural structure.

### General Workshops

Half a day, three parallel workshops. Participants spend 45 minutes in each workshop and rotate through all three:

- Workshop “My Skills with AI”: Each person would come to share their skills, to identify the skills present. We would have a mapping of the skills of each individual within the structure.
- Workshop “My Desires with AI”: for those who have desires to explore things with AI and are motivated by it.
- Workshop “My Professional Needs”: with the perspective of questioning how AI could help.  
We identify potential “AI mentors” among

the employees of the structure or the professional network. These are people who can dedicate a small part of their time to helping others implement AI projects.

### **Sectoral Workshops**

Half a day. The different activity sectors of the structure or network are identified by tables, and we rotate, somewhat in the principle of the World Café, to contribute ideas for uses of AI to improve the quality of work. It is from these sectoral workshops that choices and arbitrations could be made by the management of the structure.

## **Implementation after the action-training phase**

Within the framework of a cultural structure, it is necessary to respect Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR: the voluntary integration, by companies, of social and environmental concerns into their commercial activities and their relations with stakeholders). To implement a responsible use of AI, I propose three steps:

1. A step of responsible choice by the management of the structure on which AI tools are used, as social and environmental responsibility is very important, including with AI. This may impose certain limits, but we are dealing with a structure funded by public money that cannot do just anything.
2. Organization of the internal mentoring system.

3. Setting up a short, non-mandatory quarterly meeting on the subject of the use of AI in the structure or in the network.

## Material Suggestions - Early 2025

- A Swiss host, Infomaniak, offers AI tools where there is no data surveillance and as little carbon footprint as possible: <https://www.infomaniak.com/fr/hebergement/ai-tools> (they have now integrated the very powerful Chinese Open Source AI Deepseek on their own servers).
- Quick benchmark of generative AIs in early 2025:
  - ChatGPT: good for structuring things, but overall quite average in my opinion.
  - Deepseek: the best by far, in my opinion as well.
  - Claude: rather good for subjects related to writing.
  - Perplexity: the one that does web searches to answer, and provides references.
- To install an LLM on your own computer: the LM Studio software.

# AI in Service of Democratic Transformation of Cultural Institutions

**Methodological proposal inspired by process management, adapted to cultural sector values.**

*Artificial intelligence is most often deployed to optimize production chains, for example through their digitization to create a digital twin in order to find ways to reduce costs and increase efficiency. In the subsidized cultural field, the objectives are very different from those of commerce. The challenge and potential of AI does not consist, in my view, in automating tasks for increased performance; AI can serve to reveal the real practices of audiences and agents, with the aim of promoting a deep cultural democracy, respectful of everyone's rights and dignity. I propose a seven-step methodology, derived from industrial process management systems, but reinvented to prioritize openness, cooperation and the discovery of the unexpected, and to place humans and territory at the*

*center. The goal is to avoid the traps of rigid optimization, by favoring collective dialogues and an ethics centered on authentic relationships, so that cultural venues can, also thanks to AI, rebuild themselves even better as true co-constructed commons.*

## The paradigm shift: from optimization to revelation

Supply chain optimization through massive data analysis to minimize losses and accelerate flows, focusing on metrics like costs and speed, is a quest for efficiency that may be useful in industry, but it risks dehumanizing processes if applied as such to the cultural sector; we must guard against simplistic translations. **In a cultural institution, the challenge is the reverse: AI can be a very powerful tool to better reveal real practices, with the aim of serving cultural democracy and honoring the dignity of each person, by allowing deeper exploration of how the venue interacts with its territory and its audiences, including those who are excluded from it.**

The traditional approach of surveys and optimization processes locks us into predefined frameworks that stifle possibilities for cultural and social innovation, amplifying the biases inherent in AI such as cultural stereotypes or the standardization of perspectives. Instead, I advocate for an exploratory stance where AI helps welcome surprises, by asking non-directive questions to discover invisible patterns and reveal symbolic barriers to cultural participation.

This reversal integrates a relational ethics, where responsibility is shared in a network of human actors, to avoid unpredictable impacts on human relationships. It involves cultivating shared resilience in the face of uncertainty, distinguishing authentic empathy from technological or statistical simulations, for a transformation that enriches living together rather than rationalizing it. Often, “audience surveys,” for example, done with or without AI, are confined to pseudo-ration-

alization, completely foreign to the real movements of enrichment between human beings, which is at the heart of cultural democracy, which is in my view the path for tomorrow's development of subsidized culture.

## **Methodological approach adapted to the cultural sector**

Here is a seven-step approach to implement these transformative methods through AI. I hope it is inspiring, in its overall logic or in its details.

### **Step 1: Form a reflection collective (not “appoint a manager”)**

Instead of designating a manager who imposes a top-down vision, let's create a cross-cutting collective including reception staff, artists, programmers, audience representatives such as associations and regular users, non-audiences from the territory, technicians and administrators. Animation roles rotate, and decisions are made by consent to foster authentic cooperation.

This collective collectively documents exchanges, capturing without filter to preserve the diversity of voices. This avoids rigid hierarchies, integrating varied perspectives, to co-construct an emergent understanding, aligned with participatory governance (to resist technocratic approaches). This group becomes a secure space where tensions enrich dialogue, cultivating irreplaceable empathy and intergenerational transmission to invent cultural mutations together.

And AI allows synthesizing these exchanges from their

traces (written, recorded, photographed), to help create narratives and legitimize them, as their analysis will show their relevance.

### **Step 2: Listen to the territory (not “identify beneficiaries”)**

Rather than defining “clients” or “targets” according to marketing criteria, organize active listening sessions in and around the venue: spontaneous conversations recorded with dictaphones, dialogues with passersby who avoid entering, exchanges with local merchants and associations.

Documentation is open: audio recordings, photos of spontaneous uses, observation notebooks, stories of “non-encounters” explaining absences. This reveals invisible barriers and hidden sociability networks, without a predefined grid to let the unexpected emerge.

This listening favors cultural diversity, integrating non-Western or marginalized perspectives, and protects sensitive data for respectful ethics, transforming the institution into a living reflection of its territory. AI will enable producing structured syntheses of all these informal exchanges, from their traces, and will thus be able to reveal paths for creation, interaction and cooperation that would never have appeared otherwise.

### **Step 3: Map real practices (not “the current process”)**

Instead of mapping formal processes like reception or ticketing, AI will be able to analyze conversations to reveal the real journeys of audiences, diverted uses of spaces and usage temporalities, such as creative off-peak hours or social micro-rituals.

Visualizing human flows includes not only those entering, but those who pass by without entering, identify-

ing surprising patterns without *a priori* categorization. This confronts AI biases by favoring ethical traceability, with open questions like “Which voices are missing?”

This mapping becomes a discovery tool, linking heterogeneous data for nuanced understanding, ready to integrate the ecological impact often hidden in digital tools.

**Step 4: Define dignity indicators (not “performance” ones)**

Rather than occupancy rates or revenues, measure the diversity of voices heard, the quality of encounters through individual stories, the sense of belonging, spontaneous initiatives, personal transformations and new social links created.

These human indicators place respect for singularities above efficiency, evaluating openness to the unexpected and rediscovered meaning. They integrate vigilance against discrimination, training on gender or ethnic biases, which are often amplified by AI.

Thus, evaluation becomes democratic, valuing resilience and collaboration as keys to an inclusive and adaptable culture. AI will enable creating these evaluations with dignity indicators (which would be too biased if produced by human agents).

**Step 5: Co-construct with creative AI (not “seek facilitating tools”)**

Instead of automating ticketing for example, use AI for creative dialogues: have two people debate “What is a democratic cultural venue?” to bring out the unexpected, or as a mediator by synthesizing exchanges in real time and asking open questions about the unspoken.

AI analysis should be prompted in the direction of AI creativity from this data: “What surprising models emerge?” or “What contradictions appear?”, for example, avoiding orienting the prompts. This transforms AI into a discovery partner, as it will allow linking heterogeneities to reveal the invisible.

This co-construction cultivates vigilant optimism, distinguishing simulation from authenticity, and favoring critical experiments that question established cultural norms.

**Step 6: Experiment with transformations (not “rethink the process”)**

Test new co-created hospitality rituals, dare to create spaces of freedom for audience appropriation, programming emerging from revealed desires, reversed mediations where audiences transmit their knowledge, or alternative temporalities like night openings, cultural breakfasts or any other atypical and inspiring experiences that came from dialogues.

These small-scale experiments should be documented with AI help, which will be able to help measure their impacts continuously, with more ease for participatory adjustments, thanks to syntheses made very quickly by AI, always placing shared human evaluation as priority. AI will allow easily integrating the stories of this irreplaceable materiality, valuing processes rather than results, to preserve embodied experience.

**Step 7: Continuous and open evaluation (not “control”)**

Practice monthly circles open to all, with sharing stories of transformations rather than statistics, documenting failures as learning, permanent adjustments and celebrating unexpected discoveries. AI will allow very easily giving meaning to failures for example,

and thus daring to share them more and advance in sincerity and sensitive openness to each other.

This democratic evaluation through AI measures respect for dignity, questioning meaning and integrating the societal dimension, to resist standardization. It also allows, through its relative neutrality, to maintain ecological and ethical vigilance, indicating discriminatory uses.

Thus, it enables piloting nuanced transformation, preserving authentic relationships and cultivating resilience in the face of profound social changes linked to technologies and political mutations.

## **Benefits specific to the cultural sector**

### **Beyond efficiency**

This methodology restores the legitimacy of institutions as commons, favoring social innovation where new forms of living together emerge. It embodies cultural democracy by making inhabitants actors, clarifying the public service mission beyond numbers.

Venues reconnect to their territory, revealing and integrating marginalized voices for a living and inclusive culture, resistant to technological standardization.

Finally, it liberates collective creativity, welcoming the unexpected as a source of mutual enrichment and shared meaning.

### **Impacts on teams**

Teams rediscover motivation through renewed meaning, and can develop skills in facilitation, active listening and reversed mediation. Pride emerges from truly

serving the territory, with this creativity liberated by openness to external perspectives.

Professional resilience increases, learning to navigate uncertainties with empathy and collaboration, valuing authentic relationships, even if they don't seem "efficient" at first glance (it's AI that will give them this status).

This internal transformation reinforces versatility, valuing intergenerational transmission and adaptation, for more united and innovative teams.

## **Points of vigilance and ethics**

### **Resist drift**

Do not instrumentalize AI to monitor or control, protecting participant anonymity and guaranteeing the right to withdraw at any time (respect GDPR, obviously). Avoid the race for numbers, even with dignity indicators, to prevent dehumanization and performative obsession.

Maintain vigilance against amplified biases, training agents on discrimination issues. Prioritize sober technical solutions to minimize ecological impact, collectively questioning the relevance of tools. Here too, don't try to go too fast (being falsely "efficient"), but instead consider that confronting viewpoints with respect for others will open the most relevant path (and this thanks to AI which will take care of writing syntheses, assessments and analysis elements).

This "ethics by design" integrates reflective moments, distinguishing real empathy from illusions, for critical

and humanist appropriation.

### **Maintain the democratic course**

Ensure shared power without imposed decisions, with total transparency of documents, which must be accessible to all, at the end of meeting moments, and in a technically very simple way (a QR Code, to access a “drive” without need for registration). Cultivate hospitality to welcome the unexpected as an opportunity.

Mixed committees evaluate human impacts regularly, democratizing debates through citizen consultations, which will seek the voice of young people and marginalized persons. It’s about questioning the societal model, preserving authenticity and diversity.

Thus, governance remains inclusive, exploring liberated time for well-being and engagement for transformation guided by humanist values, implemented in the interaction modalities in proposed encounters, whether formal or informal. For example, the QR code can be transmitted as much to someone who participated in a long meeting or shared creation process, as to someone with whom we discussed for 5 minutes on a sidewalk or in a market.

## **A gentle but profound revolution**

This approach, which marries AI uses and collective intelligence techniques, allows I hope cultural institutions to rediscover themselves through their territory’s gaze, to transform without violence, to reconnect to their democratic mission and to reinvent themselves continuously and facilitated. The essence of such a continuous approach facilitated by AI is to dis-

cover the unanticipated, gradually revealing what can be a shared, co-constructed and living culture. **AI is no longer an efficiency tool but a discovery companion, in service of a humanist and democratic vision.**

To deepen this, I cross this reflection with Olivier Hamant's concept of robustness, in his book *Antidote to the cult of performance* (2023). He opposes the robustness of the living to the fantasy of performance:

« "To inhabit this world without questioning performance would be madness."

"Robustness is what allows maintaining the system stable in the face of fluctuations."

"War is therefore both a product and a cause of performance gains, in an endless gear."

"When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be reliable."

"Growth gives the illusion of abundance, while it creates scarcity."

"The living is neither effective (it has no objective) nor efficient (it wastes enormous energy and resources). It mainly hosts a myriad of counter-performances at all scales, from molecule to ecosystem."

"We will now have to live in a fluctuating world, that is, invent the civilization of robustness, against performance."

**“Performance only serves individual comfort by excluding others, human and non-human alike, robustness makes links the lever of balance and survival of the group.”**

»

These ideas align with my plea for robust cultural institutions, integrating redundancies, chances and heterogeneities to face turbulence, rather than fragile optimization. By adopting this robustness, cultural venues become adaptable and human, ready for a fluctuating world, reconciling discovery and dignity.

# **PART IV - PROFESSIONAL METHODS AND PRACTICES**

Following the analysis of theoretical foundations, power dynamics, and digital transformations, this section delves into the concrete reality of daily practices. How can we evaluate our projects sincerely and constructively? How can we build robust projects in the face of uncertainty? How can we cooperate effectively despite diverse expectations? These questions pervade the daily lives of cultural professionals, often overwhelmed by urgency and deprived of the time needed for methodological reflection. This section offers tools, methods, and frameworks that are directly applicable, forged through thirty years of practice in highly varied contexts.

The first chapter, "Evaluation and Institutional Memory," addresses a subject the cultural sector generally prefers to avoid. Public cultural policies are rarely evaluated: a few quantitative criteria, aesthetic judgment criteria, but criteria related to social reality and the social utility of projects are glossed over. Yet in terms of the political sustainability of cultural projects, these evaluations are indispensable. They allow projects to evolve through voluntary reassessment while also providing more convincing arguments about their meaning to elected officials and funders.

This chapter first offers two recommendations for territorial cooperation. The first: begin every meeting with a brief sharing by each person of their expectations and objectives regarding the project. The goal is not to seek common ground in expectations, as each person is legitimate in their specific expectations, but to become aware of this diversity in order to build dialectically with it. The second recommendation: establish collaborative evaluations conducted by collective bodies among

colleagues, to help evaluate projects in which we are not stakeholders. The tools and analytical frameworks of cultural rights are particularly valuable and effective for evaluating the social integration and meaning of projects.

This chapter also develops a reflection on institutional memory as a condition for cultural rights. Cultural institutions live with a troubling paradox: while they claim commitment to cultural rights and recognition of each person, they often operate in a form of systemic amnesia. How many times does someone who participated in a project find themselves treated as a stranger on their second visit? This amnesia reflects an implicit conception of the public as an anonymous flow rather than as a community of singular cultural subjects. Yet cultural rights imply the right to cultural continuity, the right to recognition of contributions, the right to have one's diversity respected. Without institutional memory, these rights remain dead letter.

Finally, this chapter proposes a method for "formalizing the informal." The informal—hallway exchanges, spontaneous discussions, side conversations—often constitutes the most fertile ground for learning and innovation. Yet it resists any institutional capture. Frameworks experimented with in videoconference training sessions show that it is possible to create conditions for the emergence of the informal while allowing for its documentation and sharing: collaborative chat tools, collective note-taking, tag structuring, mind-mapping, etc. Formalized informal exchange can become more powerful than spontaneous informal exchange, because each person's contributions become resources for all.

The second chapter, “Project Methodologies,” offers conceptual and practical tools for building more robust projects in the face of uncertainty. The central concept is that of “antifragility,” borrowed from Nassim Nicholas Taleb: an antifragile system is not simply resilient (capable of withstanding shocks); it grows stronger through shocks, the unexpected, and crises. How can we build cultural projects that have this capacity to embrace uncertainty and thus anchor themselves more deeply in their objectives?

This chapter also develops the distinction between “balance” and “supports.” Balance is the deep meaning of the project, its purpose, what keeps it standing. Supports are the concrete means mobilized to achieve this purpose. Most cultural organizations overinvest in their supports to the detriment of their balance. They consolidate their means without questioning their meaning. Yet if a support becomes deficient, the project collapses. Whereas if the balance is solid, supports can be changed when necessary. The method of “balance meetings” proposes regular times dedicated to exchanges among stakeholders about the meaning of the project in which they participate—meetings that may seem unproductive from the outside but that ensure the project will function much better.

This chapter also proposes methods to foster collective innovation: collaborative mind-mapping as instituting and evolving writing, the “potential development space” as a method for bringing about the unexpected, and a reflection on constructive transgression of the framework. How can we dare to step outside the framework when it is necessary for the project? How can we legitimize this

transgression with partners and funders?

The third chapter, “Cooperation and Organization,” brings together a toolbox of directly usable collective facilitation methods. “Thematic groups” allow for collective elaboration on specific subjects with a clear structure (functioning, stages, key points, expected outcomes, debriefing). The “lasting connections workshop” aims to create meaningful connections during collaborative workshops, with digital traces to maintain the bond over time. “Pair exchanges” give voice to each person in a genuine space for expression and elaboration. The “World Café” is a proven technique for collective brainstorming with rotating groups. “Secret advice” allows for deep mutual enrichment.

This chapter also addresses questions of posture. “The importance of expression” identifies an essential path toward emancipation. “Speech against PowerPoint” critiques the hegemony of formatted presentations that prevent genuine collective exchanges. “The state of openness” proposes a democratic and transformative facilitation posture. “Reception” offers an exercise for practicing interaction. The “collective bibliography” transforms encounters with books into encounters with oneself and with others. Finally, “Systematizing mutual discoveries among cultural actors” proposes methods for removing barriers to cooperation.

This section will be particularly useful to professionals seeking concrete methods to improve their daily practices, evaluate their projects constructively, facilitate effective meetings and workshops, and build lasting collaborations. It will in-

terest managers of cultural structures who wish to transform work organization within their teams. It will offer trainers tools that are directly transferable to their interventions. Finally, it will give everyone keys to escape permanent urgency and reclaim time for meaning.

# CHAPTER 7: EVALUATION AND INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY

Voici la traduction :

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The evaluation of cultural projects and institutional memory are two subjects that the cultural sector generally prefers to avoid. Evaluation, because it is frightening: fear of what might be discovered, fear of being judged, fear of losing funding. Institutional memory, because it seems secondary compared to the urgency of projects to be carried out. Yet these two dimensions, in my view, determine the very sustainability of the cultural sector. How can we defend the meaning of our actions to elected officials and funders if we cannot evaluate them sincerely? How can we respect people's cultural rights if our institutions forget them from one visit to the next? This chapter offers concrete methods to transform evaluation and memory into levers for democratic transformation.

The first section, "Towards Cooperative Robustness in Cultural Projects," starts from a simple observation: we all need others, and at the same time, others disturb us. Territorial cooperation between cultural actors is often experienced as a constraint, an obligation to obtain funding. Each person's expectations can be very divergent, which is absolutely normal. Rather than denying this reality, two recommendations allow us to transform it into a strength:

- The first recommendation: begin every meeting with a quick sharing, by each person around the table regardless of their sta-

tus, of their expectations and objectives regarding the project. This is in no way about trying to create commonality in expectations—each person is legitimate in their specific expectations. But becoming aware of this diversity and building dialectically with it allows us to understand potential blockages and work around them. If we don't take this time, we may think we're being more efficient, but in reality we will lose a lot of time later because we will have presumed intentions in others that they don't have.

- The second recommendation: collectively improve the evaluation of cultural projects. Public cultural policies are very rarely evaluated. A few quantitative criteria, some aesthetic judgment criteria, but the criteria relating to social reality, and therefore the social utility of projects, are glossed over. Yet in terms of the political sustainability of cultural projects, these evaluations are indispensable. They will allow projects to evolve through voluntary reassessments, and to argue for their meaning more convincingly. These evaluations could be conducted by collective bodies, among colleagues, to evaluate projects in which we are not stakeholders, so that evaluation does not rhyme with dishonest valorisation.

The second section, "Towards Voluntary Evaluation of Cultural Projects," goes further in its analysis and may prove controversial on certain points. The subsidised cultural sector is going through a crisis of legitimacy, and this crisis is not solely the fault of indifferent political leaders. It also results from internal contradictions that the sector refuses to see. The profes-

sionals who proclaim themselves bearers of humanist and democratic values have, for the most part, accepted without protest the most liberty-restricting measures during the Covid period, dutifully relaying unconstitutional official injunctions that a minimum of critical thinking would have allowed them to question. After such submission, how can they still claim to defend respect for others, inclusion and democracy?

From this observation, I propose a refoundation through sincere evaluation. Let us stop defending privileges and whining. Let us evaluate our projects in depth to help them grow, let us construct sincere narratives of what we offer, also integrating our learnings, our mistakes, our journeys and reassessments. Let us work *with* our “audiences” and no longer *for* them, let us refound genuine democratic spaces around creation, let us allow ourselves to be enriched by others. Evaluation then becomes a tool for cultural prevention: anticipating crises rather than enduring them, understanding causes rather than treating symptoms.

The third section, “Institutional Memory in Service of Cultural Rights,” addresses a troubling paradox. Cultural institutions, which claim an attachment to cultural rights and to the recognition of each person as a bearer of culture, often operate in a form of systemic amnesia. When a person crosses the threshold of a cultural venue, they carry within them experiences, knowledge, sensibilities that constitute their own cultural richness. Yet how many times does this same person find themselves treated as a stranger on their second visit? How many contributions, involvements, presences are erased by the simple passage of time or a change of team?

This amnesia reflects an implicit conception of the

public as an anonymous flow rather than as a community of singular cultural subjects. It contradicts the profound dimensions of cultural rights: the right to cultural continuity, which allows one to build a coherent path over time; the right to recognition of contributions, which values each person as an actor in cultural life; the right to have one's diversity respected, which presupposes knowing who actually frequents our institutions. I analyse the legitimate resistances to documentation, the confusion between documentation and surveillance, the fear of fixing identities, and I propose an ethics of shared cultural memory, where documentation becomes an emancipatory practice rather than a tool of control.

The fourth section, "Formalising the Informal," proposes a methodological challenge. The informal—corridor exchanges, coffee break discussions, asides—often constitutes the most fertile ground for learning and innovation. This is where tacit knowledge is transmitted, where interpersonal bonds are built, where innovative ideas emerge. Yet the informal, by definition, resists any institutional capture. How can we valorise these underground processes without distorting them?

The experience of video-conference training, where the informal disappears due to the lack of physical presence, constituted a precious laboratory for me, conducted with the Observatory of Cultural Policies. I developed three devices that allow recreating the informal within a formal framework: real-time mental mapping that captures and structures emerging ideas; a collaborative digital platform where everyone can publish personal syntheses, argued controversies and enriching contributions; structuring through tags that allows free navigation through knowledge. These experiments reveal a surprising result: formalised informal can become more powerful than spontaneous in-

formal. In traditional training, the informal remains personal, limited to exchanges between a few individuals. Formalised, it becomes collective, and each person's contributions become resources for all.

This chapter will be particularly useful to professionals seeking to strengthen their territorial cooperation by moving beyond misunderstandings and assumptions. It will interest directors of cultural structures who wish to implement sincere and constructive evaluation approaches. It will offer mediators tools to build a genuine memory of relationships with audiences, respecting cultural rights. Finally, it will propose to trainers methods for valorising the informal without distorting it, transforming an apparent constraint into an opportunity for pedagogical innovation.

# Pour une robustesse coopérative des projets culturels

## Réflexion sur les modalités de coopération territoriale et d'évaluation.

*Pour que les projets culturels puissent trouver pleinement leur sens social et devenir plus robustes face aux attaques politiques qui les jugent « non essentielles », il me semble nécessaire de réfléchir aux dynamiques de coopération et d'évaluation. Pour participer régulièrement à la mise en œuvre de moments de co-construction entre acteurs et institutions culturelles, je souhaite partager une réflexion et deux recommandations, que j'espère utiles, en 2025 et pour plus tard.*

À quoi sert la coopération ? Elle sert à ce que les projets s’ancrent à plusieurs endroits à la fois. Elle aide à ce que le sens se diffuse en synergie. Et elle permet le «  $1+1=3$  », c’est-à-dire des impacts culturels et sociaux plus importants que ceux des projets menés seuls.

Mais, du fait de la diversité des scénarios de coopération, elles sont souvent assez difficiles à mettre en œuvre. Parfois, des coopérations malmenées, au lieu d’apporter de la synergie, deviennent un frein, et on aurait préféré mener le projet seul ! Comme on dit, « seul on va plus vite, à plusieurs on va plus loin ». C’est facile à dire, mais c’est singulièrement compliqué à faire. L’objet de cette réflexion est d’apporter quelques pistes, je l’espère utiles, dans ce sens.

On a peur d’être déstabilisé par l’autre. On a peur de perdre la valeur de notre projet, de ce qu’on défend à travers ce projet, à cause des autres qui, en « tirant la couverture à eux », pourraient le dénaturer. Et pourtant, soit nous sommes obligés, soit nous savons que la coopération est nécessaire, voire indispensable, par exemple pour que le projet puisse bénéficier de financements complémentaires. La coopération intervient entre des acteurs publics, ainsi que dans le lien entre acteurs publics, associatifs ou privés. Les attentes de chacun des acteurs peuvent être très divergentes, ce qui est absolument normal. On a tous besoin des autres, et en même temps, les autres nous dérangent, parfois assez profondément.

## **Première recommandation : le**

## **partage des objectifs en début de réunion**

Pour mettre en place les coopérations, nous organisons des réunions en présence ou en visioconférence. L'objectif de la réunion est d'être efficace : il y a toujours un ordre du jour, des décisions à prendre, des actions à mettre en place, des dates à définir, des personnes à recruter, des budgets à trouver, etc. Le temps est compté, et tout le monde veut avancer.

Mais il me semble indispensable de commencer toute réunion par un partage rapide, par chaque personne autour de la table, quel que soit son statut, de ses attentes et de ses objectifs par rapport à ce projet. Ainsi, nous prendrons conscience les uns et les autres de la diversité des attentes, et nous serons mieux en capacité de comprendre d'éventuels blocages et de les contourner.

Il ne s'agit en aucun cas de chercher à créer du commun dans les attentes. Chacun est légitime dans ses attentes spécifiques. Mais prendre conscience de cette diversité et construire en dialectique avec elle, c'est-à-dire savoir d'emblée que le projet est complexe, multiple, et que ce sera là sa qualité, est essentiel.

Si on ne prend pas ce temps-là, on va croire être plus efficaces et aller plus vite droit au but, mais en réalité, on perdra beaucoup de temps plus tard, parce qu'on aura présupposé des intentions aux autres qu'ils n'ont pas. On va aussi penser que leurs objectifs sont les mêmes que les nôtres, ce qui est absolument normal, car nous ne pouvons pas nous mettre à leur place ; ils sont les mieux placés pour nous le dire.

Ainsi, par ce moment de partage non directement pro-

ductif, nous allons gagner énormément de temps et d'énergie par la suite, car nous poserons des actes et des objectifs en lien avec la réalité multiple de chacun des partenaires, et non pas avec des imaginaires divergents déconnectés de la réalité des autres.

Cette recommandation n'est pas facile à mettre en œuvre, alors qu'elle paraît très simple, car cela semble inutile. Et aussi, on craint toujours d'entrer dans des discussions et confrontations qui feront perdre du temps ; mais soyons sûrs que cela en fera gagner par la suite !

## **Deuxième recommandation : améliorer de façon collective l'évaluation des projets culturels**

Les politiques publiques de la culture sont très peu évaluées. Il y a quelques critères quantitatifs, des critères de jugement esthétiques, mais les critères de lien avec la réalité sociale, et donc d'utilité sociale des projets culturels, sont survolés. Ils sont souvent présents, bien sûr, car c'est ce qui justifie de plus en plus de financements, et c'est bien normal, car tout le monde paie ses impôts. Mais une démarche d'évaluation profonde de l'ensemble du dispositif du projet (et non pas l'action culturelle isolée) reste généralement non demandée par les financeurs.

Pourtant, en termes de pérennité politique des projets culturels, ces évaluations sont indispensables. Elles permettront à la fois de faire évoluer les projets eu-

x-mêmes par des remises en question volontaires, tout à fait utiles, et d'autre part de pouvoir argumenter sur le sens des projets de façon plus convaincante.

L'évaluation collaborative devrait être au cœur des coopérations. Ces évaluations pourraient servir aux différents partenaires de la coopération culturelle. Cela permettrait aussi d'aider les élus à comprendre, et donc à défendre de façon plus argumentée les projets culturels, et se les approprier.

Pour pouvoir évaluer le sens de l'inscription sociale des projets culturels, les outils et les grilles d'analyse des **droits culturels** me semblent tout à fait précieux et opérants. Ces évaluations pourraient tout à fait être menées par des instances collectives, entre collègues, pour aider à évaluer des projets dont nous ne sommes pas partie-prenante, afin qu'évaluation ne rime pas avec valorisation mensongère du projet. L'évaluation et la remise en question sont des exercices tellement difficiles qu'il faut vraiment à mon sens les mettre en œuvre dans des collectifs qui se situent hors des enjeux du projet.

Petit à petit, en systématisant ce type d'approche, l'expérience pourrait s'accumuler, et ainsi le secteur culturel pourrait se doter d'outils politiques beaucoup plus puissants, convaincants et concrets que ce qui existe aujourd'hui. Ces outils pourraient aussi permettre aux projets eux-mêmes de grandir, de se remettre en question et de mieux atteindre leurs objectifs, au-delà de la simple défense de leur existence.

# Towards voluntary evaluation of cultural projects

**For “cultural prevention” policies.**

*The subsidized cultural sector is going through a crisis of legitimacy after betraying its democratic values. I believe that a refoundation through sincere evaluation is necessary.*

## **A sector in crisis that refuses to see its contradictions**

In the middle of this year 2025, we readily assert that culture is threatened in France, and this is a reality, as we can see on the [Crisis Map](#) offered by the [Observatory of Cultural Policies](#)) Yet, it is not culture itself that is “in danger,” but rather a specific professional sector: that of cultural actors subsidized by public money. Private culture, on the other hand, is doing remarkably well, as evidenced by the ever-flourishing consumption on digital platforms.

The subsidized sector is indeed suffering from political choices of morbid condescension. Cultural professionals are outraged by this treatment, they who proclaim themselves bearers of humanist and democratic values. But their indignation rings false when we remember their behavior during the Covid crisis (2020-2022): when democracy was attacked, through the establishment of an exceptional legal regime, as in wartime, while we were absolutely not at war, what did these self-proclaimed defenders of democracy, freedom, and humanism do? They obeyed without flinching the most liberticidal measures, the most destructive for physical and mental health, docilely relaying the hypocritical discourse of mainstream media subservient to a villainous capitalism, which had seized the opportunity of fear, waving it as strongly as possible, to obtain this blind obedience, which increased the wealth of the richest at a speed never seen in History and produced major divisions and wounds in society and in souls.

The collusion between the extreme center power in France and capitalist forces, generators of social vio-

lence, domination and exclusion, that is to say the exact opposite of democratic values, who in the artistic and cultural field dared to take the risk of denouncing it? How many were there, among cultural professionals, to refuse guilty obedience? How many resisted the stigmatization of the “unvaccinated,” when no evidence established their supposed dangerousness, the scientific consensus having moreover been forced to admit after the fact that decision-makers knew from the start that these vaccines did not protect against transmission? After such submission to absurd and unconstitutional decisions, how can they still claim to defend respect for others, inclusion and democracy?

## The signing of a pact of submission

The rare protesters, those “dangerous anarchists” who were labeled *conspiracy theorists* but who were actually *resisters*, were ostracized by their peers, all anxious to preserve their subsidies and not to offend the power in place, even if it was despotic, brutal and incoherent (these are the classic techniques for obscuring judgment and setting up totalitarianisms, as Victor Klemperer documents so clearly in *LTI, the Language of the Third Reich*, 1947). Faced with this servile obedience to the most aberrant orders, this abdication of all critical political thought, I had realized at the time a cruel reality: if this sector, which should be at the forefront of attention to others and democratic care, capitulates so easily in the face of arbitrariness, then it saws off the branch on which we all rest. It endorses its voluntary submission to any future diktat. And... “nobody cares.”

Culture was declared “non-essential.” A few voices

were raised, certainly, but where were the actions? Who took the risk of keeping venues open, faced with the incoherence of closure decisions, to continue to serve the public by applying, if necessary, reasonable sanitary measures, as was the case in Belgium collectively for Cultural Centers and for the bookstore sector in France? Collectively, we are politically strong. There was no one or almost no one in France, and those who risked it were most often stigmatized as “far-right conspiracy theorists,” which was absolutely not the case. Servitude is only voluntary, let us not forget (La Boétie, 1577). The cultural sector thus signed its act of submission, refusing to mobilize against the political and intellectual totalitarianism at work. Its collective political consciousness was simply absent, out of fear of sanctions I think, because apart from a few extremists convinced of the merits of these liberticidal measures, most didn’t think any less, but didn’t take the risk of their intuitions, remaining in the comfort of their fear to justify their inaction and avoid too great cognitive dissonance between their values and their actions.

Political leaders perfectly understood the lesson: this pact of obedience signed in blood gave them *carte blanche* to transform the cultural milieu into a simple political and budgetary adjustment variable, which could only be at their command, or else not be.

Despite the harshness of my observation, I do not judge anyone individually. Fear remains the worst advisor, and many, animated by good intentions, betrayed their values, blinded as they were by maintained fear, by submitting unconditionally to health totalitarianism, this biopower that Michel Foucault had so well analyzed forty years earlier. The first struggle is the struggle against fear; it is not unconsciousness, it is self-anchoring and lucid power to act. And it is al-

so much better for public health, thanks to empowerment and not infantilization, whatever the capitalist despots say!

## **Towards a democratic refoundation of cultural action**

However, it is never too late to question ourselves and work to restore the democratic meaning of arts and culture. I remain optimistic, and that is the meaning of my speaking out here. Faced with political leaders now uninhibited and certain of their absolute domination, only one path is open to us: to question ourselves, and be educators towards these same political leaders, work to dialogue with them rather than insult them, seek to put ourselves in their place. Because we may well criticize them, we have a large share of responsibility in their actions, which are indeed unjust today, just as those of 5 years ago were. If we had resisted the manifest inconsistencies during the Covid period, if we had collectively fought against our fears to be able to stand together, they would have known that we were strong, and ready to do anything to ensure respect for human rights, which is the mission for which we are accountable not to elected officials, but to citizens themselves.

We must refound a truly democratic perspective for our actions. This implies radically rethinking our cultural projects, deconstructing systems of privilege and the symbolic domination exercised by artists over spectators reduced to silence. Let us think particularly of these young audiences, these children forced to

attend moralizing shows that don't concern them, where they are bored and see themselves stigmatized if they have any divergent idea or manifest their disinterest.

Cultural rights require that we recognize through our actions the full dignity of each person, that we rethink their place in the encounter with works. **This is what must be evaluated: not our self-glorified actions, but the real respect for the dignity of audiences. This evaluation must be sincere, shared among peers, nourished by deep reflection on the re-foundation of cultural action.** Founding texts like *Art as Experience* by John Dewey (1934) can enlighten and support this approach.

Let us also recognize that popular cultural practices are massive and legitimate. To speak of "cultural citizenship forfeiture" for "audiences" not reached by public cultural institutions is an imposture: these citizens consume Netflix and Spotify, frequent TikTok and YouTube, all private cultural spaces, certainly, but cultural nonetheless. They participate in many cultural rituals in their territories, which are not legitimized by cultural "professionals." Why would these practices be qualitatively inferior to those offered in subsidized cultural spaces? According to what criteria? This hierarchization reveals an untenable position of domination. We are not better than private actors and autonomous practices; we are simply different.

Instead of despising these practices, let us integrate them into our reflection. Let us invent other forms of encounter, without condescending judgment, in authentic respect for everyone's cultural rights. During the Covid crisis, digital cultural practices exploded, but subsidized actors participated little. A few laudable initiatives certainly emerged, but without funda-

mental political work or anthropological differentiation from private proposals. And unfortunately, since the end of the crisis, these digital experiments have almost disappeared from the subsidized cultural landscape.

## Evaluation as a path of transformation

Serious evaluation of our projects becomes crucial. Let us document the processes, let us be interested in individual pathways, no longer of abstract *audiences* but of singular *persons*. Let us tell these journeys, identify what fundamentally distinguishes what we offer from private and autonomous cultural practices, what processes of singular encounters around art we propose. Let us make a narrative of this, sincerely, also integrating our learning, our errors, our paths and questioning, in service of citizens. Only then will political leaders understand the value of our actions and stop dismissing them with the back of their hand. Let us be educators with them, open dialogue, and if they don't want to listen to us, let us persevere.

Let us strive to understand the logic of those who make these destructive decisions, rather than “resisting” in a disorderly way that validates our powerlessness and fragility. Let us work **with** our “audiences” and no longer **for** them, let us refound true democratic spaces around creation, let us allow ourselves to be enriched by others, to reweave connections. Let us reopen ourselves, truly. And as in all care, whether medical, psychological or artistic, let us be interested in causes rather than symptoms, let us work preventively, if we can say so. It is up to us, who feel excluded and stigmatized by these political leaders, to show tol-

erance and reconnect dialogue with our aggressors. Since they are obviously incapable of it, let us accomplish this work in their place, let us work for two and even for three, by including “audiences” in our evaluation approaches, thus deepening our connection with all the stakeholders involved in the subject, including elected officials. Because culture, in its anthropological sense, will never disappear, it is what weaves the fabric of our lives.

This crisis represents, as many recognize, an opportunity for refoundation. Let us place voluntary and sincere evaluation at the heart of all our projects. Let us take the necessary time and space to question ourselves, in order to authentically serve democracy rather than perpetuate the bourgeois reproduction of a system of domination in which artists fully participate. Michel Schneider had brilliantly demonstrated this in *The Comedy of Culture* (1993): the cultural milieu too often defends everything except democracy, while claiming the opposite. Without a profound transformation of its methods and its democratic posture, the subsidized cultural sector will pay an exorbitant price for its blindness.

# Corporate memory at the service of cultural rights

**Rethinking the relationship between cultural  
venues and people.**

*Cultural institutions, through their  
failure to collect and care for data,  
forget those they welcome, denying  
their dignity. This amnesia contra-  
dicts cultural rights: how can we  
build a relationship without memory?*

## **Institutional Amnesia in the Face of Cultural Dignity**

Cultural institutions today experience a troubling paradox. While they may claim an attachment to cultural rights and the recognition of each person as a bearer of culture, they often function within a form of systemic amnesia that contradicts their democratic ambitions. This contradiction reveals a profound tension between stated values and actual practices.

When a person crosses the threshold of a cultural venue, they do not arrive empty of all history. They carry within them experiences, knowledge, and sensibilities that constitute their own cultural wealth. Cultural rights, enshrined in the Fribourg Declaration and integrated into certain public policy discourses, even if there remains a long road ahead for this to become widespread, assert precisely that this wealth must be recognized and valued. Yet, how many times does this same person find themselves treated as a stranger upon their second visit? How many contributions, involvements, and presences are erased by the simple passage of time or the change of a team?

This amnesia reflects, in my view, an implicit conception of the public as an anonymous flow rather than as a community of singular cultural subjects. When an institution loses track of those who have participated in its activities, animated its workshops, enriched its offerings, it de facto denies their status as contributors to the common cultural life. It is their cultural dignity that is thus rendered invisible, reduced to a momentary presence without temporal depth.

The problem goes beyond the simple question of courtesy or organizational efficiency. It touches the very

heart of what it means to respect cultural rights in their relational and temporal dimension. For these rights are not limited to guaranteeing occasional access to a cultural offering. They imply the recognition of each person in their capacity to build a coherent cultural journey, to see their contributions valued, to inscribe their presence within the duration of an institutional relationship.

## **The Overlooked Dimensions of Cultural Rights**

Thus, the question of institutional memory illuminates often-neglected dimensions of cultural rights. Beyond the right of access, which remains central, other equally fundamental but less visible rights emerge: the right to cultural continuity, the right to recognition of one's contributions, the right to have one's diversity respected.

- The right to cultural continuity appears self-evident as soon as we consider culture not as a consumption of isolated events but as a process of identity construction over time. Each cultural experience is part of a personal trajectory, dialogues with previous experiences, prepares future developments. Without institutional memory, this continuity is broken (at the level of the institution). The person who returns after participating in a project finds themselves facing an institution that has forgotten everything about their shared history. Their journey is fragmented into disconnected mo-

ments, deprived of the coherence that recognition over time could give them.

- The recognition of contributions constitutes another major issue. In a living conception of culture, audiences are not simple receivers but full actors. They suggest, create, animate, facilitate, enrich the cultural activity in a thousand ways. These contributions, however modest they may appear, weave the cultural reality of a territory. To forget them is to perpetuate a top-down vision of culture where only institutional proposals matter. It is also to deprive the institution of a precious resource: the accumulated knowledge of what has been attempted, succeeded, failed, transformed by the community itself.
- Cultural diversity, finally, cannot be respected without a form of documentation that makes it possible to perceive and value it. How can we know if an institution truly addresses the diversity of its territory if it keeps no trace of who frequents it? How can we identify the absent, understand the barriers, adjust the offerings? Statistical invisibility inevitably leads to political invisibility. Without reliable data on the actual composition of its audiences, an institution can only assume, at the risk of addressing only a restricted and homogeneous segment of the population while believing it serves the general interest.

These neglected dimensions of cultural rights converge toward the same requirement: to consider the relationship between an institution and people not as a succession of occasional interactions but as a continuous process of mutual recognition and reciprocal en-

richment. And this goes beyond personal bonds.

## **Deconstructing Resistances: Between Legitimate Fears and Misunderstandings**

Faced with the necessity of documenting cultural relationships, numerous resistances may be expressed, which should be examined with attention rather than dismissed outright. These resistances reveal profound tensions between different conceptions of cultural relationships and deserve to be heard for what they say about our collective fears.

- The first resistance, and perhaps the deepest, stems from the confusion between documentation and surveillance. In a context where data collection immediately evokes the excesses of surveillance capitalism and authoritarian temptations, the simple act of recording information about people arouses understandable mistrust. This mistrust is rooted in a long history of profiling for purposes of social control, from parish registers to contemporary digital databases. It would be naive not to recognize the legitimacy of this concern.
- Yet this confusion masks an essential distinction between filing to control and documenting to recognize. The first logic aims to categorize, surveil, predict, and potentially constrain. The second seeks to bear witness, honor, enable the construction of

lasting relationships. This distinction is not merely intellectual: it translates into technical choices, governance modalities, and concrete uses of collected data. Documentation in service of cultural rights places the person at the center, guarantees them access to and control over their own data, privileges qualitative richness over quantitative reduction.

- Another frequent resistance invokes the principle of horizontality. According to this view, documenting would create distance, introduce an asymmetry between the institution that knows and the person who is known. This fear rests on a particular conception of horizontality as the absence of mediation, pure immediacy of relationship. Yet, true horizontality does not reside in systematic forgetting but in mutual recognition. When an institution remembers a person, their journey, their contributions, it does not tower over them, it honors them as a full cultural subject. Amnesia is not egalitarian, it is indifferent.
- And the fear of freezing identities constitutes a third source of resistance, particularly sensitive in the cultural field where identity fluidity is valued. How can we document without confining? How can we keep track without reducing the moving complexity of people to fixed categories? This tension is real and should not be minimized. It calls for technical and ethical responses: open, evolving systems where people maintain control over their own narrative; approaches that privilege journeys over labels, processes over states; constant vigi-

lance against the classificatory temptation.

These resistances, far from being obstacles to overcome, can be seen as safeguards. They remind us that the documentation of cultural relationships can only be done with awareness of the risks it carries and the values it must serve, and of course with the consent of the people involved.

## **Documentation as an Emancipatory Practice**

If we accept to move beyond misunderstandings and take seriously the necessary safeguards, the documentation of cultural relationships can become a profoundly emancipatory practice, in service of cultural justice and democracy. This transformation requires a reinvention of purposes, methods, and governance.

Documenting to recognize is first to affirm that each person who enters into relationship with a cultural institution carries a dignity that deserves to be honored over time. This recognition is not abstract: it translates concretely into the institution's capacity to remember, to build on what has been experienced together, to propose paths that take into account the journey already accomplished. It transforms the institutional relationship into genuine accompaniment, where each interaction is enriched by those that preceded it.

This approach enables what could be called *positive cultural accumulation*. Unlike capitalist accumulation that concentrates wealth, cultural accumulation enriches all participants. When an institution maintains

memory of lived experiences, constructed knowledge, woven bonds, it constitutes a common intangible heritage that benefits the entire community. Newcomers can build on what has been done, long-time participants see their contributions valued, future projects can draw inspiration from past successes and failures.

Documentation is also a powerful tool for making the invisible visible. In any territory, a multitude of cultural contributions remain in the shadows: the resident who discreetly shares their knowledge, the adolescent creating in their corner, the migrant bringing their cultural references, the elderly person transmitting memories. Without attentive documentation, these riches remain invisible, unrecognized, unvalued. To make them visible is to broaden our very conception of what constitutes culture, it is to recognize the multiplicity of sources of cultural creation and transmission.

This visibilization has major political effects. It makes it possible to verify whether promises of inclusion and diversity are being kept, to identify absences and exclusions, to understand the barriers that persist. It gives institutions the means to self-evaluate not on abstract criteria but on the lived reality of the relationships they build. It offers citizens and elected officials tangible elements to assess whether cultural policies truly serve the general interest or only certain segments of the population.

But for these emancipatory potentials to be realized, documentation itself must be rethought in its modalities. It cannot be the sole affair of institutions, imposed unilaterally. It must be co-constructed with the people concerned, respecting their wishes and their rhythms. It must guarantee not only data protection but their accessibility and shared governance. It must privilege the qualitative richness of journeys over the

quantitative reduction of presences.

## **Toward an Ethics of Shared Cultural Memory**

Beyond technical and organizational aspects, the question of institutional memory in the cultural field calls for in-depth ethical reflection. This ethics must articulate institutional responsibility, democratic requirement, and conception of memory as a common good.

- The memorial responsibility of cultural institutions flows directly from their public service mission. Custodians not only of works and knowledge but also of human relationships, they have the duty to preserve and transmit this relational wealth. This responsibility implies guaranteeing continuity beyond team changes, political alternations, managerial fashions. It requires resisting the temptation of voluntary amnesia that allows starting from scratch without having to assume the legacy of past relationships.
- This responsibility is coupled with a democratic requirement. For if we want the cultural project to be inclusive, institutional memory cannot be selective. It must ensure the preservation of traces of all presences, all contributions, with particular attention to those most at risk of invisibilization: the most fragile, the most discreet, the most distant from dominant cultural codes. Without this vigilance, institutional memory re-

produces and amplifies social inequalities, keeping track only of those who know how to make themselves noticed.

- The democratic stake also extends into the very conception of this memory as a common good. The relational data accumulated by a cultural institution do not belong to it alone. They constitute a collective heritage that must be governed as such, in transparency and participation. This approach implies moving beyond proprietary logic to adopt a stewardship logic: the institution is the guardian of a memory that belongs to the entire community.
- This ethics of shared memory invites us to imagine devices where memory becomes truly collective: open archives where everyone can deposit their trace, storytelling times where shared history is built in multiple voices, digital or physical spaces where memory circulates and enriches itself. It suggests new forms of cultural governance where citizens actively participate in defining what deserves to be kept, shared, transmitted.

At bottom, the subject of institutional memory touches on fundamental questions about the very meaning of public cultural action. Is it simply about offering a supply to passing consumers? Or is it about building, over time, relationships that recognize and celebrate the cultural dignity of each person? This largely determines technical and organizational choices, but also and especially the ethical and political horizon of our cultural institutions.

Institutional memory, far from being a simple management tool, can be in my view a lever for social transfor-

mation. It enables the shift from a culture of the instant to a culture of duration, from a logic of flow to a logic of bonds, from a vision of audiences as an undifferentiated mass to a recognition of each person as a singular cultural subject. This transformation is not merely organizational: it is profoundly political, it touches the heart of what it means to build society in respect of everyone's cultural diversity.

# Formalizing the informal

**Informality, essential to learning, resists structure while calling for it. How to tame it.**

*The absence of informal aspects in distance learning forces us to rethink its fundamental nature. This constraint becomes a laboratory for innovation, developing methods that transcend the limitations of in-person training.*

## **The paradoxical legitimacy of the informal**

The formalization of the informal constitutes a paradox that first questions our own legitimacy. The informal, by definition, exists outside the framework. In a logic of pure efficiency, it might seem to be nothing but wasted time. This primary methodological difficulty consists in recognizing that the informal is not only important but essential to learning and innovation processes.

This question becomes particularly acute in the context of videoconference training. Participants, physically separated, can no longer spontaneously organize those informal moments that traditionally enrich the training experience. They are present only within the formalism of the pedagogical proposition. What might appear as a limitation was actually for me an opportunity to profoundly rethink the nature and function of the informal.

## **The informal revealed by its absence: hidden dimensions of knowledge**

The informal represents those unstructured spaces where essential exchanges occur: transmission of tacit knowledge, building of interpersonal bonds, emergence of innovative ideas, personal appropriation of knowledge. In these coffee break moments, these corridor discussions, fundamental processes take place:

the sharing of subjectivities around a common subject, the expression of disagreements that allow one to assert their singular thinking, the creation of clans and intellectual affinities.

Moreover, the informal allows the emergence of knowledge that sometimes exceeds that of the trainer. A participant may possess specific expertise, lived experience that enriches or nuances the formal content. These spontaneous contributions, impossible to program, constitute a wealth often lost in traditional systems.

Ignoring this dimension would amount to amputating the training experience of a substantial part of its value. Formalization then becomes not an attempt at control, but an act of recognition and valorization of these underground processes.

## **Methodology in action: three devices to recreate the informal**

Faced with the absence of natural informal moments in videoconferencing, I developed several methods to recover the specific gains of these spontaneous moments, while enriching them with a new collective dimension.

### **1. Facilitated exchange and real-time mapping**

The first method consists of creating exchange spaces between participants on given topics, moving away from the classic trainer-learner scheme. During these exchanges, a mind map is created by the trainer in real time, visible to trainees, capturing and structuring

the ideas that emerge. This dual action—exchanging freely while seeing one’s ideas take visual form—legitimizes the informal elements that arise in conversation. The mind map becomes the tangible trace of these spontaneous emergences, giving them recognized existence and value.

## **2. The collaborative platform: three axes of expression**

The second device relies on a contributive digital tool where each participant can publish their reflections along three proposed axes (without obligation):

- **Personal synthesis:** Each person reformulates what they have understood and retained. This apparently simple proposition reveals the singularity of each appropriation. Where we often believe that everyone will have made the same synthesis, the confrontation of texts reveals the richness of subjective perspectives. This diversity of understandings, usually confined to informal exchanges, becomes visible and shareable, and constitutes real learning: we are enriched by others’ perspectives on the subject (which previously only came in informal moments), which makes us consider it from various facets.
- **Argued controversy:** The space to express disagreements with the presented content. In face-to-face informal settings, these disagreements are spontaneously expressed after the training moment, allowing everyone to assert their own thinking. Formalized in writing and shared, they enrich collective reflection while preserving the critical dimension essential to all learning.

- **Enriching contribution:** The possibility to bring complements, nuances, experiences that exceed or complete the formal content. This opening recognizes that knowledge is not the trainer’s monopoly but can emerge from each participant. Where, in the informal of traditional training, these contributions were only shared in small, precisely informal groups, with writing, they become collective and considerably enrich knowledge for the collective.

### **3. Tag structuring: free navigation in knowledge**

Trainees add thematic “tags” to their contributions, for which they are identified as authors. This allows thematic rather than hierarchical navigation. This horizontal structuring breaks the usual rigidity of training content, allowing personalized paths and fortuitous discoveries, essential characteristics of informal learning.

## **Reflective observation: documenting to understand**

Beyond these specific devices, this approach involves continuous reflective observation. It involves documenting one’s own experiences of the informal, noting moments when it produces significant effects, identifying conditions favoring its emergence. This observation phase allows distinguishing different types of informal (social, cognitive, creative) and identifying recurring features in these dynamics.

This documentation itself becomes working material, allowing continuous refinement of the implemented devices. It also constitutes a form of progressive legitimization of the informal, by making visible its often invisible contributions.

## **Epistemological humility: accepting incompleteness**

The formalization of the informal requires a particular posture: that of “knowing that we don’t know.” This approach opposes « **veridism** », the tendency to believe we hold absolute truth about the processes at work. It implies accepting the incompleteness of any formalization, recognizing the subjectivity inherent in observation, maintaining constant openness to questioning.

This humility is not weakness but strength. It allows welcoming the unexpected, valuing the diversity of experiences, building knowledge that is enriched by its own limits. Each experience being unique and contextual, it is through the accumulation of these singularities that a finer understanding of the processes at work is progressively built. In the example of videoconference training that I experimented with using these principles (you will find traces of one of them below), the knowledge produced and acquired by participants far exceeds the content that was mine alone as a trainer. And this knowledge is written, shared, durable, therefore perhaps ultimately more constructive than unformalized informal in usual training.

## **Expanded applications and ethical precautions**

This approach that I developed for video training can extend to other contexts. In research, it invites integrating the informal into protocols, recognizing serendipities as sources of knowledge. In organizations, it allows mapping informal networks without freezing them, creating spaces conducive to spontaneous emergence. And in traditional face-to-face training, it led me to use writing much more in parallel and its sharing via digital tools, in order to also build collective resources based on the informal and on collective intelligence.

But this approach carries risks. The main danger lies in the denaturation of the informal through its very formalization. It is essential to maintain vigilance on the effects of our interventions, to preserve truly free spaces, to accept that certain aspects will always escape any capture. Ethical questions—respect for privacy, consent, transparency about uses—constitute necessary safeguards.

## **The amplifying effect: when the formal transcends the informal**

These experiences thus reveal this surprising result: formalized informal can become more powerful than spontaneous informal. In classical training, the informal often remains personal, limited to exchanges between a few individuals. Formalization devices create

a collective informal, where each person's contributions become resources for all.

The documentation produced far exceeds in richness what could have emerged from traditional informal exchanges. Subjectivities, instead of remaining confined to asides, irrigate the very content of the training. This amplification is only possible because formalization respects the essence of the informal: freedom of expression, valorization of singularities, openness to the unexpected.

## **A living methodology for a changing world**

The formalization of the informal cannot be conceived as a fixed methodology. It must itself remain informal in its evolution, continuously adapting to contexts and learning. This dynamic tension between structure and spontaneity constitutes its own richness.

The challenge is not to capture the informal in rigid grids, but to create conditions for its emergence and recognition. By assuming the incompleteness of our knowledge and valuing the diversity of experiences, we develop practices that honor the complexity of reality while offering landmarks for action.

This approach, born from these experiments I conducted with the [Observatory of Cultural Policies](#), ultimately teaches us something essential about the very nature of transmission: it is in the recognition and valorization of spaces of freedom that the appropriation of knowledge truly takes place. The formalization of the informal is not its domestication but its revelation,

not its reduction but its amplification. It is in this subtle alliance between framework and freedom that perhaps the very essence of any authentic pedagogical act is revealed.

## CHAPTER 8: PROJECT METHODOLOGIES

The Covid-19 crisis brutally revealed the extreme fragility of the cultural sector in the face of contingencies. Cancelled festivals, postponed tours, empty venues for long months laid bare a structural vulnerability that risk prevention plans had failed to anticipate. And the next crisis, unpredictable by definition, will undoubtedly be of a different nature. This chapter offers conceptual tools and practical methods for building more robust cultural projects (cf. Olivier Hamant), not by vainly attempting to foresee everything, but by developing their capacity to embrace uncertainty and grow stronger through trials.

The first section, “Towards Antifragility in Cultural Projects,” introduces a central concept borrowed from Nassim Nicholas Taleb: antifragility. A fragile system suffers from disorder and shocks. A robust or resilient system withstands them. An antifragile system, however, benefits from them: it grows stronger through them, just as the human body grows stronger through physical exercise or as popular movements grow when they are repressed. The idea of risk prevention, while necessary and useful, only protects against the foreseeable. It can even paradoxically weaken projects: by believing oneself protected from everything, one lowers one’s guard on a deeper vigilance, intrinsic to the projects themselves.

This section explores the conditions for antifragility in the cultural domain. A system based on tinkering and a trial-and-error method has the attributes of the antifragile. If one wishes to become antifragile, one must put oneself in a situation that “loves mistakes” by mak-

ing them numerous and low-cost. For the cultural sector, antifragility depends on a method of project design, a certain approach to work, development, construction, and ways of relating to the audience. And contrary to what one might think, it is through the highest artistic standards that antifragile cultural projects can be built. Artistic creation, as philosopher François Jullien shows, requires being in a state of “dis-coincidence”: perceiving gaps, accepting non-completion, making the journey itself the work.

The second section, “Balance and Supports,” develops a fundamental distinction for project management. Balance is the deep meaning of the project, its purpose, its why. Supports are the concrete means mobilised to achieve this purpose, the how. Most cultural organisations over-invest in their supports at the expense of their balance. They solidify their means without sufficiently questioning their meaning. Yet if a support fails, the project collapses. Whereas if the balance is solid, one can change supports when necessary.

This distinction is illustrated by a bodily metaphor. When standing on two legs, one believes oneself to be in balance, but one is actually dependent on external supports. If one contracts the pelvic floor muscles, that is, if one truly works on one’s inner balance, one can then lift one leg without falling. The same principle applies to projects: time and energy must be devoted to re-questioning, reconstructing, reformulating, and sharing the project’s objectives and meaning with others. The method of “balance meetings” proposes regular, short, weekly sessions dedicated to exchanges between stakeholders about the project’s meaning. These meetings may seem unproductive from the outside, they do not result in formal minutes, but they enable everyone to make decisions much

faster and better, thus saving enormous amounts of time and energy.

The third section, “Collaborative Mind-Mapping,” proposes a collective intelligence tool I have been using for over twenty years. Mind-mapping allows for branching rather than linear note-taking, which better corresponds to the natural functioning of thought. Used collectively, with real-time projection during discussions, it profoundly transforms group dynamics. Participants see their thoughts being noted on screen as they speak, which legitimises each person’s thinking, enables immediate collective validation, and produces a synthesis that can be shared as soon as the meeting ends.

This method stands in opposition to the pre-established PowerPoint model that sends participants the message that, whatever they do, the proceedings will end up in the same place, that they therefore have no impact. Collaborative mind-mapping starts from participants’ questions and problems, draws threads from what comes from them, and builds a map of which they are the true architects. With identical objectives, each group produces a different map, reflecting its unique journey.

The fourth section, “The Space of Potential Development,” addresses a delicate methodological challenge: how can the unexpected be made to happen? How can we create the conditions for new paradigms of thought, action, and methods to emerge? This first requires solid grounding: those present must not feel threatened in their positions in order to be able to welcome profound changes. True anchors lie in human connections, in mutual trust.

The proposed method consists of organising meetings

without predefined objectives, between people who have intuitively sensed they have things to share without knowing what. This is extremely difficult to implement in our productivist mindset where every meeting must have an agenda. But it is precisely in our capacity to take the improbable and the useless seriously that a space of potential development can open up. What opens up potential within us is not placing stakes on a certainty of gain, for true gains will always come from unexpected places.

The fifth section, “Framework, Objective and Transgression,” addresses a delicate question: when and how should one transgress a project’s initial framework? When embarking on a project, one has objectives and a framework to achieve them. But if, along the way, the framework proves unsuited to the objectives, then reconnecting with the objectives means putting oneself in a position to evolve the framework. Transgressing the framework is often the best way to achieve the project’s objectives. If we draw on John Dewey and *Art as Experience* (1934), art is lived experience. If the final artistic object differs from what was planned but the experience was invested and constructive, this is rather a great opportunity. I propose methods for legitimising these changes with partners and funders, and for sharing them with participants themselves.

This chapter will be particularly useful for professionals seeking to strengthen the robustness of their projects in the face of uncertainty, without compromising on artistic standards. It will interest heads of cultural organisations who wish to transform their organisation to give more place to meaning and less to the urgency of means. It will offer facilitators concrete tools to mobilise collective intelligence and produce immediately shareable syntheses. Finally, it will offer every-

one a reflection on constructive transgression: how to dare to step outside the framework when necessary to better achieve objectives, and how to narrate these bifurcations to legitimise them.

# Build antifragility for cultural projects

## Methodological proposal.

*What methodology should be adopted to build cultural projects that have the capacity to tame uncertainty and thus become more deeply rooted in their objectives? Methodological proposal, based on the thesis of Nassim Nicholas Taleb, the philosophy of François Jullien and the psychological studies of Olivier Houdé.*

## Report on the state of the cultural sector post-Covid-19

It would be salutary, a fortiori after the Covid-19 epidemic in 2020 which led to an extremely destructive containment for the cultural professions (among other sectors of society), to question the methodologies in order to envisage being able to make cultural projects more *antifragile* in the face of uncertainty.

During this period of confinement, there have been many very inspiring cultural innovations, which are still going on: film festivals that have reinvented themselves online, remote theatre projects, collective dance or music via videophony, calls for graphic, photographic, cinematographic creation, etc.

So, is everything all right? Everybody has *resisted* ? I'm not sure that this is the opinion of a theatre company whose tours for the next two years are being jeopardized by the cancellation of the Festival d'Avignon, the theatres, concert halls and cinemas empty for long months, the artists leading the very many artistic practice workshops cancelled, the authors, publishers and booksellers... The State and local authorities intervened by extending the unemployment insurance for temporary workers in the entertainment industry for one year, by setting up specific aid for the performing arts, cinema, plastic arts, music, museums, publishing, etc... These were indispensable supports, it is the role of the common good. They were probably not sufficient in France, Germany for example having affirmed the centrality of the cultural sector by supporting it to the tune of 50 billion euros after the confinement (in France it is about 100 times less). But what about the causes of what appeared to be an *extreme*

*fragility* in the face of health contingencies? And the next crisis, unpredictable, will be of a different nature.

**I propose, in 6 steps, definitions of concepts that will serve as solid support, in my opinion, for *antifragile* methodological paths in the cultural sector, i.e. that allow projects to be able to exist and even strengthen themselves in situations of uncertainty or intense stress.**

## **1. Risk prevention: a limiting belief**

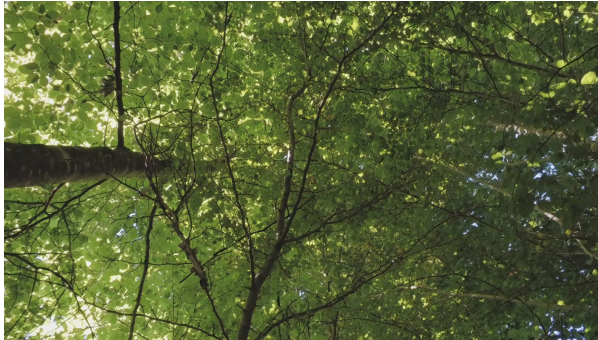
The first idea that comes to mind is the *risk prevention* approach: trying to predict everything that can happen, based on past experiences. For example, foreseeing that a new epidemic could occur, and therefore having already prepared distant alternatives for all cultural projects. Just as in a film shooting *plan*, the unpredictability of the weather is anticipated by a “Plan B” of shooting indoors nearby in case of rain. Or, for an outdoor event, folded barnums are always ready to be deployed in case of bad weather.

This risk prevention, while necessary and very useful, does not *protect* against *the unpredictable*. It only prevents the predictable. It is important, but not sufficient. Risk prevention presents itself as reassuring (“We have foreseen everything”), which is false: it is impossible to foresee everything. And it is infinitely rare for the past to repeat itself identically.

The reality is that we live in an uncertain world, in which what will happen and destabilize us is precisely what could not be foreseen. We saw this at our ex-

pense during the Covid-19 crisis, which weakened the whole world, hitting the weakest hardest. What we can only admit after 2020 is that the world is uncertain and certainly promises unpredictable surprises! It would be salutary not to forget this lesson.

Let us therefore assume the obvious: it is absolutely impossible to predict everything. But then, how can we prepare for the unpredictable? This is the difference between the *risk prevention* attitude, which is limited to what it can imagine, and the *antifragile* attitude, which prepares for the unimaginable, only to come out of it stronger. This thesis may seem very theoretical, not very “realistic”, because **how to tame the unknown, the impossible, the unthinkable?** However, intuition makes us feel that this would be the best way. But what is it concretely, and how to make a cultural project *antifragile*?



## **2. Definition of antifragile, by Nassim Nicholas Taleb**

The concept of antifragility was formulated by Nassim

Nicholas Taleb in his book “**Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder**”, the first edition of which was published in 2013. It was published in French translation in 2018 (**Editions Les Belles Lettres**).

Nassim Nicholas Taleb, a former trader, is today a writer, statistician and essayist specialising in the epistemology of probability (i.e. the critical study of the subject of probability). He is one of the very few people to have anticipated and warned about the extent of the financial crisis of 2008, for example. His atypical thinking and his critical stance seem to me to be a solid support to nourish reflection in the field of culture. Let’s first discover the concept of antifragility, before moving on to implementation paths, adapted for the cultural field.

« Just as the human body grows stronger as it is subjected to stress and effort, just as popular movements grow when they are suppressed, so living things in general develop all the better when they are confronted with factors of disorder, volatility or anything that might disturb them. This faculty to not only **take advantage of chaos but to need it in order to become better is the “antifragile”**, like the ancient Hydra of Lerna, whose heads multiplied as they were cut off.

*Antifragile, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, 2018 (back cover).*

»

Indeed, these words make us dream: who wouldn’t want us to be strengthened by hardship? Who would-

n't want to be able to put Nietzsche's aphorism "What doesn't make me die makes me stronger" into practice for their cultural projects? But isn't that a bit theoretical and utopian? The Hydra is a myth, not reality... On the other hand, concerning the human body, our personal experience validates Nassim Nicholas Taleb's hypothesis, because we can see that the human body is strengthened when it is subjected to stress, within a certain limit: physical exercise, vaccination, fasting... among other examples.

The point here is not to question the importance of preventing known risks. Of course, we must be prepared for the obvious risks that we know about: supervising children crossing the street, having national stocks of masks, etc. Let's not confuse antifragility with inconsistency. But we must not give in to **the naive belief that risk prevention would protect us from everything**. On the contrary, the excess of forecasting and *risk prevention*, seen as the only horizon in organizational decisions, reassures us, but paradoxically is a factor of great fragility. Why is this? Because we believe we are protected from everything, so we lower our guard on a deeper vigilance, intrinsic to the projects themselves. Thus, in good conscience, excessive prevention can paradoxically weaken projects, perhaps even more than before the widespread practice of risk prevention since the early 2000s. Why is this so? Let Nassim Nicholas Taleb explain it to us very simply:

« We have never had as much data as we do today, yet we are more unable than ever to predict. More data — paying attention to the colour of the eyes of the people you meet when you cross the street, for example — can lead to

missing the essential — the big truck coming across the street, in this case. When you cross the street, you're eliminating data, except for data that could be a critical threat. As Paul Valéry wrote: *There are many things to ignore in order to act.*

*Antifragile, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, 2018 (page 372).*

»

Of course we can only agree. But then, what are the relevant facts to remember, and how do you go about taking a *antifragile* path? What exactly are we talking about? Here is a first, very simple example of antifragility. It is not a model, it allows us to start grasping the concept in terms of concrete action :

« A do-it-yourself system and a test-and-error method would have the attributes of antifragility. If one wishes to become an antifragile, one must put oneself in the “fault-loving” situation — to the right of “fault-hating” — by making faults numerous and not very damaging.

*Antifragile, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, 2018 (page 34).*

»

Here is a table (page 36) that summarizes this example:

Fragile	Rough	Robust
I hate mistakes	Spiteful mistakes are just information	Worship of mistakes (since they're light)

We are beginning to perceive, I think, that **antifragility is about a method of designing projects, a certain approach to work, to development, to construction, to the way we relate to the public.** But then, should we only do “do-it-yourself” cultural projects, i.e. without any real artistic project, not very fragile because they are not very ambitious? On the contrary, **it is thanks to the highest artistic standards that we will be able to build cultural projects that are antifragile**, whether they’re “small” or “big”, as we will now discover.



### 3. Cultural Policy Missions

By the way, what is the framework for the implementation of cultural projects in France? Cultural policies, and therefore funding frameworks, have for main-spring the development of artistic creation, its dissemination and its practices. This is at the heart of the missions of cultural institutions in France, as the french

official texts indicate:

« **Official Missions of the Ministry of Culture :**

The mission of the Ministry of Culture is to promote artistic creation in all its components and to enable the democratization and dissemination of cultural works.

The mission of the Ministry of Culture is to make the capital works of France and humanity in the fields of heritage, architecture, plastic arts, performing arts, cinema and communication accessible to the greatest number of people. It promotes the development of artistic works in all their components in the territories and throughout the world. It is the guarantor of artistic education.

Source: website [www.gouvernement.fr](http://www.gouvernement.fr).

»

These missions are engaged in two directions: *cultural democratization*, to make works accessible to the public, and *cultural democracy*, which consists in fostering artistic practices of audiences. These two facets of cultural policies are complementary, and in my opinion, they always benefit from being combined. There is much debate in the political and financial stakes between these two perspectives, the answer to which lies in what are now called *cultural rights*. This is a subject in itself, which I do not deal with here, the cultural projects I am talking about are indifferently related to both approaches.

But what exactly is “artistic creation”? The philosopher François Jullien is one of the contemporary thinkers who explore the mysteries and potentialities of artistic creation in the most profound way. Here is an excerpt from his book “*Dé-coïncidence, où viennent l’art et l’existence*” (2017, Editions Grasset):

« In what way is art a lesson, no longer just a lesson of life, as so much has been said, to decorate life or because one is sculpting one’s life. Whether one aestheticizes one’s life as much as one wants, the notion of “art of living” is unfortunate: it is compromised with the renunciation of the adventurous inherent in wisdom and withdrawn into convenience. On the other hand, the demand for the *dissonance* that is proper to art, and which is more radically enlightened by modernity, puts the capacity for *existence* at work from the outset, inscribing it in the sensible. In the de-coïncidence, art and existence discover their common origin, and at first in opposition to “Creation”: discover that the new - the unheard of - is indeed possible, but precisely because it is not naively a beginning. Because it is the result of a disengagement and de-enclosure that keeps us out of the confinement of a world and its adapted adequacy. Or that it is by coming out of the hinges under which the possibilities are sealed, *out of joint* — possibilities that we did not suspect — that comes an audacity that, in its challenge, can redeploy from the infinite and allows us to finally be-

gin. What each work of art does, in short: that the first morning of the world, then, becomes fleetingly within reach.

*Dé-coïncidence, où viennent d'art et l'existence ?*, François Jullien, 2017 (page 136).

»

To summarize, François Jullien thus demonstrates that **artistic creation is inherently antifragile**, because art is by nature always reinventing, reinstating the first time at each of its occurrences. It is a lesson in life. The essence of artistic creation is to be adventurous, unseemly, *uncoïncidental*.

## 4. Antifragility of a resolutely artistic and innovative approach to culture

Artistic creation is what cultural projects are meant to develop and disseminate, so let's nourish ourselves on its deep logic of functioning, let's allow it to express itself fully. Let us not seek to reduce what is the greatest strength of art: **the requirement of audacity**. Let's take a risk in the cultural projects themselves, without which we would destroy the meaning of art, which we are here to defend! This audacity is precisely what will help our cultural projects to become antifragile. We can give it its name: **innovation**.

The approach to building a cultural project must therefore be innovative in order to be antifragile. But how

can we identify that we are indeed in an attitude of boldness and innovation, and not in a race to reassure ourselves by trying to anticipate everything? How can we identify criteria to guide us? It is a question of our relationship to “error” and “uncertainty”: **Do we seek to avoid uncertainty at all costs, i.e. the risk of error, or do we actively prepare to receive them in order to be enriched by them?** Nassim Nicholas Taleb sums it up very well :

« Mistakes make some things break, and some things don't. Some theories fall apart, and some don't. Innovation is precisely something that benefits from uncertainty; and some people sit back and wait for uncertainty and use it as raw material, just as our hunting ancestors did. ...an ethical life is not ethical when it is free of personal risk.

*Antifragile, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, 2018 (page 512).*

»

We could synthesize these ideas into one formula:

$$\text{Antifragile} = \text{s'enrichir de} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Erreur} \quad \& \quad \text{Incertitude} \\ \text{Ethique} \quad \& \quad \text{Prise de risque} \end{array} \right\} = \text{Innovation} \iff \text{Création artistique}$$

Innovation is therefore not an empty word, which would mean following fashions, in a form of demagogic and often technophile headlong rush, such as making absolutely “digital” projects or systematically using “social networks” without even really knowing why.

Innovation is an approach, a method, which integrates

into the heart of its process **openness to the unexpected**, and is enriched by it. It is an attitude of openness to what, *a priori*, destabilizes us and that we would tend to reject out of fear. But beware, innovation is not a simple messy Spanish inn either. An innovative project can be extremely vast and structured, but it must **cultivate its agility**, which lies in everyone's attitude towards the unexpected: *"it surprises me, it worries me, it destabilizes me, well I'm going to do my best to deal with it and I'm going to try to find out how I can make the most of it!"*

## 5. A method: mourning work

It is counterintuitive to accept the unexpected, because the unexpected represents the loss of what was expected. It is necessarily a disappointment at the outset, which we fight against by reflex: denial, anger, guilt, etc. We would like to be enriched by this new situation, as advocated by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, but we have to admit that our brain does not take us in this direction spontaneously, far from it.

To be able to adopt a *antifragile* approach, whether at an individual level or collectively (within the framework of a project), we must learn to go through the stages of mourning very often. It is usually a rather slow process, because there is little awareness of it. It is a mourning training that must be practiced in order to become more and more able to go through the stages of mourning in an agile manner. The 5 stages of mourning work are :

1. Shock and denial.
2. Anger.

3. Negotiation.
4. Depression.
5. Acceptance (or resilience).

It's important to know that these stages can be quite disorganized, with jumps and flashbacks, which is particularly destabilizing.

antifragility is therefore above all a real *work on oneself*, dynamic and difficult, because it is to be produced precisely in those moments when one is in great difficulty, when one has lost what one imagined and is caught up in one's unpredictable reactions in the face of this loss. So, the method is to practice the work of mourning, at high speed. To go faster in mourning, so that, thanks to the resilience that the work of mourning produces, we can consider the opportunities that lie behind the loss.

In fact, antifragility is at the heart of our learning system from childhood. In his book *Learning to Resist* (2019), educational psychologist Olivier Houdé explains through neuroscience that from childhood and throughout life, learning and reflection are based on **cognitive resistance** (another way of naming antifragility):

« Cognitive resistance is our brain's ability to **inhibit automatisms of thought to allow us to think** But it goes far beyond that: this ability is also essential in many situations of everyday life. Indeed, we must learn to resist automatisms of thought when they are oversimplifying and dangerous.

»

## 6. A path strewn with constructive pitfalls

Preparing for the unpredictable in order to take advantage of it, in the cultural sector, means adopting, collectively and in the structure of the systems that we put in place, be it planning, technique, organisation in teams, artistic work, communication, etc., an attitude of taking distance, a less reflexive, counter-intuitive time of thinking, in short, a true *algorithmic* approach, which involves sharing information, combined with autonomy in decision-making.

The method to adopt this attitude, as we have just seen above, is the work of mourning, which seems to be slower to approach, but which allows us to build in reality, and not in the fantasy of what we have lost and what we would like to find again. The challenge is to get back in touch with reality as quickly as possible, which has just changed in an unpredictable and irreversible way.

This brings us to places we hadn't anticipated. It is destabilizing at first glance, but the cultural projects will only be better, more anchored in reality, and will respond even better to their initial objectives, because they will have been able to adapt to the changing reality.

To develop *antifragility* in the construction and exploitation of cultural projects is to choose the path that is the least easy, the riskiest, the most *agile*, the least reassuring, a path of successive innovations. It is the path that will come up against the most pitfalls, but which guarantees that the project will come out of it grown and perennial.

**Choosing this type of approach has profound impacts on the forms of artistic projects, working methods, professional training, management attitudes, etc.** If this approach is very difficult, it is above all because it implies accepting the loss of a form of power of domination, of mastery. It implies a change in our relationship to the world, which goes against the majority ideas about effective action and organisation. Thus, it often happens that the people who weaken projects the most are the leaders themselves (artists, elected officials, directors, etc.), because they are too afraid to let go of their power. In my opinion, taking these risks is the best guarantee for building ambitious cultural projects that will fully meet their objectives in our uncertain world.

*This text is the introduction to the antifragile method for cultural projects. It will be followed by other texts that will develop proposals for the field.*



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*Thanks to **Robinson Labourdette** for discovering the work of Nassim Nicholas Taleb, and to Véronique Guicho-Leroux and Isabelle Altounian for their attentive rereading.*

# Balance and supports

**A method for the sustainability of projects.**

*Based on the way the human body  
balances itself, for a sustainable ap-  
proach to project management.*

Observation of nature is often very good advice for engineering projects (architecture, aviation, textiles, IT, neural networks for example...). The functioning of the balance of the human body seems to me to be very enlightening for the management of projects, especially cultural projects. I propose here **a methodology for the sustainability of projects**, based on an understanding of the functioning of balance in the human body.

So let's start by defining the processes of balance and support, at the mechanical and physiological level, in a perspective more inspired by the Alexander technique or the Feldenkrais method than by academic anatomy.

## Balance

What is balance? It is not something fixed, it is a competition of forces, which produce a lasting state. Whether the outward appearance is immobility or movement, the internal energy is the same: it is an active dynamic, which produces this sustained state. The balance is all the more perennial since, thanks to these living forces, it is able to evolve. Openness to change is one of the best guarantees of balance.

Let's take the example of a waiter carrying a dish full of glasses, at arm's length, walking at full speed in the large hall of a brewery: the dish is not fixed horizontally, it is in constant movement, around a point of balance, which allows the glasses to remain in place and the liquids not to overflow. If the waiter tried to keep the dish horizontal at all costs, the glasses would surely spill. In this example, balance is achieved through movement. It is therefore clear that **balance is a**

**maintained dynamic state**, and not a definite static state.

## The supports

The search for balance is often confused with support management, even in some dance methods. However, they are two essentially materially different (and complementary) notions. Balance is a state, a dynamic of forces, whereas **the supports are the points, the zones, on which the system (body, machine, project...) rests.**

## Differences and complementarities between balance and supports

- The supports are indispensable, since everything is subject to the Newtonian force (the attraction of lighter masses by heavier masses).
- In a state of weightlessness, for example, supports would not be necessary for the construction of a balance.
- Although they are indispensable, supports are much more anecdotal than balance: one can change supports while remaining in the same type of balance. We understand this well with walking: when we walk, we are in balance (we don't fall), yet we change our supports constantly: sometimes one (one foot), sometimes two, sometimes

none (a small jump!).

- I consider the supports in the plural, because they are variable, contrary to balance, which is dynamic but much more constructed.
- The supports and balance are therefore completely independent, even if the balance needs the supports to be embodied.
- In the movement of the human body, balance is built up from the muscles of the perineum (these are the muscles located between the legs, also called the “pelvic floor”, to which the bones of the pelvis are attached, overhung by the spine, then the head). And the supports are most often the feet, at the end of the legs.

## **Active Approach to Balance**

You won't find this kind of definition of balance in an anatomical method. The anatomical approach will evoke the functioning of the inner ear to control muscle tone. So why approach things differently when anatomical methods are obviously right? Because I treat the subject from the point of view of the action that we can have on our balance, not from the point of view of the physiological observation, on which we have no control. I treat the subject holistically (i.e. as a whole) and practically, not analytically and technically (the explanation of the individual), and it is also in this sense that I will approach the project management method. It is about method, practice, action, not theory. But practice also requires an understanding of things, which is not the same as theoretical unders-

tanding.

For information, multiple explanations of the same phenomenon are common and accepted in physics, especially since the discovery of quantum physics. Light, for example, depending on what one needs to do with it, is considered either as a wave or as a set of corpuscles, which is totally contradictory in theory, but verified and operating in practice.

## **Method for the mechanical balance of the human body**

Let's finish this definition of concepts with a method to work on the balance of the human body, from which we will come up with ideas for project management.

To mechanically balance a physical system, the approach is most often *external*: for an architecture for example, an engineering work will try to precisely define the forces present to build the tensions that will lead to a state of equilibrium.

But to work on the balance of the human body, even at the mechanical level alone (for example to stand without leaning on the bar in a subway or bus, which is in chaotic motion), the external approach to the balance of forces is no longer operative at all. What is efficient is an *internal* approach to the construction of one's equilibrium, because we are the internal actor and not the external spectator. We will find this same opposition "*internal approach vs. external approach*" in the project management method. Advice given from the outside is most often impossible to put into prac-

tice from the inside, or does not lead to anything constant.

How then **work your balance from the inside**? The Feldenkrais Method (developed by Moshe Feldenkrais from the 1940s), widely used in the field of dance, sport and the arts, uses the “Awareness through Movement” (APM): by making very small movements, little by little one activates an inner awareness of the muscles, their interactions, the vertical stacking of the skeleton, the tensions, the forces present, in order to advance towards a greater balance, i.e. to succeed in doing the same things with less effort and more relaxation.

I give you an exercise, to finish this part, which is not strictly speaking an exercise of the Feldenkrais Method, but which allows you to become aware very simply, through movement, of the nuance between balance and support:

- Stand on your own two legs.
- Raise one of the two legs. Most of the time, it is rather difficult, except if you are a dancer, to stand, you tend to stumble. This is because the body is not actually in a state of equilibrium, but dependent on external support.
- Now, stand on your two legs, and contract your perineum (to put it trivially: “squeeze your buttocks”). Keep the muscles of your perineum strong. This requires continuous effort.
- Then raise one of your two legs, while continuing to contract your perineal muscles. You will immediately notice that you can stand much more easily with one or two legs, almost indifferently.

If you have done the exercise, you have clearly felt, thanks to the “Awareness through Movement”, the essential difference between balance (which is built up internally by the mobilization of the perineal muscles) and support (external, which can be variable: one leg or two legs). An external observer would be of no help to you in building your balance: he could just say “stand straighter, bend a little to the left or to the right, etc.”, which would help a little, but would in no way contribute to the construction of a lasting balance.

How can this awareness of the difference between balance and support be applied to the field of project management and what are the specific benefits?

## The balance and support of a project

For project management, I propose this comparison:

- **Balance** would be **the objectives** of the project,
- **Supports**, it would be **actions** that we would implement.

The most important thing, of course, are the objectives, that is, the **why** of the project. The actions flow from the objectives, that is the **how**.

Here is a summary table:

<b>Balance</b>	<b>Supports</b>
Objectives, aims of the project	Incarnations, actions for project implementation
Why	How

<b>Balance</b>	<b>Supports</b>
To “muscle” on a continuous basis	Changing as needed
To be shared with teams on a regular basis	To be built flexibly and agilely
That’s the most important thing	That’s the most anecdotal

The essential difference between balance and support for a project is that support is concrete, “heavy” to carry and implement, whereas balance, the purpose of the project, seems more theoretical, less concrete, “easier” to carry, it seems more obvious, stable, and asks fewer questions. In my opinion, the reality is precisely the opposite of this preconceived idea, and this is the cause of many difficulties in the management of projects.

Often much more importance is given to support than to balance in the work, because the support is more tangible, so this is what seems to be “most important”. But then, if you want to do well, you can unbalance the project, and even cause it to fall apart. This means doing things with a gradual loss of meaning; one can end up doing absurd, counterproductive actions, and not being able to do otherwise. All the more so because, because these actions require a lot of work from us, we take a cognitive bias that prevents us from realizing that they go against the objectives of the project. The objectives have become blurred, so we “cling” to the actions, which is actually very destabilizing for the project.

The methodological lesson that can be drawn from this for project management is :

- On the one hand **don’t give too much importance to support, to actions, and put yourself in a position to change**

**them if necessary, without fear.** Concretely, this can lead us to produce actions that seem to be the opposite of what we had initially planned.

- On the other hand, what leads us to be able to change actions in this way in an efficient way is the fact of **always devoting time and energy to question, rebuild, reformulate, share with others, the objectives of the project**, its meaning (just as we must continuously mobilize the muscles of the perineum to keep the balance, whatever the changes of support, i.e. the modifications of the external context).

Imagine that the project is your body, that you strengthen both legs very strongly to make sure you remain standing, but in doing so you forget to work the muscles of the perineum. If one of your two legs fails, you fall immediately. Whereas if you had worked your perineum first, i.e. your balance rather than your supports, with legs that may be less solid but more mobile and possibly replaceable, you would have been much less likely to fall if one of your supports was lost, and you would have been able to change your support, thanks to your well maintained balance.

## **Balance and support in teamwork: the “balance meeting” method**

The management of a project in terms of balance and support helps in depth to give the project’s actors the ability to stay in touch with the meaning of the work,

and thus to remain motivated and make the most relevant decisions. The project becomes better, more perennial and resistant to the unforeseen, which always occur.

But how, concretely in a team work, how to implement this primacy given to balance, that is to say to the meaning of the project? I propose a method, which I have called the “**balance meetings**”, made up of a list of recommendations, not hierarchical:

- **It is simply a matter of short weekly meetings, devoted to exchanges between the actors on the meaning of the project in which they participate.** This may seem at first sight dangerous and potentially destabilizing for the project. This is precisely why this method is effective: you work on the balance of the project in depth, you take the risk, and this is what makes it more solid. Just like the muscles of the perineum, which require real work, not easy, are what guarantees a continuous balance.
- The objective is to ensure that the project’s actors can **build the balance**, that is **an overall vision of the project and its meaning**, in a collective and shared way, by allowing them, during regular meetings (which can be short and by videophone), to share their points of view and to question the meaning of the project.
- In the course of these meetings, one realizes that what seemed obvious to one may not be obvious at all to the other (one would not have assumed this because they had never expressed it, it may take time to discover one’s own thoughts).

- This progressive and continuous sharing, on the one hand, allows the finality to be re-founded, and above all to integrate itself in depth in each actor of the project, and on the other hand, to evolve over time, if necessary.
- Each person can have different temporalities of appropriation of ideas, which is quite normal.
- The regularity of the exchanges allows this in-depth integration, at the individual and collective levels.
- These meetings may from the outside seem superfluous, because you cannot see their concrete effect (cf. the outside observer who watched you lift one leg and could not perceive the inner work of balance you were doing).
- There are many concrete things to be done every day for the progress of the project, which seem much more tangible, urgent and important, so these meetings are not easy to hold, yet they are essential.
- These **balance meetings** in fact allow everyone to arbitrate much faster and better for what he has to do, therefore to decide not to do certain things that prove to be useless and on the contrary to find new ones that are much more useful.
- So, despite the outward appearance that “nothing is happening”, balance meetings bring in the end a lot of time and energy saved, and above all the guarantee that the project will work much better.
- Often, this type of meeting can worry leaders, who, because of a lack of confidence in themselves or in their project, may prefer

not to leave room for questioning. But not letting the actors of a project question it means emptying it little by little of its meaning, and opening the door to actions (the “supports”) that are increasingly disconnected, useless and counter-productive. Moreover, leaders may be afraid of wasting the precious time devoted to these meetings, whereas full and complete ownership by everyone, as we have seen, is on the contrary a guarantee of unprecedented time and quality savings.

- Let us not forget that Taylorism (forcing employees to act against their will) was only effective for line work (think of the film “Les temps modernes” - 1936 - by Charlie Chaplin). Today, as jobs are very rarely repetitive, the more the actor of the project (whether employee, volunteer, independent...) finds meaning in his work and the more his efficiency, i.e. his capacity for good initiatives, correlated to his well-being at work, will increase.
- These meetings may not be hierarchical (the “leader” of the project may not necessarily be present, he has to come regularly, and be a good listener above all). What matters is that they are regular (at least once a week, for each given project).
- These meetings do not necessarily bring everyone together all the time, but must be held.
- These meetings do not result in formal minutes. Everyone can write up a report for themselves, but there is no “official” report, so that everyone can appropriate the objectives of the project in their own way,

with their own words (if they are someone else's words in a report, they are experienced as external and undermine our appropriation).

- The process may seem slow. One would think it would be more effective to “give the instructions” from the beginning so that people will carry them out. But reality proves us wrong: if we want to go too fast, we miss the appropriation by the actors of the project, we are in a Taylorist conception, which is the most inefficient and generating psychosocial risks in the contemporary world. And we forget the immense capacities of each person, since the project always makes sense for them, in depth, in interiority, that is to say, it is a balancing factor.
- These meetings can be given whatever name one wishes, in relation to the singularity of the project, so that they will not be experienced as a plated model, but as a force specific to this particular project.

## **Examples of good balance/support combinations**

Here are three examples in the field of cultural projects:

- **The evolution of musical practices:** Until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, “clients”, people who enjoyed music, went to concerts and bought records. At the end of the

1990s, they discovered the possibility of downloading. They now listen to much more music and in a more diversified way than before, because free music is easier to discover (like in a library). To confine themselves to support was the guilt of “piracy”, which led to the bankruptcy of record companies. To work on the balance was to open, from these more numerous musical discoveries, to even more concerts than before, which, for their part, do not pose a problem of payment. The economic support of the music sector in the past was largely based on the sale of records. The new support is mainly the sale of concert tickets. But the objective, the balance, which is to develop the meeting between audiences and musical artists, remains the same, we just changed support. I’m not saying it was easy, but this example illustrates the difference between those who were able to reposition themselves very early on in terms of meaning and balance, to change their actions (support), sometimes very profoundly, and those who had clung to support that had become obsolete.

- **A cultural place in which the public no longer comes:** if the public loses its attendance habits (for example after the confinement of 2020), one can exhaust oneself trying to solidify one’s former supports, such as making even more communication on paper or on social networks. But to work on the balance is to question the meaning of this theatre, this cinema, this cultural place: why does it exist? Working with the teams to reread the founding texts of cultu-

ral policies, rethinking the offer, perhaps making it more evolutionary, even being able to change the nature of the actions that take place in the place. An example: a subsidised cinema could decide, because it has a small audience during commercial screenings, to screen only locally made films, to become once again a place for sharing culture, and for socialising around a cultural requirement that goes beyond academic cinema. This does not mean doing less well, but on the contrary, seeking and encouraging local creation perhaps, thus supporting the dynamics of economic and cultural construction around the audiovisual sector, instead of remaining a cinema that “oars” to seek an audience that does not want to be there. It is not at all demagogic, on the contrary, it is to go further in the requirement, by giving oneself the possibility, thanks to the work of balance (to ask oneself the fundamental questions of democracy and cultural democratization), to make the actions (the supports) evolve in a very important, relevant and collective way. In this field, **balance meetings** can take place at the national level to work on the evolution of cultural policies.

- **Editing a film** : Editing a film is a challenge, because there are often tens of hours of *rushes*, which must be chosen tactfully, to create a film that works, that achieves its initial objectives (tell a good story, make people laugh, make them cry, transmit important ideas...). And sometimes this requires very profound changes in the narrative at the editing stage: we

don't give all the information to the viewer, to create mystery and suspense that will feed even more interest in the film, for example. But also, the content and rhythm of each scene, each shot, each second of the film, is what makes it *walk* or not. So it can happen that we concentrate, scene after scene, on the details, which little by little make us lose sight of the general balance. When you've finished editing, you may have the impression that the film is perfect, when in fact it doesn't work at all. Why is that? Because we stayed focused on the supports (i.e. the details of each scene, of each shot, which we took care of as best we could). How do you work on the balance of the film? It's quite simple: watch it in its entirety (at the different stages) maybe once a day. It may seem like a waste of time in each day, especially if it's a feature film. But, in reality, watching it, over and over again, in its entirety, allows you to never lose sight of your objectives, your purpose, your breathing, your senses, in short, your balance. And that helps to make much better and faster, sometimes hard decisions (like cutting out a successful scene in the editing, which had been expensive to shoot, but which unbalanced the film).

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# Collaborative mind-mapping

**An instituting, evolving form of writing.**

*Collaborative mind mapping is a visual and tree-like note-taking method, projected in real-time during meetings or training sessions. This approach fosters collective intelligence by legitimizing contributions and creating an immediately shareable record.*

## What is mind mapping?

Mind mapping (known as “*cartes heuristiques*” in French) is a technique formalized under this name by the English psychologist Tony Buzan in the 1970s. Initially, it involves using a simple sheet of paper to write the main subject in the center, then the secondary subjects that stem from it, and the sub-secondary subjects, in a tree-like structure, adding concise notes and creating diagrams or drawings associated with each note. This allows for the structuring of the thought process in a tree-like manner. Thanks to the combination of text and visuals, one can easily memorize what has been written down and the connections made. The subjects are related in an “organic” way.

Initially, it is a memorization tool, helping to learn school lessons, for example. Instead of making a list, for Henri IV, for instance, one would write Henri IV in the center, then the era, politics, arts, family, etc., around it. And within each sub-theme, one can develop step by step. Our thinking works in a tree-like manner, not linearly. Biologically, even the connections between neurons are forms of tree-like structures.

Mind mapping software was developed starting in the late 1990s and allows for very easy note-taking or brainstorming. Ideas can be noted in a tree-like sequence. They can be easily moved, and branches can be opened or closed. It is a very useful tool when brainstorming, creating plans, or exploring all angles of a subject, for example.

## Mind mapping for collective intelligence

Here, I share a method I have been using for over 20 years in group settings, which I have named **collaborative mind mapping**. It has proven effective in collective creation processes, professional training, project management, conferences, and all types of collective intelligence spaces. It is a tool I use almost every time in public presentations or workshops I conduct.

The basic method involves taking mind map notes of everything being said while people discuss a topic. This note-taking is shared publicly via a projector, which should display the largest possible image so that the group is almost immersed in the written content. Thus, participants see their thoughts being noted on the screen in real-time, hierarchically organized, with different themes following and connecting with each other. Everyone can contribute, with the entire thought process visible to them. This practice has several benefits:

- It legitimizes thoughts, meaning that what someone says is written down, so it holds importance, anchoring and establishing the value of what is being shared in the moment. This gives it importance for later but also in the present moment. Thus, participants are more invested in the significance of what is happening and are encouraged to contribute more deeply.
- We can immediately share this synthesis with everyone right after the exchange. There is no need to wait two weeks for someone to compile the summary. Today,

summaries can be done much faster with artificial intelligence, but for now, it is still not very refined. Mind mapping creates a synthesis, an immediately shareable record, which holds great value: indeed, we have worked on a topic for a certain amount of time, and later, we will move on to other topics. Therefore, being able to quickly share an institutional and qualifying note-taking allows for better transformation, exploitation, and integration of what was said during the exchange.

- As people see their thoughts and those of others being written down in real-time, they can make corrections on the spot. They can intervene and say, “Ah, no, there’s a mistake here,” or “That’s not exactly what I meant.” Thus, the collective validation of the future synthesis of what has been developed in the group happens in the moment, and it is very democratic and constructive in terms of collective intelligence, as it makes the participants responsible for the record that will remain of their exchange. This record is formed in front of them, and they can ask the scribe to modify things. The collective dimension of intelligence is clearly identified.
- It can make it easier to reconnect with a topic if someone joins midway or misses a part or the end. It is also a written link in the moment, even for potential disconnections that may occur for some. And I’m not just talking about inattention, but it helps with that too. I have received feedback from people, especially those who did not speak French very well, who, thanks to this

real-time note-taking, were able to better follow what was being said. It served as a support for their listening.

## **Usage in professional training**

There are many methods in the field of professional training, but a commonly used method is PowerPoint, i.e., a pre-established document that more or less redundantly outlines the exact progression of a 2-hour training session, for example, step by step. There is this pre-conceived notion of the pedagogical progression.

Why not, but this presents several dangers. The first danger is that the participants receive the message that no matter what happens, no matter what they do, regardless of their contribution during the training, the pedagogical progression will go to the same place. That is, they are being told that they have no impact, no competence on the subject on which we precisely want them to become competent! Yet, this is the goal of professional training. Therefore, the pre-established fixed document has no mnemonic value; it is completely external to the people participating in the training.

If we revisit the purpose of professional training: it is to guide participants on a journey to become more competent on a subject. It is not about listening to a lecture, because listening to information given to us has little to do with what we retain.

## Example at Arte France

I take the example of training sessions I conducted for the channel Arte during the transition to digital and the dual TV and web activity the channel was building. I conducted numerous training sessions to help TV staff appropriate technical and methodological concepts from the digital sector. And there were many words, for example, that they did not understand. They needed to appropriate these new methods, techniques, and languages.

I was given a PowerPoint where I just had to flip through the slides to cover the entire subject of the training in one day, the sum of information the participants were supposed to receive. But between receiving information and integrating it, again, it is not the same thing! And for the participants, it can be quite soporific. I took the opposite approach with mind mapping. I knew exactly all the information I was tasked with conveying to them, but instead of imposing my personal logic, I proposed at the start of the day to make a list of questions, problems, unknown words, things that were blocking them because they had already been confronted with this digital world, quite mysterious to them at the time.

So I simply started by noting on the screen, in mind mapping, the questions, the words they did not understand, the problems they had, etc. So the structure we saw on the screen came from them. It was them, not me. I had imposed nothing; it came from them.

Then, knowing where I wanted to go, I started with a topic in consultation with them. "Is it okay if we start with this topic?" "Yes, yes." And so I pulled the threads from what had come from them and in interac-

tion with them, because questions could arise as we went along. And we delved into the topics hierarchically in mind mapping. We explored step by step. And once we had roughly covered one aspect, I moved to another topic. And so on throughout the day. It was up to me to be open to what came from them while not forgetting important parts that were in the training objectives, of course. But since it was a subject I knew very well and the objectives were clear, I made the connections between the topics.

That is, we reached the objectives through paths that were unique to this group, very singular paths. And at the end of the day, immediately after, instead of receiving a formatted deliverable that had nothing to do with their experience, they received a multi-page PDF file with the home page, then the main topics, and then the sub-pages where we delved into each sub-topic.

Of course, the mind map can be displayed on a single page, but it makes a huge page! It is not readable on a single A4 page, of course. That's why I make it into a multi-page PDF.

Throughout the day, I reorganized the map in consultation with them. I had started with their topics, and little by little, I grouped some together, we found other topics that became main topics along the way, etc. The thought process was built and written collectively during the day. So, this document was theirs. I was the architect, so to speak, or rather the builder, and they were the architects.

What interested me at the time was that I conducted many training sessions on the same subject for different groups at Arte France, and the objective of these trainings was always exactly the same. But depending

on the group, with the objective met each time, the maps did not have the same structure at all. For some groups, certain topics were explored more deeply than others. All topics were always covered, but with entirely unique ways of approaching them for each group.

## Is it difficult?

There is a concern one might have about this technique: it is not easy to facilitate a meeting and simultaneously take notes at high speed of what is being said. Yes, it is difficult. I am not saying it is easy, but it is a practice that can be experimented with and learned. Mind mapping software is very easy to use: the *Enter* key creates a new topic, and the *Insert* key creates a new branch in the tree. It is really extremely simple to use. Once you get a little used to it, it works well. It is a technique I have often taught, notably during a research-action project where there were 5 groups of people working in parallel on collective intelligence. I had Master's students at Paris 7 work on it, to whom I taught the technique, and they took mind map notes during the meeting. It worked very well: they had never done it before, they practiced a little, and we had very high-quality synthetic documents. Of course, from these documents, you can export to PDF, but also to Word, etc. It depends on the tools.

What I cannot do, however, is take notes while I am speaking myself.

## Mind Mapping Tools

Personally, I use the commercial software MindManager, which I am very accustomed to and which suits me well. But there are others, many others. It is a very common tool now. There is one I recommend, called Freeplane, which is almost as ergonomic as MindManager in use, I find, and which can produce very high-quality exports, notably in XML format. It is a very good tool, Freeplane. There is also Xmind, which is paid software but can be used for free with a limitation: it cannot export to PDF. But this is not really a limitation today, as you can simply print, and now, in the print menu, you can print to a PDF file. So, it is not a limitation. There is also the software FreeMind, which is very spartan in my opinion, quite historical, and which I personally find quite minimal.

I would say that among all these, the free version of FreePlane is perhaps the best. But ultimately, the best tool is the one you are accustomed to. I have been using MindManager for 20 years, and I feel comfortable with it.

### Technical note on multi-page PDF export

Easy to say, but a MindMap is a tree that can be very large. So, if you export it to PDF on a single page, each part will be very small. Of course, on a computer, you can navigate through it, zoom, etc. But if you print it, unless you print it on a very large sheet of paper, it will be very small and hard to read. Personally, I prefer to do multi-page PDF exports. How do I do

that? Well, I fold the MindMap and print it to PDF. So, that's page 1 of the PDF. Then, there are these functions in MindManager: I hide topics so that it fits on a page but is not too small, is readable enough, and I print to PDF only that open topic. That's another PDF file, page 2, and so on. I do this, page by page, unfolding, refolding, hiding, showing. So, you have the first page, which is the whole map, and then, page by page, you have the sub-parts of the whole. You end up with a number of pages, a number of PDF files, each being a page. Then, you just need to combine them together, assemble them. For that, there are many tools online that allow you to merge multiple PDF files. Personally, I use a software I purchased, installed on my computer, called *PDF Exchange Standard*, which allows me, after printing the first page to PDF, to print the second page, which has the same name, and the software asks me if I want to replace the previous file or if I want to add a second page to the existing file. I do the latter. So, in the end, once I have printed the pages one after the other, I have a complete PDF file with all the pages. This PDF export takes a little time, but it remains very quick, and it creates fully usable, printable documents that can be used in reports, summaries, etc.

# Potential development space

## **Collective innovation method.**

*The potential development space is a method of collective innovation based on intuitive encounters, without predefined objectives, where mutual trust allows the unexpected and renewal to emerge.*

## **How to bring about the unexpected?**

How do we develop new ideas, make room for innovation? How do we bring people together so that, in a free, surprising, and disruptive way, new paradigms of thought, action, ideas, or methods can emerge? This is essential for renewal, which is indispensable in all fields of activity.

We know that sometimes, no matter the work environment, we need to radically evolve certain aspects of our work, our proposals, our methods, or our subjects. These shifts allow us to pivot in the right direction, stay ahead of our time, and fully exercise our prerogatives. For example, if the goal is to build cultural proposals that serve citizens, contributing to the emergence of new and enriching futures.

The first step is to assess the possibility of our need for this type of approach. It's particularly destabilizing and therefore requires great self-confidence, as well as a solid grounding in our social and symbolic roles. If we feel symbolically threatened or in competition with others, we're more likely to reflexively secure our positions. And then, it becomes difficult to innovate—to think outside the box and enrich our living space with those externalities, those alterities we need to stay alive.

## **Being grounded to allow for destabilization**

The starting point, for an individual or a group, is to

ensure that in this potential development space, the participants do not feel threatened in their deep grounding. That is, they can imagine their own reality being completely transformed without fear. This requires bonds of trust between participants.

Why? Because if we want to welcome profound changes, the only stable element is precisely the bonds that will remain. A human bond, if deep, is malleable, adaptable. True grounding lies in connections, in people's ability to feel and mutually express the depth of their relationships, even as circumstances change.

Once these prerequisites are established, here's a proposal for creating a potential development space within a group—a space that can allow completely unexpected things to emerge. Dare to gather people, ideally a small group. Two people invite two others, one invites another, three invite one more. In my opinion, the group should not exceed six people; even that might already be too many. There are those who initiate the meeting, but there must be a mutual desire to come together. Intuition about the purpose of the meeting must be mutually encouraged, even if the exact reason is unclear. The key to potential is the mutual acceptance of the unknown.

We don't really know why we've organized this one-hour meeting between four people. None of the four knows exactly why. And yet, we've set up this moment of encounter, sharing, gathering—call it what you will. We meet and don't know where to begin. We accept not knowing, no longer knowing. We're here, present with one another, for a limited time. Thus, this acknowledged unknown rests on mutually recognized intuitive value. This means there are likely things to share, even if we don't know what they are yet and

will discover them together. This intuitive moment, formalized in a social act—we're meeting, we've set aside time to meet—whose usefulness no one knows, and we accept not knowing why or what purpose it will serve.

## **The extreme difficulty of the improbable**

This is extremely difficult to implement, and that's precisely why it creates potential development spaces. It's so hard because our representations of the world and activities are largely productivist. We must produce something together—otherwise, why meet? Here, we accept that we have nothing to produce, that we know each other a little, a lot, or not at all, but we've sensed something and chosen to devote official time to these vague things. In the end, it's very much like a meeting between friends or even a romantic encounter: we don't know, but that's not the point; we know we want to, perhaps, and we'll let what emerges do so, let our steps guide us, choose to get lost in an unfamiliar city and maybe discover things that will enrich us forever—without knowing whether we'll discover anything at all.

What unlocks potential in us is the absence of stakes tied to guaranteed gain. The gains we receive will come from unexpected places. That's why this is a *potential space*. It's where we welcome the unexpected—and by definition, the unexpected is unexpected. To welcome it, we need complete openness, because it will not come from where we expect. This requires floating attention, so precious in psychoanalysis,

which lets the mind wander, meander, find its own paths. It's so destabilizing yet so constructive, so essential.

In this acknowledged situation—always difficult, because there's always something "better" to do, urgent priorities—we create a "bubble," a space where what emerges will emerge, perhaps nothing. Or perhaps things we won't even perceive in the moment, which will reveal themselves much later, without us knowing they were born there. Allowing ourselves this unknown detour is so hard to pinpoint yet so essential.

## **Daring and legitimizing**

For this moment to truly open and deepen, for this time to unfold like a vast space, we must dare to be fully ourselves without fear. Being ourselves means daring to express, daring to reveal to others what lies within us, while listening to what lies within them. That is, not filling the void out of fear, not just showcasing ourselves to be recognized by others. Not seeking validation, yet still presenting ourselves, speaking to the other, because the other never fully knows us. What we'll share is who we are, each in depth. It's our being that will be shared in this moment, not our having (including intellectual having).

In this delicate, deeply invested sharing, it may seem extremely improbable and useless—but that's precisely the point. It's in our ability to take the improbable and the useless seriously, to give them space just as we do for useful things, that a potential development space can open—sometimes extremely vast—within a limited time we've sanctified together.

This is a rare practice, but one I believe we've all experienced at some point in our lives, if we're honest. I've formalized it here as a method, to legitimize it and, perhaps, help open these indispensable potential development spaces more often. I invite you to legitimize them. They are profoundly important workspaces. I can attest, and I think each of us can recall exceptional, unexpectedly important moments that arose by chance in life—moments I encourage us to cultivate a little more, without over-systematizing them, lest they lose their exceptional nature.

# Framework, purpose and transgression

**So as not to get lost along the way.**

*When the framework of a project becomes inadequate, transgressing it often allows for better achievement of the objectives by prioritizing lived experience over expected outcomes.*

## **When transgression can become essential**

When embarking on a project—whether cultural, therapeutic, or social—we set objectives and establish a framework to achieve them. Let’s take an example:

- The objectives may be therapeutic, such as helping people with disabilities build self-confidence to support their job search.
- The framework for achieving these objectives could be creating a video CV, with several steps (creativity, mastering speech, self-confidence within the group, etc.).

But if, during the project, we realize that the framework—the creation of a video CV—is no longer suited to the objectives because the participants are not progressing as quickly as initially anticipated, then staying true to the objectives means being able to adapt the framework and accepting that the outcome will differ from what was planned. We must transgress the initial framework to evolve it, ensuring we stay aligned with the core goals.

## **How to make this understood?**

This kind of change is not easy to grasp from the outside. To legitimize it, we must be able to narrate it, as external stakeholders—those not involved in the project’s process—may have expected a specific result. They might feel deeply disappointed or even believe that the absence of the “expected outcome” harms the

participants themselves, who didn't achieve what was initially intended. I believe it's always essential to return to the fundamental objectives, which are often about the journey, the experience.

If we take John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, for example, art is the lived experience. If the artistic object, the material production, differs from what was initially planned—but the experience was deeply engaging and constructive—then the final outcome being different is actually a great opportunity. In other words, transgressing the framework is often the best way to achieve a project's objectives if it becomes clear along the way that those objectives are no longer tenable or require a different path than originally envisioned. I'd even argue that this is one of the essential methodological keys to successful projects.

## **Sharing the living framework**

I'm not saying we shouldn't "push" participants to meet the initial objectives, as this can also foster motivation. But sometimes this push becomes external to their personal journey, their own desires, and they end up as puppets controlled by us, the facilitators. In that case, the result may be rewarding for the institution, but it won't represent as profound a personal enrichment for the participants—meaning the true objectives will not have been fulfilled.

However, to do this effectively, we must identify this shift with the participants themselves, articulating together that we've adjusted the framework for good reasons and that this change belongs even more fully to them.

## CHAPTER 9: COOPERATION AND ORGANIZATION

The best ideas, the most transformative projects, the most fruitful innovations rarely emerge from the solitude of an office. They arise from encounter, from the friction of perspectives, from collective intelligence in action. But how many meetings do we leave feeling we've wasted our time? How many days of collective work end without lasting bonds being forged between participants? This chapter brings together a toolbox of collective facilitation methods, forged through years of practice in highly varied contexts—professional training, action research, team coaching, cultural events. These are not recipes to be applied mechanically, but frameworks to be adapted, reinvented according to situations and audiences.

The first section, “Thematic Groups,” proposes a method for collective elaboration on specific subjects. The principle is simple: divide a large group into smaller teams (fewer than ten people to foster rich and attentive exchanges), assign them a working theme, and structure their reflection in three phases—brainstorming, structuring, sharing experiences. The challenge lies in moving beyond a simple list of ideas to deepen the embodiment of the subject. What proves truly enriching is the sharing of experiences: how has each person concretely lived the topic being addressed? These experience narratives weave the fabric of collective reflection grounded in reality.

The second section, “The Workshop of Lasting Connections,” addresses a concern too often neglected: what happens afterward? One can live through a fascinating day, develop important things with other partici-

pants, and leave without knowing how to contact them again. The workshop of lasting connections proposes a two-part framework: first, an exchange in pairs where each person presents their project and expectations; then a circulation period where each participant distributes five sheets with their contact details to five other people, agreeing together on the concrete reasons for future reconnection. This is not simply collecting contact information, but creating a mutual commitment to extend the bond.

The third section, “Digital Traces for Building Connection,” addresses the question of continuity between work sessions. How does each person maintain the link from one session to the next? The common method of meeting minutes, written much later, serves more as a memory tool than a connection, and who really reads them? I propose creating deep traces of activities (audio recordings, transcriptions, photos, mind maps, video rushes, etc.) and sharing them immediately via an accessible digital space. These traces become an “equipped memory,” as philosopher Bernard Stiegler put it, which gives power and autonomy to participants, allowing them to freely take hold of the material to enrich their own work.

The fourth section, “Pair Exchanges,” proposes an exercise in collective intelligence that may seem simple but leads much further than it appears. The principle: move through the space, stop at the signal, form pairs with the person beside you. For one minute thirty seconds, the first person argues a viewpoint on a given subject, the second listens. Then switch. Afterward, form new pairs and take up the same subject by adopting the opposing view. This is not a debate; it is an exercise in elaboration and listening where each person constructs their own thinking by confronting it with opposing perspectives. A democratic and emancipato-

ry experience.

The fifth section, “World Café,” presents a proven technique of collective intelligence, in a version personalized through years of practice. The World Café is useful when there is a need to collectively create ideas, working paths, or concrete projects. The framework articulates an initial collective brainstorming to define themes, then group rotations between several tables, each table having a host who takes notes and summarizes for newcomers. Thus, all participants contribute to each theme, and the reflection enriches layer upon layer. If this exercise is conducted with attentiveness, particularly in terms of rhythm, it can produce very concrete projects that will actually be implemented.

The sixth section, “Secret Advice,” proposes a powerful exercise to nourish creativity and collaboration. Each participant gives a three-minute pitch to present a project, an idea, a concern. After the pitch, no oral exchange: each person who listened writes one or two sentences of suggestions on a piece of paper, cuts out this small text, and brings it to the person who just pitched. Thus, each person leaves with as many written and intimate pieces of advice as there were participants present. These words constitute a precious asset: written rather than spoken aloud, they avoid any public judgment and create connection in intimacy.

The seventh section, “The Importance of Expression,” identifies an essential path to emancipation. The more I facilitate collective intelligence sessions, the more I realize that what most people lack is the capacity for expression: a legitimate space to give form to their singular thinking, their ideas, their projects, their sensibility. This seems obvious, but it is in fact extremely difficult to achieve. The facilitator’s role is not to “do”

but to set the frame, provide the tools, grant permission. The tool is very important: it is what gives autonomy, capability. Permission for expression, thanks to a framework provided by time, method, and materials, allows people to surpass themselves.

The eighth section, “Speech Assaulting the PowerPoint,” tackles a habit so widespread it seems natural. PowerPoint presentations harm collective intelligence by freezing exchanges—this is known, documented, criticized for a long time by statisticians, generals, elected officials. And yet they remain almost unavoidable. Why? Because the PowerPoint presentation actually serves two functions: structuring the meeting and serving as a deliverable. We think we’re killing two birds with one stone, but in doing so we render the meeting useless as a meeting: if the remaining trace is the prior PowerPoint, what has been transformed thanks to the presence of all these people? I propose that speech assault the PowerPoint, using for example live mind mapping to structure exchanges while leaving room for everyone’s contributions.

The ninth section, “The State of Openness,” proposes a democratic and transformative facilitation posture. Openness is not a passive attitude but a skill that develops: creating the space of possibilities, welcoming the unexpected, sharing energy without imposing it. This section explores the conditions of openness and the means to cultivate it.

The tenth section, “Reception,” offers an exercise in practicing interaction. How do we truly welcome what the other brings us? How do we create the conditions for active listening that transforms the listener as much as the speaker? A concrete protocol for working on this fundamental skill.

The eleventh section, “Collective Bibliography,” transforms the encounter with books into an encounter with oneself and with others. Taking photos of books that speak to us, sharing them, discovering those of others: a simple framework for creating connections from our references, our inspirations, our curiosities.

Finally, the twelfth section, “Systematizing Mutual Discovery Among Cultural Actors,” proposes methods for removing barriers to cooperation. Why don’t we know each other well enough among cultural actors in the same territory? How can we spark a future from mutual acquaintance? Concrete paths for breaking out of isolation and building living networks.

This chapter will be particularly useful for professionals who facilitate meetings, training sessions, workshops, and who seek to break free from conventional formats to truly mobilize collective intelligence. It will interest leaders of cultural organizations who wish to transform how their teams work. It will offer trainers a palette of directly transferable frameworks. Finally, it will give everyone tools for creating lasting connections, weaving networks, building together rather than simply crossing paths.

# Thematic groups

## **Elaborate together.**

*This method is a simplified and faster variation of the World Café method, which I have successfully implemented and tested. The goal is for each participant to contribute to the co-construction of ideas on given themes, leveraging collective intelligence.*

## How it works

Let's take an example. Imagine a group of 27 people. It is divided into three teams of nine. Each team has 30 minutes to work in parallel on a given topic. For example: *What are the qualities needed to effectively welcome young people in cultural and social structures within a city?* In each group, one person is designated to take notes and synthesize the ideas to present them later.

## Steps of the process

1. **Brainstorming** (10 minutes): Each participant proposes ideas on the theme, either orally or in writing (markers and paper are provided). This step aims to gather as many ideas as possible.
2. **Structuring** (5 minutes): The ideas are organized and structured, ideally visually (for example, in the form of a diagram). Tools like scissors, tape, or glue can be used to group or reorganize elements. This step lasts about 5 minutes.
3. **Sharing experiences** (10 minutes): Participants exchange personal experiences related to the proposals. For example, on the theme of welcoming, they might discuss how to remain kind in difficult situations.

Once these steps are completed, the groups remain at their tables and work on a new theme following the same process.

The challenge is to move beyond a simple list of ideas, which might seem to immediately answer the ques-

tion. What is enriching is to deepen the embodiment of the topic through the sharing of experiences.

## **Key points**

- Groups should consist of fewer than 10 people to encourage rich and attentive exchanges.
- It is essential to mix participants to include individuals from different services or positions.
- The structured exchange during the experience-sharing phase goes beyond informal discussion and aligns with collectively defined objectives.

## **Expected outcomes**

One of the main goals is to strengthen mutual understanding among participants and build trust within the group. Depending on the time available, two or three themes can be addressed (two often being sufficient).

## **Presentation of results**

At the end of the session, time is dedicated to a collective presentation. For example, if two themes were addressed by three groups:

- For each theme, one person per group summarizes orally in two minutes what was de-

veloped.

- During this oral presentation, the documents produced are projected using a visualizer (a small camera that projects the content on a large screen). This allows for a complementary approach between written and oral content: the written support facilitates collective listening.

Audio recordings made during these presentations can be saved and shared via a collaborative space (such as a *drive*). These recordings, along with the written documents and possible transcriptions, are then used to produce a synthesis. This synthesis can lead to concrete recommendations or even a charter developed by the group.

# The sustainable links workshop

## **Create meaningful connections in collaborative workshops.**

*This “Workshop of Sustainable Connections” encourages the creation of lasting bonds between participants in collective events. Each person exchanges their personalized contact details with five others, while jointly defining concrete reasons for future follow-up.*

## And what's next?

During moments of collective intelligence animation, what people experience can be very powerful and constructive. However, I believe it is important to think about what comes next, because one can leave an exciting day having developed important things with other participants, yet not know how to contact them again. Sometimes, we didn't dare to ask for their contact details, or we receive a list of all the attendees without knowing who is who, and without feeling authorized to reach out to them. This is why, at the end of a day for example, it can be very interesting to implement this rather original "Workshop of Sustainable Connections," which I will now describe.

## Method of the Workshop of Sustainable Connections

The goal is to forge connections that can potentially continue beyond the day. This workshop has two parts:

### First Part:

- The first part is quite similar to the [Pair Exchange Workshop](#). It involves using the same principle, except that the theme shared in pairs is to introduce oneself and explain to the other why they are there, what they expect, what they wish to do, and what their project is.
- For example, if one is an amateur artist,

they can explain their performance project. If in a professional setting, they can share their service project. It can also be an opportunity to share a utopian idea related to the context we are in.

- In any case, it is important to propose a theme that is both concrete and forward-looking during this exchange.

### **Second Part:**

- The second part involves asking participants to take 5 half-A4 sheets and, on these sheets, to write their contact details, their name, their role, or any other information they wish to share. They can use markers to make this information aesthetically pleasing.
- Then, they take a photo of their designed contact details and immediately share this photo via a QR Code in a dedicated digital space. This space can be a simple WhatsApp group, but the ideal is a photo gallery system where all the photos can be viewed visually. This way, participants are made responsible for creating a visual and unique list, which works much better in mnemonic terms than a simple anonymously sent Excel sheet.
- Next, in an open space where everyone is moving around, each person distributes their 5 sheets to 5 others and receives in return 5 sheets from other participants. At the end, everyone leaves with the complete contact details of 5 other participants.

## Why?

There is an important instruction during this exchange: it's not just about handing over a paper without speaking, but about engaging in a bit of dialogue, even if briefly. The exercise lasts 15 minutes, and the goal is to have conversed with 5 people in this short time. That's about 3 minutes per person, but the timing isn't overly rigid, as it's a more relaxed moment at the end of the day. This exercise works particularly well after participants have already shared experiences together.

## How?

When someone hands me their sheet, we must agree together, by writing on the sheet itself, on reasons that might lead us to get back in touch. So, I receive the sheet, and it's up to me, in a way, to commit to contacting this person again for a reason we define together. This reason isn't necessarily functional, and I emphasize this: it can be related to a deep exchange, a sharing of ideas, or a discussion on a specific topic.

There is a form of investment, even if the word is a bit strong, in a future connection to be pursued. This exercise allows for creating connections that go beyond simply collecting contact details, promoting meaningful and engaging interactions.

# Digital traces as a link

**The power of digital to bring people together.**

*The immediate sharing of activity traces (recordings, photos, mind maps) via an accessible digital space strengthens the connection between sessions, fosters participants' autonomy, and enriches the collective memory of the group.*

## The Importance of Connecting the Dots

When organizing successive work sessions, whether in the context of training or cultural activities, the question of the connection between each session arises. How does each individual make the link from one session to the next? For example, in a professional training program with three days per month, how does one internally connect? Or, in the case of a video club that meets every Wednesday afternoon, how does a participant connect from one week to the next? Whether it's a theater workshop, a music class, or a series of meetings to develop a project among different partners (e.g., via videoconference), the question of connection is essential.

Here, I propose a rather general but functional vision to improve the quality of this connection. If we improve the quality of the internal connection for each individual from one session to the next, then, from session to session, what is produced will be of higher quality and deeper.

The common method is the meeting report, for which one person is responsible. However, writing a report takes time, and often it is sent much later. Though useful, who really reads it? Ultimately, it serves more as a memory tool than a connection tool, which is not quite the same thing, even though the two are related.

For activities like music, video, or painting, it seems important to create deep traces of these activities. For music, it could be the recording of certain performances. For video, it could include the raw footage shot that day or the edits made at that stage. For painting, it could be photographs of the stages of creating the paintings. Written summaries by partici-

pants about what was seen or done can also be considered.

It is entirely possible to produce and record these traces; it's easily accessible today. The session facilitator can, for example, create a mind map in real time to keep track of what was said.

## **The Digital Sharing Space**

I recommend sharing these traces in a digital sharing space (a “drive”), immediately after the day, meeting, or activity, ideally within the following hour. This way, all individuals who leave that day or activity depart with a QR code or a link sent by email, giving access to this digital space where all traces are stored.

Until the next meeting or activity, some participants will consult these traces, while others will not. Everyone is free. Some will share these traces with others, and they will remain accessible over time. The idea is that they are hosted permanently, serving both as a link between sessions and as a narrative of the entire process.

## **The Virtues of Tooled Memory**

Another virtue of these traces is their usefulness in welcoming individuals who may have missed a session. They can thus familiarize themselves with the traces and reconnect more easily to what was done. I have also observed that some individuals seize these

traces to create something on their own. For example, during a video workshop, a teenager took the initiative to entirely sort through the raw footage shot the previous week, categorizing images and sounds into a typology. No one had asked him to do this, but thanks to these digital traces, he was able to freely seize them and enrich his experience. Without these traces, he wouldn't have been able to do it and would have been less involved in the project.

Thus, this digital trace tool empowers and fosters autonomy among participants. It allows them to develop something for themselves, enrich themselves with what was done previously, and prepare more deeply for the next session, while nurturing the collective project.

These traces also allow participants to remember the process they experienced. Often, we forget the steps and details of what happened, and we don't always realize the value of our own contribution. Thanks to these traces, each individual can assess their journey and recognize the progress made. It also allows facilitators or project funders to gain concrete insight into the process.

## **Technical Implementation**

In practice, a new folder is created for each session, dated, and organized into subfolders to store the traces of what was done. These traces can include text, images, sound, or video. The tool used must be simple to access, allowing participants to view the traces (e.g., as a photo gallery) and download them for further work.

The tool must be extremely simple to use, accessible without complications (e.g., without complex access codes). Personally, I recommend web tools not indexed by search engines but accessible directly via a link. For years, I've been using this type of tool without encountering issues, as we operate in a space of mutual responsibility. Of course, one can also choose to add access codes, but caution is needed: if access is too complicated, the trace becomes a barrier rather than a connection.

For example, I use this script, which I install in a specific subfolder for each project in a non-indexed area of my web hosting: [Single-file PHP file manager, file sharing, file browser and photo gallery](#).

## **Memory, Connection, and Autonomy**

In summary, these digital traces, accessible and permanent, help create connections, strengthen participants' autonomy, and enrich the collective project. They become a *tooled memory*, as Bernard Stiegler put it, a memory that can be accessed freely, without constraint, to connect and move forward together.

## Exchanges in pairs

**To give everyone a voice.**

*A collective intelligence exercise that stimulates thinking and listening. Working in pairs, each participant builds his or her own argument on a given topic, alternating between opposing points of view. A democratic and emancipating experience.*

## A genuine space for expression and elaboration

This collective intelligence exercise can be used as an ice-breaker, but like the “Sit-Stand” exercise, in my opinion, it can lead much further. It’s a much more powerful space for elaboration, encounter and expression than it might at first appear.

Here’s how to get started:

- The group is asked to move around the space, to occupy the stage, to move not in circles, but in a lively way, with different rhythms, for a short time (30 seconds or 1 minute).
- It’s a way of getting yourself moving, mentally too.
- The rules of the game will have been set out in advance, so that people know what we’re going to suggest.
- At one point, you say “top”, everyone stops and you pair up with the person you’re standing next to, preferably someone you know little or nothing about. You can, of course, look for another person if you find yourself next to someone you know very well.

With these pairs, the exercise will last three minutes, in two sequences of one and a half minutes each:

- For one and a half minutes, the first person in the pair will explain something to the second, who will listen, and for the second and a half minutes, the second person will argue his or her point of view on the same

subject. It's an exercise in elaboration and listening, not discussion.

- For example, if we take the subject of social networks, the first person's role is to define social networks for the other person, and explain why social networks bring so much to humanity.
- Once the two people have exchanged ideas, the group is asked to move back into space.
- Then we say "top", everyone stops and forms new pairs.
- And now, we're going to take the same subject, do the same exercise, but take the controversy. In other words, if we take the example of social networks, this time we're going to talk about why social networks are dangerous for humanity. It's not a question of pretending, but of really looking for arguments for, in the first exercise, and against, in the second.
- In this exercise, the participants don't introduce themselves, but each develops a personal argument on a subject that echoes the topic of the day's training, the meeting, etc., and that's why we're going to talk about why social networks are dangerous for humanity.

## **Giving everyone the chance to speak, in a democratic system**

At the start of a meeting or training session, one of the great advantages of this exercise is that it gives everyone a chance to speak, and each person is invited

to elaborate his or her thoughts. It's a well-known fact that when we put our thoughts together to explain something to someone else, we're also building our own thoughts. On the one hand, this is enriching for the listener, but it's also extremely structuring for the speaker. That's why this exercise is not a discussion, but an elaboration, each in turn. What's more, this exercise allows everyone to speak without fear of judgment. You're with another person whose social status you may not know, so it's simply two human beings talking. We enter directly and immediately into a profound exchange, stripped of the trappings of hierarchical social reality.

Speaking up can be particularly difficult, and many people find it hard, for fear of the impact of their words: fear of being ridiculed, fear of not having anything interesting to say, and so on. In this exercise, everyone speaks at the same time, you're invited and encouraged to do so, there's nothing at stake, so you do it!

That's the whole point of this kind of dynamic: people find themselves doing something important, potentially very constructive for them, in intellectual, conceptual, self-confidence-building terms, etc., that they might never have allowed themselves to do on their own.

For me, it's a very democratic exercise, which also sends out the message that everyone has the right to speak, that everyone has the absolute right to express themselves. Our fears and inhibitions are not only detrimental to our personal development, but also to the exercise of democracy. We need to have the confidence to be able to enrich the collective with our own point of view. It's also very beautiful and democratic that no one can pass judgment or exercise power over

what anyone says, because it's impossible to listen to everyone at the same time!

We can then build on what each person has said during this time to begin in-depth work on the subject that brings us together, producing writings, podcasts or other elaborations.

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*This activity was passed on to me by Sonia Leplat, who received it from Christelle Blouët.*

# World Café

**A tried-and-tested technique that's always being reinvented.**

*The World Café is a collective intelligence technique that fosters the collaborative creation of ideas and concrete projects. Through successive rotations, groups enrich different themes, allowing each participant to contribute to the overall reflections within a structured yet flexible framework.*

## World Café?

You've probably heard of, if not participated in or organized yourself, a World Café. It's a proven collective intelligence technique, but one that can be adapted to suit individual needs. My version, which has proven effective in numerous professional situations, is a personal adaptation of this method.

The World Café is useful when there's a need to collectively generate ideas, work paths, or projects. It's an exercise that can lead to concrete actions, which has happened several times in the World Cafés I've organized.

### Concrete Example

Let's take an example: a number of cultural leaders from several French institutes in a specific geographic area participated in a **World Café I organized**. The goal was to jointly define film distribution projects that could both better reach target audiences and create synergy between the different institutes.

### Step 1: Collective Brainstorming

For me, the first step in a World Café is to conduct a collective brainstorming session. I do this using mind mapping. This allows the group to define concrete work paths or specific themes that will later be explored in detail by the working groups. Of course, themes can also be imposed for a World Café, but in the example I'm using, there were no imposed

themes. The general brainstorming session allowed ideas to emerge, such as:

- Organizing a joint event during the Cannes Film Festival to leverage its international communication in regional branches abroad.
- Better organizing the circulation of films and their directors across territories, etc.

Thus, it was necessary to start with this brainstorming.

## **Step 2: Organizing the Tables**

After the brainstorming, tables are set up. Each table corresponds to one of the work themes. The participants are divided into as many groups as there are tables. Each table has a host who will facilitate the discussion and take notes. The initial idea is that each group contributes to each of the themes.

Imagine there are four themes (four tables) and around thirty participants. This makes roughly four groups of eight people. For twenty minutes, they sit at a table and work together to develop their reflections, proposals, or concrete ideas to address the question or theme at hand. They have large sheets of paper, markers, and the table host takes notes on all their contributions.

## **Step 3: Group**

## **Rotation**

After 20 minutes, the groups rotate and move to another table. When they arrive at the new table, the host gives them a quick summary of what was discussed during the first round. Additionally, the written notes are preserved, allowing the newcomers to avoid repeating what has already been said and to enrich the reflections started by the previous group. Then, a third round, followed by a fourth round: in this way, everyone contributes to each table.

### **Step 4: Break and Preparation for the Presentation**

Finally, there's a break of at least fifteen minutes. During this break, the table hosts prepare their public presentation using a graphic representation of the project.

### **Step 5: Collective Presentation**

Each table host presents what was developed in five to ten minutes, followed by a ten-minute debate on the topic to further enrich it. In the example I gave, very concrete projects emerged from this World Café and were implemented within the French institutes.

## **Tips for Facilitation**

If this exercise is conducted with attentiveness, particularly in terms of pacing (for example, if you notice that participants need 25 or 30 minutes instead of 20), it's important to remain flexible and adaptable. You really need to guide the participants, and in this case, it can lead to very rich outcomes. Rigidity in organization should be avoided.

## Secret tips

### **In-depth mutual enrichment.**

*A powerful exercise to nurture creativity and collaboration: each participant presents a project or idea in 3 minutes, then receives intimate, written advice from the others. Without public judgment, these precious words weave bonds, inspire new perspectives and reinforce mutual enrichment. A dynamic of listening, generosity and sharing that transforms exchanges.*

This is a session in which each person presents themselves to the others to make a pitch of no more than three minutes. The aim is to present a project, an idea, a concern, or something they'd like to implement. It's not about sharing something perfect, but rather about sharing desires and intentions, with the dynamic of receiving suggestions from the other people present.

During the pitch, the other participants listen attentively. Once the pitch is over, there is no oral exchange. The person who has presented sits down, and all those who have listened write down one or two sentences of suggestions for them on a piece of paper. They don't fill up the whole sheet, but do it in two or three minutes. Then they cut out the small text with a pair of scissors, leaving only the written word. This cutting stage is important, as it's an integral part of the exercise, of the value we give to what has been written.

Then, each participant stands up in turn to bring his or her word of advice to the person who has just pitched. The latter remains seated and receives the words one after the other. Once all the tips have been given, the next person stands up to pitch, and the exercise is repeated.

In this way, each person leaves with as many intimate pieces of written advice as there are participants present. These words are a precious commodity, as they are written and not expressed orally, thus avoiding any public judgment. This creates a bond and can bring new ideas or perspectives.

The aim of this exercise was above all to encourage strong mutual enrichment. Each person dared to expose their ideas to the others and put themselves in a position to receive. And each person was also in a posi-

tion to listen attentively, to think about what could really be useful to the other as advice to help him in his business, and offered the contribution to the other. In this way, each person develops his or her own abilities, for the benefit of others.

This exercise can be carried out at the very start of an interaction, as it establishes from the outset a dynamic of attention to the other and sharing.

# The importance of expression

## **Identifying an essential path to emancipation.**

*Expression, often overlooked, is a key element for individual and collective emancipation. By providing a legitimate framework, appropriate tools, and permission to express oneself, everyone can overcome their limits, create, and achieve self-realization. Collective intelligence relies on this ability to liberate and value the ideas and talents of all.*

The more I facilitate collective intelligence sessions, the more I realize that what most people lack is the capacity for expression. What does this mean? A legitimate space to shape their unique thoughts, ideas, projects, and sensitivities. It may seem obvious, but it is actually extremely difficult to achieve and holds great promise.

This was recently confirmed by feedback from a student after a podcast workshop where I had students work individually and in groups to create podcasts. There were various approaches. They struggled—it was far from easy for them—but they managed to create real, concrete, and expressive outputs: they made music with instruments I brought, recorded high-quality sounds with computers and microphones I provided, defined topics based on books I supplied, created tutorials using their own skills, and had a lot of fun discovering their ability to create sounds with musical instruments, especially electronic ones, that I had brought. It was a challenging journey for them.

During this time, I was doing other things, like answering emails, leaving them to work independently. I was in a state of floating awareness, occasionally offering small pieces of advice, but they were the ones doing the work, investing themselves. I provided the framework, the permission, the encouragement. Then they took over. My presence was important because it legitimized these activities, but I didn't need to do much in the moment. All the tools I brought—the large suitcase filled with books, musical instruments, sound equipment, and computers—gave them autonomy and capability. Tools are crucial.

One student thanked me at the end of the session, saying it was an amazing experience. Meanwhile, during the session, I felt like I was doing almost nothing. In

reality, what I did was set the framework, give them permission to create something autonomously using the tools. So, what I actually did was prepare all that material, which I had carefully chosen for them, transported by taxi, train, and tram. From the other end of France, I carried that extremely heavy suitcase. That was the work I did—the framework I provided. In fact, I did a lot, but not in the way usually expected, because in the moment, it felt like I was doing nothing.

What I conclude from this experience, as well as from many collective intelligence sessions I facilitate, is that the proposal of expression, the encouragement to express, and especially the permission to express—thanks to a framework provided by time, method, materials, etc.—allows people to embark on a journey, to surpass themselves. In my view, this is an essential path for collective intelligence, meaning the emancipation of each individual from their prior limitations.

We all have self-imposed limits that hinder our true potential. Thanks to the framework, which provides permission, we emancipate ourselves—that is, we discover and experiment with our capabilities, expanding our knowledge. This happens through experience, which is what needs to be produced, and through expression, which is the most difficult thing to do on one's own. This space of permission for expression is where the collective has the most power, and the collective framework must be built to authorize and be capable of receiving and legitimizing these expressions, both before and after.

# Speech takes on PowerPoint

**For more useful collective exchanges.**

*PowerPoint presentations hinder collective intelligence by rigidifying exchanges—this is well-known and documented—yet they remain almost unavoidable. Here are some avenues for understanding and action to make collective exchanges more useful.*

## Why such hegemony of PowerPoint presentations?

Many important meetings have been structured for over 35 years now with the help of a tool: Microsoft's PowerPoint software, which has inspired many imitators. Clones can be found from other publishers, including in the open-source domain, with LibreOffice Impress, for example.

What I propose to question here, in order to offer paths for improvement, is not specifically a tool—PowerPoint—but rather the way it is used in the context of collective exchanges, and the major problems, it seems to me, that this usage creates for collective intelligence. The PowerPoint presentation has many flaws: it diminishes the collective intelligence capabilities of the assembled group and significantly affects the usefulness of the meetings and other events it helps structure. This is regularly discussed and documented, and I would like to make a constructive contribution to reinvesting the function of speech in human groups.

## A long-standing, well-argued critique

For critical references on PowerPoint, I recommend the book *The PowerPoint Thought: An Investigation into This Software That Makes You Stupid* by Frank Frommer (2010), the various publications by statistician [Edward Tufte](#), several U.S. Army generals (James Mattis or Herbert Raymond McMaster, who have spoken publicly on the subject), and, more recently, Pa-

Patrice Bessac, the mayor of Montreuil-sous-Bois, in a radio interview. The [Wikipedia page on PowerPoint](#) is quite enlightening and should, in my opinion, be read by those who use PowerPoint thinking they are doing the right thing.

Edward Tufte even goes so far as to blame the mode of thinking and interactions produced by PowerPoint presentations as one of the main reasons that led to the in-flight disintegration of the space shuttle Columbia on February 1, 2003. The mayor of Montreuil-sous-Bois, Patrice Bessac, has gone as far as outright banning PowerPoint presentations in meetings to make them efficient, productive, and sources of collective intelligence again—rather than boredom, rigid thinking, and stagnation.

But then why do we still so widely continue to use PowerPoint? There are the usual explanations, and I will add a new one.

What is usually said is that PowerPoint presentations are extremely reassuring. They structure the presentation to follow. But in truth, they are only reassuring for the speaker. Those listening are reassured by a speaker who does their job well—PowerPoint or not. But the habit of seeing PowerPoints is so ingrained that, indeed, a meeting without PowerPoint may not seem like a “real” meeting—not serious, structured, efficient, or professional...

And of course, there are a thousand ways to use PowerPoint. Those who use it for Pecha Kucha presentations (6 minutes and 40 seconds during which 20 images are displayed for 20 seconds each, with no text on the slides, serving as a support for a varied, lively, and surprising presentation on a topic) tend to be extremely dynamic.

Some people—and this is obviously the worst—write everything on the PowerPoint. There are long lists, documents, and during the meeting, they simply read what's displayed on the screen. It's almost idiotic because the people in the room know how to read! What's the point of speech if it just repeats what we can already read for ourselves?

Then, for most slightly more reasonable uses, thanks to the PowerPoint document, we see the main documents and information on the screen, a structure for advancing the reasoning, and the speaker uses it as a support for speech that goes far beyond what is shown on the screen.

## **The symbolism of the “important” meeting**

The first serious problem with this, before I get to my new contribution on the subject, is the reduction of possible interactions with the audience. Because the PowerPoint presentation is pre-made, the audience has very little room to express themselves. Yet their input could steer the subject toward something more important, more interesting, since it's a meeting—a collective construction.

I'm talking about the PowerPoint presentation in the context of an exchange between human beings. Sending a PDF file, like sending an article or a book for people to review individually, and creating these documents with PowerPoint—why not? In this case, PowerPoint allows for easily creating visually appealing documents and offers them for reading, which is perfectly fine. The problem lies in using this rigid logic of writ-

ing for a moment when people have been brought together. If we gather people, it's precisely so they can interact and create something greater together than what came from one person alone. Otherwise, we might as well just send documents, not meet, and then exchange comments—or read the materials beforehand and gather only to discuss them.

The well-identified problem with PowerPoint presentations is the reduction of potential for exchange and cooperation in the moment. Now, if it's a lecture-style presentation for thousands of people, interaction isn't possible—and in that case, fine. But the issue is that, in small groups, we're using a method that's efficient for large, interaction-less gatherings. Thus, the PowerPoint presentation takes on a symbolic aura, associated with the fact that "big" meetings are done with PowerPoint. And we apply the same methods to our "small" meetings to give them an air of seriousness, professionalism, as if they were "big" ones! That's the mistake: not considering the context—a real lack of self-confidence. And above all, in doing so, we shut the door to the potential for mutual enrichment, which is the best thing we can hope for from a meeting.

And why is this so boring? Because using a PowerPoint presentation for 6 minutes and 40 seconds, or for a short talk in front of a huge audience, or for a 12-minute TED talk as a support for speech, works very well. But for a two-hour meeting or a two-day training session... without realizing it, thinking we're adding value, we're actually perverting the essence of it.

## **The Dual Detrimental Function of PowerPoint Presentations**

What I want to highlight—something I haven't seen in critiques of PowerPoint presentations so far—is the fact that, though we're well aware of it, PowerPoint actually serves two functions, and this is a major flaw:

- On one hand, the function of structuring a meeting,
- On the other hand, the function of being the deliverable of the meeting: "You'll send us the PowerPoint!"

Thus, thanks to PowerPoint, we convince ourselves we're being highly efficient and professional, killing two birds with one stone!

We prepare the meeting, we outline its progression—sometimes, people who want it to be interactive even include slides in their PowerPoint that say: "Ten minutes of open discussion." It's written in the PowerPoint. So, despite the PowerPoint, they try to create moments of interaction. This makes them feel serious, professional, and legitimate—all the more so because the PowerPoint serves as tangible proof that the meeting happened and of what took place in it. It validates that we really worked, since we have the content in the presentation, what we call the "deliverable."

Indeed, having written documentation after a meeting is useful for sharing and building on what comes next. As the saying goes, "Words fly away, writings remain." But the real problem is that this particular document was created before the meeting.

PowerPoint eliminates the need to write meeting minutes. It both structures the meeting itself and serves as its record. But what this creates is a meeting that was, quite simply, useless as a meeting! I'm not saying the information in the PowerPoint or the speaker's remarks was useless—it may have been entirely important and valuable. But why hold a meeting if no one could contribute anything beyond it? And if something did happen beyond the slides, we have no record of it, because only the original PowerPoint remains.

So, we have a meeting prepared using a PowerPoint, run using a PowerPoint, and whose only trace is that same pre-existing PowerPoint. But what was transformed thanks to the presence of all those people in the room? There, we have absolutely no record. This is a serious problem, because things must have happened during that meeting that could have added great value—which was the whole point.

This was the crux of Edward Tufte's critique of the investigation following the launch of Columbia on January 16, 2003. PowerPoint after PowerPoint, by simplifying thought, ended up obscuring the real issue—details that emerged during the meetings were lost because they weren't captured in the "simplified flow of thought" imposed by the presentations. Information about the cause of the impending disaster was known and documented but wasn't accounted for in the presentations. As a result, the problem went unaddressed, and upon re-entry into the atmosphere 15 days later, on February 1, 2003, the space shuttle disintegrated mid-flight.

So, PowerPoint reassures—and above all, it tries to suppress the power of speech, the transformative power of speech, which is always frightening yet is precisely what allows us to change the world. And if we

gather, it's to be collectively useful, to advance the subject we're working on together. It's not just to validate what the person who wrote the PowerPoint assumed—otherwise, why were we even there?

## **Speech launching an assault on PowerPoint presentations**

I propose that speech rise up against PowerPoint presentations! Organizing dialogue among human beings is obviously far more difficult, complicated, risky, adventurous, creative, productive, and transformative than simply preparing a PowerPoint presentation—which, by the way, can take a lot of time but isn't real work. Making room for speech actually requires much more effort than creating a PowerPoint, because we let go of the illusion of control (often mistaken for competence) and risk the meeting spiraling in all directions, potentially yielding nothing.

Indeed, it's far harder to prepare, facilitate, and summarize a meeting without PowerPoint—one where everyone has a role as a contributor, even if some contribute more than others. But if we embark on this unsettling adventure, we'll have to work harder. We'll feel on edge, exposed. We'll need to invent interactive frameworks. We'll have to find ways to synthesize ideas, forging common ground from the dissenting thoughts of all participants. We'll need to manage speaking time.

Yet if we embrace this level of rigor, we might hold fewer meetings—but each one will be far, far more

prepared than with PowerPoint, even if it doesn't appear so, since there's no pre-packaged deliverable. Our preparatory work might consist of scattered notes, intentions, or organizational ideas we adjust on the fly based on how things unfold. It may seem less "professional" than a PowerPoint, but it's anything but! And so, each meeting could truly become a moment of meaningful transformation, thanks to the immense power of speech—if it's given space and structure. PowerPoints, often unintentionally, muzzle that power.

Here's a small trick I use often, with great success: while people are talking, I take live notes on-screen, using mind maps, capturing every contribution. This provides a flexible structure for the meeting, built by the participants themselves. We open the floor to everyone's input while simultaneously displaying the evolving discussion, allowing the group to see collective thinking take shape—and intervene, request edits, or refine ideas.

Ideally, use two screens: one for live notes and another to display documents (which can still be essential). The visibility of shared note-taking turns it into a real-time synthesis, co-created by all as they watch it unfold. I also strongly prefer prepared documents—images, for example, numbered if needed—sent one after another. It's easy to jump around the list, reorder, or pull up another if the discussion demands it. With PowerPoint, people often end up scrambling backward and forward through slides—trapped by pre-formatting. But with documents in a folder (displayed as thumbnails), we can follow the planned sequence or deviate freely. We remain agile.

# The State of Openness

**For democratic and transformative facilitation.**

*How can we cultivate a welcoming posture that allows everyone to contribute fully? Openness is not a method but an inner state that transforms our facilitation practices.*

## **The facilitation posture: creating the space of possibilities**

In any activity, and I will focus here on cultural mediation, when we occupy a facilitation position, our role consists of offering others a space where they can journey, contribute, enrich themselves and enrich the project, whether professional, artistic or personal.

To generate these benefits, the coordination position must, in my view, be considered in a state of openness. This is a form of trust towards others, an inner grounding sufficiently solid not to worry if participants take us towards horizons different from those we had imagined. If the group disrupts our initial framework and the organization of the shared moment unfolds differently than planned, it's because there are good reasons, emerging in the moment, to which we have been able to give space. Our role then consists of maintaining a framework beneficial to the collective, allowing everyone to make their contribution. This is the whole principle of democracy, which requires much more work on oneself than autocracy (the belief that we are more right than others, and that we abuse power).

## **Openness as a democratic lever**

This posture demands openness from us on all levels: the subjects addressed, the modes of organization, everything. **Our capacity for openness directly determines the intensity of the democratic experi-**

**ence.** A person who is not very open, rigid in their methods or in the subjects to be addressed, will limit through their facilitation the group's contributions. Contributions will certainly emerge, but they will remain constrained by this lack of openness, thus creating a relatively weak degree of democracy. Conversely, the deeper the democratic experience, the more it transforms its context and moves the community towards new and more adapted directions, enriched by all the contributions made possible.

This is not just about words, but concrete attitudes: looks, ways of organizing space, ways of welcoming, a relaxed and open inner state, gestures that give everyone their place. These are the manifestations of an authentic state of openness.

## **Developing one's capacity for openness**

The question then becomes: how to develop this capacity for openness when occupying the role of facilitation, animation, as a mediator, as a boss, as a teacher or as an artist? Several paths are available to us. This is more of a capacity than a skill, because the same person can, depending on their state at the moment, manifest great openness one day and struggle to achieve it the next.

### **First path: Methodological preparation**

The first point consists of calming our methodological concerns. We must have explored from all angles the planned course of the day or work session, have discussed it with other participants, have confronted it with others' perspectives. For this, we must integrate

into our work methods official, legitimate and paid preparation times for all stakeholders. **Preparing in several stages constitutes the guarantee of a capacity for openness absolutely indispensable to the success of the shared moment.**

To prepare is to plow the ground of our projections about the organization of the moment to come. It's thinking, rethinking, modifying. Yes, it takes time, but **this self-preparation aims less at producing the perfect document or schedule than at going through this journey several times to anchor ourselves, to create an intimacy with the situation we are going to facilitate.** Thanks to this intimacy, fruit of repetitions that weave in us the necessary neural connections, we will be fully present to our proposal. We won't even need to think about it consciously anymore: it will be integrated within us.

This intimacy gives us the capacity for openness and flexibility. **Our meticulous and repeatedly revisited preparations paradoxically bring us the flexibility necessary for the lived moment.** We know that we will be able to "land on our feet" even if things happen differently than planned, because we carry within us all the issues, objectives, purposes and expectations of this day, with the capacity to evolve them if necessary. This is again the essence of democracy: being able to evolve the system itself to always stay as close as possible to the objectives for the common good.

### **Second path: Physical preparation**

This path may seem trivial, but it is essential. A few physical exercises, stretches, jumping in place, and other movements are enough to create a sensation of mobility in the body, regardless of our strength or flexibility. It's simply about putting one's body in motion,

even for just two or three minutes. This physical mobility releases a capacity for mental movement that is quite beneficial.

This mobile energy, acquired through our prior physical preparation, naturally radiates into the group we are facilitating. It imprints a dynamic that participants gradually embrace, as if we were setting the tone through our mere physical and energetic presence set in motion.

## **Shared energy without imposing it**

Often, in collective moments, we observe a certain inertia at the start. After about fifteen minutes, energy circulates better and people enter a more fluid state of cooperation. Prior physical preparation allows the group to dive more quickly into this collaborative state. We propose a level of “vibrational frequency,” and others can synchronize to this energy of movement, without needing to do these exercises themselves. They benefit from our physical preparation, which allows them to enter personal and collective energy more quickly.

Some collective intelligence approaches invite participants to move in space. While the intention is commendable, this approach presents risks: it can be perceived as infantilizing or put those who are less comfortable with their bodies in difficulty. Experienced as an obligation, it can produce the opposite effect: people move physically while resisting internally to protect their integrity.

On the other hand, when we ourselves embody this en-

ergy without imposing anything, we emanate a quality of presence to which everyone can freely synchronize, in their own way. We don't impose a method; we propose an encounter based on our own state of openness, which is both mental and physical. We become an open door, inviting people to enter this universe while fully respecting their dignity and their own rhythm.

# Reception

## **Interaction practice exercise.**

*An activity to explore welcoming and interaction: each person alternates between welcoming and being welcomed, experiences strong emotions, and discovers group dynamics. The goal: to create connections, establish a supportive framework, and reflect on each person's role in interactions.*

## **Method, with a group of 30 people**

I designed and co-created this exercise to explore the theme of welcoming.

For example, with a group of 30 people, 10 chairs are arranged in a circle. The activity takes place in three rounds (each lasting 5 minutes):

- In the first round, 10 people sit on the chairs and are tasked with welcoming the other participants moving around the space.
- In the second round, 10 different people take their places on the chairs.
- In the third round, the final 10 participants sit down. This way, everyone experiences being both a welcomer and someone being welcomed.

This exercise is well-suited for addressing the theme of welcoming. However, I believe it can also be adapted to explore other topics, particularly interaction. There are twice as many people moving around as there are welcomers. As a result, some may end up welcoming groups, while others welcome individuals. Those moving around may sometimes feel welcomed but can also feel excluded if no one approaches them. Similarly, welcomers may occasionally find themselves alone, with no one coming to them.

## **Emotions and the Framework**

This exercise evokes strong emotions in participants, both in their interactions and personal experiences,

tied to the themes of interaction and individual roles. The instruction I gave was: “What does welcoming mean?” For the welcomer, it’s not about providing information but about showing interest in the person being welcomed, building a connection, asking questions, understanding their needs, and listening attentively. It is the responsibility of the seated person to create a supportive framework for the person they are welcoming.

This approach to building a framework is crucial in interactions, especially for someone in an organizational role, dealing with beneficiaries or partners. It involves establishing a framework that fosters connection, dialogue, co-creation, or service delivery.

## **The Theme of Interaction or Service**

While this exercise was designed to explore welcoming, I believe it can also serve as a useful foundation for addressing other topics, particularly those related to interaction or the service one aims to provide. The emotions experienced during the exercise enrich subsequent reflections, as they are rooted in the participants’ personal experiences.

Additionally, during this exercise, some participants may face challenges, while others may succeed at certain moments. Observing how others act around you is also part of the process. This informal exchange is incredibly enriching, as it allows participants to learn from and discover each other’s approaches.

# Collective bibliography

## **An encounter with oneself through books.**

This activity is very useful at the beginning of meetings, gatherings, or workdays. The idea is to bring a number of books that address the topic being worked on, or that are related to it, and to display them on a large table. Of course, to do this, you need to have a large library! But I believe a library is a true asset, as it allows for deepening any subject.

## **Meeting books, meeting oneself**

Upon arrival, participants are simply invited to browse the books as they wish, even during the welcome coffee. Each person establishes a unique connection with a book, often without knowing why. They feel drawn to read this or that book. There is something organic in this process—a form of thinking, relating, and self-discovery through dialogue with books.

As an icebreaker, this approach immediately engages each person's unique perspective and their singular encounter with a book that is equally unique.

From the very first moment of arrival, this collective space allows everyone to embark on a personal exploration. Those who don't enjoy books are not obligated to participate—there's no pressure, it's not a constraint.

## **Photographing the books**

Participants are encouraged to use their phones to take photos of the covers of the books that interest them, as well as the back covers or even quotes inside the books. The activity can also be varied by suggesting they choose three books, arrange them creatively side by side, and photograph the composition. These arrangements are often surprising and revealing.

Then, using a simple QR code for digital sharing, participants are invited to upload these photos immediately. The goal of this shared space is to keep these photos accessible to everyone.

In this way, the bibliography becomes collective and subjective. It's not just a list of books, but a selection of works that have been browsed, explored, and personally documented, with a touch of creativity.

# **Systematize mutual discoveries between cultural players**

## **Removing obstacles to cooperation.**

*Common-sense proposal for better mutual understanding among cultural actors in the same territory.*

## **Why don't we know each other well enough?**

In France, within the cultural field, it is all too common to observe that actors within the same sector and territory do not deeply understand the nature of their counterparts' and partners' work, or only access it informally or sporadically, during rare professional gatherings they attend, which are often top-down in nature. Yet, in my view, mutual understanding of what others do is essential for progress and collective strength.

Being an artist, or simply working collectively within the realities of territories and their political challenges, requires understanding each other's dynamics in order to draw inspiration and cooperate more effectively, particularly across disciplines: culture, youth, social issues, health, justice, education...

The prerequisite for building a shared community is knowing one another, and opportunities to do so are far too rare or too informal. A suggestion? Take inspiration from what professional networks do at the territorial level, in a simple, concrete, and manageable way that fits into everyone's schedules.

## **How to drive the future through mutual understanding**

At the initiative of a municipality, department, or region, simply organize a weekly video conference meet-

ing, from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m., during which a cultural actor from the territory presents their activities, projects, challenges, successes, and vision for the future in detail. The schedule of which actor presents on which date would be shared with all stakeholders in the territory, and it is crucial that this be interdisciplinary within the cultural field: music, dance, cinema, theater, visual arts, amateur practices, circus, etc.

Each session would be recorded and transcribed by AI in a straightforward manner. With around forty work-weeks in a year, one year would not be enough to cover all actors. And some actors could return.

The idea is to keep it very simple to organize. Each actor is autonomous in how they use their one-hour slot, there is no discussion, it is simply a presentation. Their contact details are shared for potential follow-ups. Participation as a listener is optional. Gradually, this would provide extremely valuable and constructive knowledge.

# **PART V - TOWARDS A RENEWED CULTURAL SECTOR**

The previous parts established the diagnosis of a sector in crisis, explored theoretical frameworks for refoundation, proposed digital strategies and concrete methods to transform practices. This final part opens onto the future. Not a dreamed or fantasized future, but a future to be built, with clear-sightedness, based on reality as it is. The French cultural sector is going through a historic tipping point. Public funding is decreasing, citizens' cultural practices have massively migrated to digital spaces, institutions are losing their symbolic power of prescription and their political standing. Faced with these upheavals, two attitudes are possible: clinging to established positions and mourning a disappearing world, or seizing this crisis as an opportunity for democratic refoundation. I propose to resolutely explore the second path.

The first chapter, "Transformation of the Sector," begins with an observation that may seem provocative: it is not "culture" that is threatened, but the subsidized cultural sector. Culture, in its anthropological sense, is doing remarkably well: cultural practices have never been so widespread, but they are taking place elsewhere—on platforms, social networks, in digital communities. Citizens spend an average of 35 hours per week on online cultural practices, compared to a few hours at best in institutions. The paradigm has changed: disintermediation bypasses the prescriptive role of institutions, artists are in direct relationship with their audiences via networks, fan communities self-organize.

This chapter proposes to face this reality head-on, not to resign ourselves to it but to adapt to it and refound our usefulness within it. Cultural institu-

tions have become, in symbolic terms, the marginal cultures, orbiting around a center now constituted by digital cultures. This reversal is not a catastrophe: paradoxically, the loss of their power of domination can open institutions to more connections with citizens, who feel less humiliated within these cultures than they did before. The text explores concrete avenues: investing in culture where it is not expected (transportation, businesses, everyday spaces), developing a pedagogical role for professionals toward other sectors, rethinking artistic forms so they embrace new ways of life.

This chapter also directly addresses the difficult question of funding. Heated debates focus on amounts and forms, rather than substance: why and what culture are we funding with our taxes? The culture budget represents 0.6% of the state budget; budgetary decisions in the cultural field therefore have only a very weak overall impact. The real issue is not budgetary but political: what do we expect from public spending on culture? Do we want it to serve to maintain a hierarchical and postcolonial system, or to move beyond it? Actors who work toward respect for cultural rights exist, but remain marginalized, and are often the first affected by cuts.

The second chapter, “Artistic Roles and Practices,” offers a reflection on the place of artists in this new landscape. Three models coexist:

1. The artist as creative genius, who produces autonomous works destined to be contemplated by passive spectators—this is the dominant model of cultural democratization since Malraux.

2. The artist as mediator, who goes toward audiences to help them discover legitimate culture—an intermediate position that remains within a top-down logic.
3. The artist as facilitator of collective creation, who allows themselves to be transformed by the people they work with, creates spaces for exchange from which demanding works are produced—an approach of genuine cultural democracy, supported by cultural rights.

This chapter honestly addresses the tensions experienced by artists. Many experience the injunction toward cultural action as a constraint, and may even speak of “community service for culture.” Without intending to, these artists carry a class contempt based on very brutal cultural criteria. Other artists, on the contrary, feel comfortable with improvisation and sharing, would prefer to spend all their time co-creating with residents, but are constrained to produce the “real” show that alone will legitimize their actions. I advocate for an assumed diversity of postures: clarifying these positions would allow for building contexts more conducive to everyone’s emancipation.

This chapter also proposes distinguishing between “primary” cultural practices (those that touch on the intimate, the everyday, deep belongings) and “secondary” practices (those mediated by institutions). Cultural rights invite us to respect the former as much as the latter, not to hierarchize them. A “relational aesthetics” or “political aesthetics” could reposition the aesthetic criterion at the level of human and social relation-

ships, viewed as a form of art.

The third chapter, “Perspectives and Commitments,” concludes the book with a call to action. Faced with budget cuts, the public cultural sector must reconnect with its democratic mission. Beyond corporatism, professionals must strengthen their ties with citizens and fully assume their political responsibility.

This chapter opens with the concept of the “free institution,” an alternative to the logics of domination that structure the cultural field. Through my thirty-five years of experience, from the first short film screenings at university to the Pocket Films festival, I show how to institute without dominating, how to legitimize creators even before they have created. This approach, rooted in the values of cultural rights, opens spaces where the freedom to create is not only possible but legitimized from the outset, without having to pass through the filters of cultural domination.

I then question the structural fragility of cultural actors in the face of political decisions. From Arcadi in Île-de-France in 2018 to the Agence culturelle Grand Est in 2025, the disappearance of cultural structures in general indifference reveals a systemic problem: the invisibility of these institutions in the eyes of citizens. If citizens are unaware of the very existence of these structures, how could they defend their continuation? I develop the concept of antifragility applied to the cultural sector: building shared narratives, practicing institutional pedagogy, opening structures to citizens so they feel like stakeholders.

In this chapter I also analyze the limits of corpo-

ratist defense, based on the condemnation of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region for the suppression of subsidies to the Théâtre Nouvelle Génération. Drawing on Michel Schneider's analyses in *\*La comédie de la culture\** and on the striking text by Kader Attia and Eva Doumbia after the murder of Nahel, I show how the supposed "freedom of expression" of cultural institutions often masks the defense of privileges of a caste disconnected from citizens. When we say "our freedoms," who are we talking about? One only needs to look at the sociology of audiences in subsidized theater to understand that this is not freedom for all.

This chapter also returns to the lesson of the Covid period. The cultural sector was declared "non-essential" and closed in an authoritarian manner, with the almost unanimous assent of professionals, while in Belgium cultural centers collectively refused to close. This submission revealed a deep political fragility: if the link between subsidized culture and citizens had been strong, the population would not have accepted having this link taken away. The current funding crisis is an opportunity to ask this question: why do attacks on the cultural sector pass "like a letter in the mail" with citizens, while other attacks on other sectors of public life spark mobilizations?

I clearly distinguish public culture from commercial culture. Economic logic is not relevant for defending democratic values. Ratings must not be the criterion. The criterion must be territorial cooperation, duration, listening to citizens' needs. This weaving into the political space will support the entire democratic edifice. I propose three concrete lines of work: working on the link between

the productions of the subsidized cultural sector and citizens in the territories; developing evaluation and criteria for this relationship; exercising our own civic responsibility ourselves. I conclude with a call to learn to disobey when necessary, and with hope in the citizen cooperations that, everywhere in the territories, are already inventing the forms of a renewed cultural sector.

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*This part will be particularly useful for professionals seeking to understand the profound transformations of the sector in order to adapt to them rather than suffer them. It will interest heads of cultural structures who wish to reposition their action in a disrupted landscape. It will offer elected officials and decision-makers elements for reflection to rethink the meaning of public spending on culture. It will give artists keys to clarify their positioning and embrace the diversity of possible postures. Finally, it will propose to all a vision of the future: not the nostalgic defense of a bygone world, but the patient construction of a truly democratic cultural sector, rooted in territories, in service of everyone's emancipation.*

# CHAPTER 10: TRANSFORMATION OF THE SECTOR

The French cultural sector is going through a historic turning point. Public funding is decreasing, sometimes abruptly. Citizens' cultural practices have massively migrated to digital platforms. Institutions are losing their symbolic power of prescription. Faced with this upheaval, the temptation is great to retreat into defending acquired rights, to deplore the barbarity of the times, to demand a return to a golden age that perhaps never existed. This chapter proposes another path: to face reality, understand the anthropological transformations at work, and build from them rather than against them. Not to resign ourselves, but to adapt. Not to abandon the values of public cultural service, but to reinvent them in a world that has changed.

The first section, "Moving Beyond the Fragility of Public Cultural Funding," sets the general framework. In this year 2025, certain public funding mechanisms are being withdrawn or eliminated, which weakens the sector and translates into concrete consequences. But we must integrate the fact that the context in which we live is constantly changing, whether political, climatic, cultural, digital, or economic. François Mitterrand's rise to power in 1981 doubled public budgets for the cultural sector; but culture did not not exist before. The cultural sector, like any professional sector, exists only through its socio-political meaning. There is no necessity directly linked to its funding—it is a political choice. We could very well not have a Ministry of Culture, and yet there would still be cul-

ture. Thus, I invite us to develop antifragility and robustness, by embedding cultural projects more deeply in social space, in more multidisciplinary ways, with renewed artistic forms.

I also propose exploring concrete paths of innovation. Take trains, for example: cultural practices there are massive (films, books, music), but are almost entirely managed by actors other than the railway sector. What is the place for culture in these everyday spaces? I propose outlining a new role for cultural professionals: a pedagogical role vis-à-vis many other sectors beyond the historical sector of public cultural support. There are enormous numbers of people and contexts to sensitize to everything that developing a cultural sector within them could bring them in the direction of their profession, to still exist tomorrow and exist better, mutually.

The second section, “The Marginality of Cultural Institutions,” proposes an analysis that may seem provocative but is essential to understanding the issues. Cultural institutions supported by public authorities were historically the symbolic center of culture, what made reference, what legitimized, what prescribed taste. The margin was what was not validated by the central institution. I posit that this system has reversed. The cultures carried by institutions have become, in symbolic terms, in the minds of the majority of citizens, marginal cultures, which revolve around a center now constituted by digital practices in cultural spaces operated mostly by international private actors.

The numbers are unequivocal: citizens have an average digital cultural consumption of 35 hours per week, incomparable with the time devoted to practices in institutions. Disintermediation short-circuits the prescriptive role of institutions: artists are in di-

rect relationship with their audiences via networks, communities self-organize. This transformation is not a catastrophe. Paradoxically, the loss of power of domination can open institutions to more connections with citizens, who feel less humiliated within these cultures than they were before. As Jean-Luc Godard said, it is the margins that hold the page together. Our role is essential, but in another place, in another way, perhaps much simpler, much more humble, but all the more powerful in terms of republican impact.

The third section, “For a Virtuous Scattering of the Cultural Sector,” draws the practical consequences of this analysis. The public professional cultural sector has completely lost its symbolic power. Historically linked to politics since Louis XIV, it exercised significant influence. Today, the places of real power, that is, the places where money circulates and alliances between the powerful form, bypass the traditional cultural sector. Those who hold the money are no longer those who attend the opera and theater. So, I propose cultivating a multitude of cultural services everywhere: in banking, in transportation, in construction, everywhere. Not just 1% cultural obligations, but a true integration of culture into professional and collective structures, both public and private.

The example of works councils is enlightening. Historically major consumers of culture, they functioned at a time when, to access motivating cultural offerings, one had to go out, travel to the theater or museum. Today, the main cultural practices take place within companies and homes themselves—YouTube videos during work hours, Instagram between files, Netflix series during lunch breaks. The mission of a cultural policy is to propose something other than these autonomous practices, to support the diversity of creation, bring greater emancipation, support and accompany ama-

teur artistic practices. This will require reinventions of artistic forms, their formats, durations, and modes of participation.

The fourth section, “Squandering of Resources in Supply Logic,” analyzes in depth the current functioning of the sector. The traditional system rests on a supply logic: professionals define what is “good,” program “quality” works, and wait for audiences to come receive them. This model was coherent when institutions constituted the symbolic center of culture. It becomes dysfunctional when they are marginal. Young people, immersed in digital cultural practices via social networks, show marked disinterest in these top-down proposals. Their cultural daily life is organized according to a disintermediated system, made of horizontal recommendations among peers and free pathways.

In this part, I also deconstruct received ideas about algorithms. Contrary to simplistic discourse about filter bubbles, TikTok’s algorithm, for example, shows exceptional finesse, combining attention to personal tastes and discovery of unexpected content. Also, anyone can instantly become a content creator; no barrier to entry exists except one’s own shyness. Digital space is a free space where we can take the role we wish, unlike the traditional cultural sector with its fixed assignments. I analyze the democratic rupture between cultural institutions and citizens: professionals make decisions in democratic disconnection, mandatory school outings perpetuate a system of imposition that violates young people’s cultural rights.

The fifth section, “The Bad Subject of Funding Cuts for Culture,” frontally addresses the taboo question. Heated debates focus on amounts, on form, rather than on substance: why and what culture do we fund

with our taxes? The culture budget represents only 0.6% of the state budget; budgetary decisions therefore have only a very weak overall impact. The real issue is not budgetary but one of meaning. I invite us not to confuse culture and the subsidized sector: culture, in its anthropological sense, is what constructs us as human beings, what encompasses our intimate practices, our personal histories, our daily tastes. It also integrates intangible heritage recognized by UNESCO.

I propose an analysis of the digital shift: majority culture has shifted over the past 20 years into digital and commercial. At home, on a train, in a metro or a café, it is not the productions of the subsidized sector that people consume, but “content” on platforms, social networks, virtual communities. Overvaluing so-called expressions of excellence amounts sociologically to producing systems of hierarchization and domination. Freedom of creation sometimes functions as an ideological shield serving to maintain privileges. I conclude with a call to dare the fundamental debate, to reintroduce simple but fundamental questions: what are we doing? Why? For whom? And how?

This chapter will be particularly useful for professionals seeking to understand the profound transformations of the sector in order to adapt to them rather than suffer them. It will interest leaders of cultural structures who wish to rethink their model in the face of the erosion of traditional audiences. It will offer elected officials and decision-makers elements of reflection to move beyond budgetary quarrels and pose the question of the meaning of public spending. It will give trainers analytical frameworks to accompany professional mutations. Finally, it will offer everyone a lucid but not desperate reading: the marginality of institutions is not a condemnation, it is an opportunity for

democratic refoundation.

# Overcoming the fragility of public funding for culture

**Anthropological point of view, to sketch out future paths.**

*Public funding for culture is currently perceived as being under considerable threat, and so the cultural sector seems to be in an extremely fragile state. I'd like to draw up a few perspectives from a slightly different point of view on this subject.*

## A Shift in Progress

At the time of my writing of this, in 2025, certain public funding mechanisms for culture are being withdrawn or eliminated, which weakens the sector and will unfortunately lead to very concrete consequences. This concerns the traditional model of how the cultural sector operates in France, which is currently being transformed by political choices made by elected officials who do not see their role in the same way as their predecessors did.

Any change in model, and thus in habits, is destabilizing for a sector, and that is absolutely normal. Of course, we must mobilize to defend the social purpose of the professional sector in which we operate. But we must also, it seems to me, acknowledge that the context in which we live is changing. It is constantly changing on multiple fronts: political, climatic, ecological, cultural, educational, industrial, digital, economic, etc.

In France, the arrival of François Mitterrand to power in 1981 led to public budgets for the cultural sector doubling. Culture was not nonexistent before. Therefore, Mitterrand's rise to power was good news for public culture. But the cultural sector, like any professional sector in a society, exists only through its social purpose. It does not have a direct social necessity tied to its funding; it remains a political choice. We could very well not have a Ministry of Culture, and yet there would still be culture! This is well documented by Frédéric Martel in *De la culture en Amérique* (2006), a work in which he points out that, unlike in France where the state plays a central role in funding culture, in the United States, it is the market and private patronage that dominate. He explores how this influences cultural production.

Thus, there are public policy choices regarding whether or not to intervene in the cultural field. And it is evident that a cultural sector not funded by public money would take on very different forms compared to one funded by public resources.

At first glance, one might think that without public funding, there can be no risk-taking, no artistic research, as everything would be subject to a brutal market logic that would stifle cultural diversity, which is nonetheless essential for the renewal of cultural diversity in societies. In my view, this is neither entirely true nor entirely false. Questions of research and experimentation are just as necessary for private entities as they are for public ones. Private entities also need to renew themselves and require research and development. Simply put, the forms of research and development are not the same: the way they are funded, their professional structure, etc. I do not want to suggest that there are no issues with the reduction of public support for the cultural sector. Rather, **I want to emphasize that, as professionals in this sector, we can position ourselves in a constructive approach within changing models, including during crises. By doing so, we might be more effective than if we remain solely in the mode of defending past achievements.**

## A Turning Point for the Cultural Sector?

I am not saying that these achievements are ill-gotten; I am saying that it is important for the cultural sector to develop **antifragility** and **robustness**, to embed itself more deeply in the social fabric, perhaps in a more interdisciplinary way and with renewed artistic forms

that need to be reinvented.

I believe we are at a turning point in the history of the French cultural sector. It seems essential to me to innovate in how we think about the role of culture in society. This involves rethinking funding models and collaborations, with, among other tools, the valuable framework of cultural rights. Cultural rights, I believe, can greatly assist in this, as culture is necessary everywhere.

## **Catching the Wave of Cultural Innovation**

Take the train, for example, which is a daily environment for many French citizens, whether it's a commuter train or a long-distance train. The country's economy relies on rail transport. In these spaces, what is the place for culture? Does it have a place? At first glance, no. Or only in an event-based manner, on banners during construction work.

But if you go on a TGV or other long-distance train, we are told that we can connect to Wi-Fi and consume cultural goods, newspapers, films, books... What are they? Has there really been any thought given to this? What portion of the rail sector's budget is dedicated to culture? In my opinion, this portion is minimal. And in my opinion, our role as cultural professionals is perhaps to reflect on what could be imagined and implemented in these spaces. There have been numerous cultural projects with the SNCF. But nothing has matured. Everything remains as one-off, non-sustainable experiments.

One might think that culture has no place there, that after all, people have other things to do when they take the train. That is false.

Because what do many people do on long-distance trains? They watch movies, read books, listen to music... They engage in cultural practices. And cultural practices are extremely developed in this context. But they are mostly managed by actors other than those in the rail sector.

I am not saying it would be easy to convince the SNCF to invest significant budgets in culture. I am simply pointing out that cultural practices are massive there, and thus there is a huge opportunity for this professional sector to cultivate many more cultural projects. What would this serve? Well, it would better align cultural practices with travel practices.

I do not mean that there should be more films about trains; I mean that by developing culture in these spaces, it could further enhance the quality of the passenger experience and thus profoundly transform the place of the rail sector in the mental representation that the French have of it.

I do not have a precise idea of what should be done. However, I know that if more numerous and well-constructed cultural experiments were conducted there, it could lead to very strong anthropological transformations. And to produce these transformations, it would require the work of many cultural professionals. The necessary funding would then exist *de facto*, as it could increase train ridership.

Of course, research and development would be needed, but as the name suggests, research serves development, and research involves experimentation, trial and error. Any company that wants to grow knows it

must invest to innovate, and if it does not, if it does not invest, it will gradually impoverish as it ages, meaning it will slowly drift away from the reality of its surroundings and the needs of the time.

## **The New Role of Cultural Professionals**

I chose the example of the SNCF at random. I could have taken any other professional sector as an example. What I want to highlight here is a new role for cultural professionals: a pedagogical role vis-à-vis many other sectors beyond the traditional public sector supporting culture in France.

This, in my opinion, is extremely important. There are many people to educate about what the development of a cultural sector within their domain can bring to their profession, to ensure they continue to exist tomorrow and exist better. And I'm not saying it's easy to implement. The educational task is immense.

# The marginality of cultural institutions

## Lucidity of a paradigm shift.

*Traditional cultural institutions, once central, have become marginal in the face of digital practices that now dominate citizens' attention. This paradigm shift demands a reinvention of public cultural service—more humble but potentially more impactful.*

## The Former Symbolic Center

Cultural institutions in France—museums, theaters, cinemas, heritage sites, festivals, etc.—are symbolically regarded, particularly by sector professionals, as the central hubs of culture. Funded by citizens' taxes and steered by the state (via the Ministry of Culture) and local authorities (via their cultural departments), these institutions are still perceived as dominant in the symbolic realm. For instance, their choices—such as which artists to exhibit—shape cultural hierarchies. Their dominance primarily extends to the professional, cultural, and artistic spheres through subsidies granted to creators and cultural intermediaries in exchange for exposure. They also influence the media and journalistic systems, which rely on their symbolic aura. Cultural offerings outside these institutions are often deemed less valuable because they lack institutional validation.

The individuals leading these major institutions—heritage custodians, high-ranking civil servants with elite educations—live their professional and even personal lives as figures of authority. Traditionally, this system has been seen as the center. On the margins lie independent galleries, autonomous cultural practices (especially digital ones), and creations that exist but lack the validation of the “central institution.”

Everything happening on digital platforms—recent cultural spaces for consumption and creation (at most 30 years old)—is still symbolically considered peripheral. I recall a film distributor publicly stating in 2019 that a movie's success on Netflix “didn't count”; to her, that film simply didn't exist. Much has changed since—she's likely forgotten her own words. There's an obvious hierarchy between the Louvre and You-

Tube, for example. They don't operate in the same league. But that was before. What I'm describing belongs, in my view, to the past. I'll explain why—and why understanding this shift is crucial to renewing the purpose of public cultural action.

## **Symbols Have Shifted to the Digital Realm**

Why would I dare such blasphemy against symbolic value? On what absurd, superficial grounds can I dismiss centuries of cultural foundations when everything seems to work perfectly? Sure, some cultural venues face attendance challenges, but major museums remain hugely successful, proving their symbolic superiority and central role in shaping shared cultural values and aesthetics. One could easily dismiss my argument with a wave of the hand.

First, we must define “cultural practices.” These include accessing works of the mind—visual arts, music, painting, audiovisual media, literature, digital arts, etc.—as well as encounters with artists and amateur or professional artistic creation. Hierarchies of value exist, whether in reception or creation, and the public culture system's values evolve with eras and socio-political contexts. Legitimate culture—what's symbolically recognized as such—influences popular cultures and is, in turn, influenced by them.

Often, initially popular cultures are later integrated into the legitimate sphere. Take street art: once a rebellious street culture, it's now polished for museums and cultural mediation, far from its original identity. This legitimization is justified—these graphic and mu-

sical works always held value, even before being “recognized.” Values are singular, not inherently ranked. This creates a spectrum of legitimate forms, each with its specifics, including within the symbolic center, which is (thankfully) made of diverse, even opposing, artistic currents.

This preamble highlights a system of mutual influence and capillary symbolic evolution between the central cultural field and marginal ones that gradually merge into the center. This system, I argue, has now flipped.

I posit that the culture carried by French institutions has become, symbolically, marginal in the minds of most citizens—orbiting a new center dominated by digital platforms (websites, social media, etc.), which now command the majority of cultural engagement time. (Note: these aren’t solely “popular” cultures, as we’ll clarify.)

This proposition may seem incongruous, even disrespectful—like the petty disdain “common folk” might project onto elites to compensate for inferiority complexes. But that’s not my intent. This shift stems not from revenge but from a broader disruption common since the digital age began.

## **A Detailed Look at the New Cultural Center**

Quantitatively: nearly all citizens, with few exceptions, are connected to multiple platforms, averaging 5.5 hours of daily digital cultural consumption—at least 35 hours weekly online. This dwarfs time spent in physical or digital institutional spaces. Even fre-

quent museum-goers might spend 12 hours weekly there (a third of their online time). Most people, despite 35+ hours of weekly online cultural engagement, dedicate far less to institutions.

What are these online practices? Infinitely varied and evolving. Many artists are discovered via social media before entering institutions. The cardinal principle of these now-dominant cultural spaces is disintermediation: artists connect directly with audiences. Even if a self-made artist gains legitimacy (e.g., a musician signed by a label), the label would urge them to keep engaging their fan community—just with amplified marketing.

One might argue these practices, though central in attention time, don't hold the same symbolic value for individuals. Professionals cling to this reassurance. But observe your own or others' online behaviors: the issue isn't hierarchy. Diverse cultural practices coexist—facets of enrichment, none inherently superior. A museum visit or theater outing holds value, just as video-watching or fan community exchanges do. Institutional experiences can be profound, but they're no longer symbolically "stronger" than digital ones. A live classical concert may not surpass streaming the album or interacting with artists online—sometimes, it disappoints.

Disintermediation disrupts institutions' former role as taste arbiters. Now, communities self-organize, co-opt, and amplify human connections via digital networks—a scale impossible pre-technology. To downplay this, consider romance: most couples now meet via algorithm-driven apps, not physical spaces. This reshapes lives—and future generations. The same paradigm shift applies to culture.

Whether we lament or applaud it, lucidity about this change is vital to reimagining cultural institutions' role. I firmly believe public service has a major role in culture—for diversity, for emancipation. My goal isn't to disqualify institutions but to help them mutate, ensuring they endure. If we ignore this shift, clinging to old values, we'll fossilize into symbols of a bygone era.

## Reconnecting with Tradition

This isn't about demagoguery or "giving people what they want" to scrape relevance. Youth outreach often falls into this trap: "Let's do graffiti—it's their culture." Or: "Let's use smartphones—they'll like that." Such condescension fools no one.

On the contrary: traditional culture, carried by institutions, retains its full historical significance. Losing dominance doesn't diminish it—it enhances its potential. Freed from hierarchical exclusion (based on cultural "knowledge"), these formerly central cultures can now forge more connections. People, no longer intimidated, may rediscover them without humiliation.

Cultural rights—advocating cultural democracy over democratization—enable marginalized institutional cultures to respectfully engage with the new center, enriching citizens with their depth. **But this requires abandoning the old system of domination.** Humility benefits all: those who embrace it and those who feel respected in return.

## How to Renew Public Cultural Action?

Concretely, public cultural actors must urgently engage with these new central cultures—each in their own way, as this field evolves relentlessly. Take TikTok in 2025: the most powerful platform for cultural diffusion and creativity. Yet 90% of public cultural professionals (regardless of age) haven't installed it, dismissing it as trivial or harmful. **They choose to remain marginal**, ignoring the central practices of their audiences.

How, then, can they address the public? How will their institutions survive if they obscure the main cultural practices of those they serve? Inevitably, they'll recede into irrelevance, catering only to urban elites or school-mandated visits by working-class children—who'll never return voluntarily, seeing these spaces as alien and marginal.

### The Uber Analogy

Compare this to “Uberization”: the disruption of individual chauffeur-driven rides via apps (Uber first), replacing street-hailed or phoned taxis. Remember taxi drivers' former power—often condescending, even contemptuous.

Fifteen years post-Uber's Paris-born inception (and despite anti-capitalist backlash), many taxi drivers now prefer Uber for more work and autonomy. The marginal became central; taxis had to adapt (creating their own apps). The condescending “democratization” of old gave way to genuine democracy. Driver-passenger

relations are now more horizontal (though ratings systems are debatable).

Uberization, initially seen as destruction, reconfigured and improved the sector's humanity. Yes, it enriches vile multinationals and spawns new servitude—but also positive change via digital-driven democracy.

## **A Blessing for Cultural Reinvention**

Similarly, the cultural sector's inversion promises more connections, more “trips” to cultural venues (to extend the metaphor), more trust, mutual enrichment, and far less condescension.

Capitalist excesses exist, but public service's opportunities for new bonds are immense—if we open to present realities and rethink roles anthropologically.

## **The “Liberated Enterprise” Model**

Finally, consider the “liberated enterprise”: teams gain autonomy, forming self-budgeting units even in hierarchical corporations. A traditional factory, “liberated” by its CEO, dismantles pyramids, creating autonomous groups responsible for results.

Do ex-managers become obsolete? No—their expertise and macro-perspectives remain vital, but now solicited by ground teams as needed. Hierarchy gives way to mutual enrichment.

Likewise, **all competencies in cultural institutions can thrive in this new paradigm—more effectively once stripped of domination. They’ll better serve public culture’s mission.**

This is a conceptual proposition and call to awareness. **I’ve cracked open a door to a vast new field for public culture—once it accepts its marginality. As Godard said, “Margins hold the page together.” Our role remains essential, but repositioned: simpler, humbler, and far more powerful in socio-cultural impact and public service meaning.**

# For a virtuous dispersal of the cultural sector

## The end of traditional cultural influence.

*The cultural sector is going through a major crisis that reveals a paradigm shift. In my opinion, we must now cultivate culture everywhere, in all sectors.*

## A paradigm shift at work

The French cultural sector is in a phase of very great financial difficulty at the beginning of 2025. What is at stake has been in the works for a long time, and in my view outlines a major paradigm shift. Of course, we must defend public cultural policies in a committed and lucid manner, but **we must also think about the future of the functioning and organization of art and cultural activities, taking into account the profound anthropological changes that are actually at work behind these budgetary and political tensions.** This is what I propose here. For current difficulties, I refer to the very relevant “[Cartocrise Culture 2025](#)” proposed by [the Observatory of Cultural Policies](#).

## The end of symbolic power

The current crisis is not a crisis of culture, because cultural practices have never been so invested by human beings, with incredible access and massive uses. There is a crisis for some, and for a certain professional milieu, but no crisis per se. It is a crisis for those who are losing the power they had.

The public professional cultural sector has completely lost its symbolic power. Historically linked to politics, it exercised significant influence since Louis XIV, who used it as a tool of power. Then, one went to the Opera in one’s box for important meetings, high-level negotiations and marriages of interest between the powerful.

Today, the places of real power, those where contemporary money circulates, do without the traditional cultural sector. Those who hold the money are no longer those who frequent the opera and theater. Notables still go there, certainly, but they are yesterday's notables, a culture in decline, which is gradually losing its political influence, whether local, national or international. I'm not sure that in the end this is such bad news.

## **Cultivating culture everywhere**

Here is what I propose: **we must cultivate a multitude of cultural services everywhere**. Human activities are flourishing: commerce, public works, education, or finance of course, for example. There are problems everywhere, and the development of inequalities is terrible, certainly, but there is potential and financial means in many places of civil life. It would be false to say "there is no money".

**What I believe we need to support today and tomorrow, at the ministerial level as in local communities, is the scattering of the cultural sector.** By this I mean developing new cultural skills in all environments: in banking, in transport, in construction, wherever we want, everywhere! Not just 1% cultural obligations, but a real integration of culture into professional and collective structures themselves, both public and private.

## **The revolution of cultural practices at work**

Let's take the example of works councils. Historically, they have been very large consumers of culture. But that was the era when, to access motivating cultural offerings, one had to go out, one had to travel to the theater, to the museum, to experience cultural practices different from one's daily life.

Today, the main cultural practices take place within companies themselves. How many employees watch YouTube videos during their working hours? How many consult Instagram between two files, or have lunch alone in their office in front of a Netflix series?

## **Rethinking the mission of public cultural service and the arts**

The mission of a cultural policy, whether carried out by public power or within private companies, is to offer something other than people's autonomous cultural practices. But why offer something else, when people already have their cultural uses? Precisely to conduct a real cultural policy, that is to say to support the diversity of creation, bring greater emancipation, support amateur artistic practices, etc. This is where we will do public service work, that is to say, do something else with art and culture than simply sell or "consume" them. And this can develop, particularly economically, in a disseminated way, within all collective, associative and professional places. This will involve

reinventions of artistic forms, their formats, durations and modalities of public participation. If “we go for it”, if we innovate, if we transmit the importance of culture everywhere and its benefits for collective spaces of any kind, **as I concretely advocate in this article**, we will renew professions, and invent the cultural sector of tomorrow, in touch with the world.

And then we must articulate culture with issues of well-being, physical and mental health, citizenship, secularism, personal construction and other psychosocial skills. The mission of public service is not, contrary to what some still claim, the simple dissemination to the greatest number of the great works of humanity, it is to build a better world thanks to the arts and culture, to their sharing, in increasingly horizontal relationships.

## **Adapting the system to new realities**

Since practices have changed, the system must adapt. External cultural venues, museums, theaters, cinemas and other event spaces, will not disappear. But from now on, they must compose with other symbolic places, not necessarily geographical: digital platforms.

This massive change in cultural practices cannot be ignored. We must imperatively anticipate it, propose experiments, invent new devices, new ways of creating. This is our collective responsibility.

# Dilapidation of resources in supply logic

**For a democratic revolution of cultural practices.**

*Faced with the crisis in the cultural sector, it is urgent to shift from a top-down supply logic to a culture of connection and listening, inspired by digital practices.*

## **Traditional supply logic versus the digital model**

The cultural field is traditionally organized according to a supply logic: programming films in movie theaters, theater performances, concerts or dance performances in dedicated venues. Professionals develop proposals intended for potential spectators who either trust the programmers or select what corresponds to their tastes from the range of available offerings. On digital platforms like Netflix or YouTube, the principle seems identical: we move toward content that speaks to us and interests us.

However, a fundamental difference distinguishes Netflix's offering from that of a movie theater. Netflix integrates the entire chain, from production to distribution, relying on extremely fine analyses of its audiences' behavior. Netflix's offering thus transcends simple proposal to become what I would call a connection. Take the example of the series *House of Cards*: its production resulted from meticulous analysis of Netflix audience data. Fifteen years ago already, artificial intelligences were deducing the precise expectations of the platform's viewers regarding themes, actors, and other key elements.

The professionals who wrote and directed this series mobilized all their creative skills while integrating extremely fine listening to the expectations of their future viewers, viewers who were unaware, moreover, that their usage had allowed their desires to be deduced. This series, remarkably produced and enlightening about contemporary political functioning, demonstrates that an approach initially perceived as a marketing strategy can lead to the creation of a very

high-quality work. In traditional cultural venues, theaters, cinemas, this precise *feedback* from spectators is sorely lacking.

Programming choices then depend essentially on the tastes and skills of programmers who travel through theater, dance, music or cinema festivals to compose proposals they hope will be attractive to the inhabitants of their territory. This empirical model, based on a hierarchy where some decide for others, seems to me to belong to the past. Young generations, deeply engaged in digital cultural practices via social networks, moreover show marked disinterest in these top-down proposals. Their cultural daily life is organized according to a disintermediated system, made of horizontal recommendations between peers and free and democratic paths.

## **The intelligence of algorithms: between personalization and openness**

Contrary to received ideas, choice always remains possible. TikTok's algorithm, for example, learns with remarkable precision users' centers of interest and proposes content of striking relevance. TikTok's algorithm is designed to maximize viewing time and engagement by showing the right content to the right person at the right time. The main factors that influence the TikTok algorithm are user interactions, video information, and device and account settings.

Far from simplistic discourse about filter bubbles and algorithmic confinement, TikTok's algorithm demons-

trates exceptional finesse. TikTok strives to keep users' "For You" feed "interesting," "varied," and "safe." It opens to diversity while responding to the need for openness inherent in human beings, combining attention to personal tastes and discovery of unexpected content, those proposals we wouldn't have spontaneously searched for.

In 2025, TikTok's algorithm is one of the most advanced content recommendation systems on the market. During the first 120 days of use, average daily time on the platform increases from about 29 minutes on the first day to 50 minutes on the last day. This ability to maintain engagement demonstrates the sophistication of the system. This can be interpreted as an addiction logic, or as a cultural enrichment logic. We don't accuse of addiction a person who spends a lot of time reading books, or who goes to the theater very regularly!

TikTok's algorithm functions precisely according to this principle of balance. We are no longer faced with an offering from which we would pick like from a theater program, but faced with a connection, a mutual knowledge that continuously deepens. This disintermediated logic now structures cultural consumption in digital spaces, without forgetting the creative dimension accessible to each user.

Because everyone can also instantly become an author, producer, content creator. No barrier to entry exists, except one's own shyness. The tool is there, accessible to all, and everyone knows it. Whoever wishes can contribute to the media space, become an actor and no longer a simple spectator, a possibility extremely rarely offered in traditional cultural venues.

Certainly, participatory shows exist, but only when

the director has decided it. Impossible to spontaneously mount the stage if it hasn't been planned. Our power to act is in these spaces extremely reduced compared to what it is in digital space. This is not a criticism, because it is also very pleasant and enriching to be a simple spectator, it is an observation to differentiate a free space, digital space, where we can take the role we want, and a constrained space, with fixed assignments (spectators, artists, professionals...) in the traditional cultural sector.

In physical space, our capacity for action remains limited compared to digital space. A hierarchy imposes itself, barriers arise. The path to becoming an actor or director remains opaque and complex, punctuated by obstacles, competition, and multiple social domination issues. Digital space, on the other hand, keeps the door open. Everyone is free to cross it according to their abilities and desires.

## **The democratic rupture: cultural institutions and citizens**

Professionals struggle to grasp citizens' real expectations. How to achieve this? In the training sessions I lead, I encourage permanent and diversified inquiry, notably via adapted digital tools. The difficulty of the exercise must be acknowledged. Cultural venues and their traditional work organization methods were not designed for this listening, unlike digital platforms.

Notions such as "user-centered" and "user experience" (UX) are not common in the vocabulary of the

cultural milieu, because they find their roots in the computer world. However, UX design and cultural mediation are very close, and we could even consider UX design, in the context of culture, as a type of cultural mediation that we could call experiential mediation.

Cultural sector professionals too often find themselves alone facing their decisions. Like elected officials who, once our vote is expressed, consider having received total delegation and no longer having to be accountable, even when we express our disagreement. Yet we are the ones who placed them there. These attitudes cut institutions off from their citizens and from the democratic role that should be theirs. Popular expression in demonstrations has not been heard for years. Even the results of the legislative elections of July 2024 were not respected.

In large cultural institutions, professionals make relatively arbitrary decisions to spend public budgets in total democratic disconnection. The illusion persists thanks to faithful spectators, often the same ones, who come to inflate attendance statistics. We add up entries without ever distinguishing, as we do on the internet, the number of visits from the number of unique visitors. This distinction would reveal the restricted number of people actually reached. Cultural institutions unfortunately function as spaces of bourgeois reproduction.

This recalls Pierre Bourdieu's work which, from the 1960s, denounced this social reproduction. In 1966, Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel demonstrate that the "need for culture" is socially constructed and that the theory of "revelation" rests on an ideology of gift, which allows naturalizing cultural dominations without questioning the privileges that determine them. The increase in the proportion of graduates from one

generation to another seems to be witness to an innovative and beneficial process of school democratization, but Bourdieu shows that school remains reproductive of social inequalities. And since his work, the world has evolved greatly, the disconnection between the subsidized cultural sector and youth, for example, is complete.

And unfortunately, mandatory school trips perpetuate this system. Children are constrained there, poorly accompanied for lack of adequate teacher training, and struggle to receive what is offered to them. These proposals impose themselves as dominant against their own culture, presupposing that they must be offered quality works to compensate for the supposed mediocrity of their autonomous digital consumption. This approach violates their cultural rights and their dignity, and testifies to disinterest in who they are, in the value of their specific cultures, which would allow making connections, without any demagoguery.

The non-connection is established on a negative presupposition concerning young people's cultural practices. Faced with this imposition, any normally constituted person can only revolt. Resistance is created against this cultural field which presents itself as open but functions, in the reality of interaction, as a closed and condescending imposition system. Hypocrisy adds to insult when discourse proclaims open-mindedness! Moreover, in the cultural milieu, examination of gender equality and ethnic diversity reveals overwhelming domination by white men. Women and minorities remain largely under-represented. The height of irony for a supposedly open space!

These places are manifestly not spaces of cultural openness in the anthropological sense, but spaces of cultural imposition and domination. Public money and

human resources are thus being squandered for a very long time. Careful, I absolutely don't want to say that everything is "to be thrown away," because there are artistic and professional teams who have magnificent commitments; what I criticize here is the form of this professional sector, which doesn't invite openness.

The cultural sector benefited from unconditional support from politicians of all sides, who found there a sincerely cultural interest but also an interest in power. The Opera perfectly illustrates this duality: a place for creating remarkable works, but also a space for organizing and reproducing power.

I don't claim at all that all cultural sector professionals are insensitive dominants who should be removed. Many of them are quality people, human, democratic and well-intentioned. But the organizational system intrinsically carries domination and resource squandering, despite the best intentions.

The perpetual quest to attract youth testifies to this. Why don't young people come? We look for films supposedly appealing to them, adapted shows... We invest massively in social media communication, in websites, without any conclusive success. The reason is anthropological: we have changed neither our organizational system nor our work methods. We remain prisoners of supply logic.

**Toward an  
aesthetics of  
relationship:**

## rethinking cultural innovation

This supply logic generates waste of resources, which elected officials are beginning to perceive clearly, and which is one of the justifications for massive disengagement in this year 2025 from public funding of culture. It is supply logic that must imperatively be rethought.

I don't mean by this that everything should be transformed into participatory projects. Netflix is not participatory, but practices permanent listening, automated certainly, but very real. Netflix can record every aspect of its viewers' behavior: when you pause, rewind or fast-forward in the film you're watching, for example. This logic of permanent listening, placed at the heart of cultural professionals' work, could generate extremely diversified projects. No single model is imposed, but all projects must be anchored in listening and connection, in openness, that is, in democracy and all these values we claim to defend.

These values cannot remain words. They must become acts, methods. This transformation requires immense questioning of professional postures and work methods, both between professionals and with spectators or participants. It's about reinventing our methods. Why should the cultural domain remain frozen when all other professions are transforming under the effect of technological and sociological evolutions?

This transformation doesn't only concern technical innovations, new ways of filming or LED lighting replacing incandescent lamps. These aspects are secondary. The essential lies in anthropological changes, to be operated voluntarily rather than "defending" outdated and dominating approaches to culture. True innova-

tion doesn't concern what we show on stage, but our way of being in relationship. What is transforming in the world is the political organizational system in the broad sense. This is what must be questioned, what we must train on, experiment with, work on.

This revolution could completely upset artistic forms, an absolutely exciting prospect. We need animator-artists capable of orchestrating these exchanges, like digital platform designers who continuously evolve their creations according to observed usage. Algorithms are never fixed. The cultural sector must acquire this same agility. Continuous evaluation must replace old temporalities. The obsolete model of a team secretly preparing for months the perfect show to dazzle passive spectators must no longer be the norm and panacea, but one of the ways of doing, and above all exit its position of superiority over all other modalities of artistic forms.

This evolution in no way implies abandoning artistic requirement. On the contrary, this requirement must be cultivated even more deeply, broadened to integrate the aesthetics of relationship, beyond the aesthetics of image, sound, scenography or musical composition. John Dewey and his conception of art as experience must inspire us. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey's concern is the education of the ordinary human. For Dewey, "the value of experience lies not only in the ideals it reveals, but in its power to unveil various ideals" and "the value of ideals lies in the experiences they make possible."

Aesthetic experience is, consequently, the paradigm of experience for Dewey since it allows awareness of transformations operated by interactions between the individual and environment. Art thought as experience allows restoring this power to act, and requires aes-

thetic concepts and work methods to be measured by their faculty to improve our experience. This work dates from 1934. It would be time to be inspired by it, otherwise an entire sector will sink.

Digital giants practice UX design, user experience design, with permanent testing and adjustments. UX design takes into account, for example, the needs of visitors with physical, sensory or cognitive limitations. Elements such as readable texts, audio content and adapted tactile devices contribute to an inclusive experience.

This approach is nothing like low-grade marketing. It's taking care of connections, and that's how it must be envisioned. Taking care of connections constitutes an essential part of our professions.

The cultural sector today crosses an unprecedented crisis of political legitimacy, attacked from all sides. Territorial communities, all political sides combined, massively reduce their financial support to the cultural sector. This crisis is painful, but to face it, stubbornly defending the past serves no purpose. We must rethink the very nature of our work. This reflection should have preceded the crisis. But no matter the context, it is imperative to fundamentally rethink the question of supply.

# The Misguided Debate on Funding Cuts for Culture

## Rethinking the Role of Public Funding Beyond the Numbers

*In 2025, debates over funding cuts for culture are heating up, following unprecedented reductions in public subsidies and a political shift in this direction. It is not “culture” that is under threat, but the subsidized cultural sector. The real issue? Perhaps not so much the amounts, but the purpose: why and what kind of culture are we funding with our taxes? Let’s explore this taboo to advocate for a fairer vision—one that defends a public cultural service in service of democracy.*

## **Don't Confuse Culture with the Subsidized Sector**

Midway through 2025, one of the major societal debates revolves around funding cuts for the cultural sector. The phrase “funding cuts for culture” is often used, but this is inaccurate. What’s at stake are cuts to the \*subsidized\* cultural sector. Let’s be clear: culture extends far beyond this narrow framework. In its anthropological sense, it is what shapes us as human beings—encompassing our intimate practices, personal histories, daily tastes... Culture also includes intangible heritage recognized by UNESCO, such as oral traditions, artisanal know-how, or community celebrations.

UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as “*the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated with them—that communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.*” This broad vision shows that “culture” is far from being limited to state-funded institutions. Within this vast landscape, there is also the commercial cultural sector, such as streaming platforms or entertainment industries. It’s crucial to name things precisely to avoid oversimplifying or essentializing the debate.

The current changes concern only a strong trend of reduced public funding from certain local authorities for the cultural sector. It’s undeniable that these budget cuts are straining the actors of the public cultural sector, whose balance relies on intertwined support from the state, regions, departments, and cities. A reduction in one of these funding sources destabilizes this

fragile ecosystem, like a house of cards. We're seeing cultural associations forced to close for this reason. The current budget crisis only exacerbates an existing fragility: the delicate and unstable dance of cross-funding (state, region, department, municipality), now undermined by each institutional level retreating to its "priorities." This triggers even fiercer competition among cultural actors: historic institutions, independent companies, associations, and local artists.

## **The Illusion of the Budget Debate: Form Over Substance**

The heated, polarized debates—unfortunately too often lumping all elected officials together—focus exclusively on the \*amounts\* of financial support, i.e., the \*form\*, which is only a partial aspect of what culture is and what the community should care for, rather than the \*substance\*: the collective meaning of these expenditures in light of their public costs. Yet, this is the real issue and the true reason behind these funding cuts: they are political choices with budgetary impacts, not inherently budgetary decisions, no matter what some may claim. Local authorities, having lost fiscal resources, may now face tougher budget trade-offs, but this has always been the case to some extent.

Let's be clear: France's culture budget represents only about 0.6% of the state's general budget in 2025, or roughly €4 billion out of a total budget exceeding €800 billion. Budgetary decisions—whether increases or cuts—for subsidized culture thus have minimal macroeconomic impact. It's misleading to suggest

that slashing cultural budgets will meaningfully address deficits elsewhere. The real issue behind the cuts is not budgetary but fundamental: *\*Why\** should taxes fund a specific cultural sector, and *\*what kind\** of culture are we talking about? What are policymakers' choices with citizens' money? This taboo question, often sidestepped in favor of quarrels over numbers, is essential—it challenges the legitimacy of subsidized cultural models.

We discuss numbers and amounts as if culture's intrinsic value could be measured solely in euros. Yet, like education budgets, the real value lies not in the sums allocated but in the methods and content transmitted. Of course, culture and education require financial means, but with equivalent budgets, one can promote emancipatory approaches or, conversely, stifling and exclusionary ones.

Moreover, some subsidized structures, like EPCCs (Public Cultural Cooperation Establishments), designed for structuring cultural actions across territories (80 to 90 in France), have budgets statutorily guaranteed by the founding authorities, making them immune to political adjustments—unless their status is modified or they are dissolved (as happened to Arcadi, France's first live performance EPCC in 2005, dissolved on December 31, 2018, by the Île-de-France Region under Valérie Pécresse).

## **The Digital Shift: Where Culture Truly Lives Today**

Let's face it: mainstream culture has been shifting toward digital and commercial spaces for 20 years.

Look around on a train, subway, or café: it's not subsidized cultural productions occupying minds and bodies, but platforms, networks, and virtual communities. A 2024 study found that over 80% of under-40s cite video streaming, online music, or gaming as their primary cultural practices, while attendance at subsidized venues stagnates. Cultural life now unfolds in transnational, horizontal spaces where no public support dictates or hierarchizes content.

Yet, while an increasing share of cultural creation and sharing emerges in these spheres, public spending continues to favor the historical model: heavy institutions, heirs to the royal then republican system, perpetuating a symbolic distinction between high culture and popular culture. In reality, funding structures reflect a paradox: claims of broadening access while most subsidies benefit an already-initiated audience and a professional cultural class, often urban and integrated into selection networks.

We're led to believe that defending democratic culture hinges solely on financial trade-offs or that funding a specific professional sector magically fosters cultural emancipation. But the facts are clear: citizens' cultural practices now occur mostly online, on commercial platforms—even among cultural professionals themselves!

## **A System of Distinction Perpetuating Dominance**

Overvaluing so-called “excellence” in art serves, socio-

logically, to manufacture hierarchies and domination. As Pierre Bourdieu explains in *\*La Distinction\** (1979): “*Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier*”, highlighting how cultural preferences reinforce social inequalities. These hierarchies are now illusory, as cultural power no longer resides in subsidized institutions but in digital networks—far more horizontal and democratic.

The subsidized sector, a legacy of royal cultural patronage, once served as a tool of political influence. Historically, French cultural subsidies date back to the monarchy, used to consolidate power, later evolving into a centralized republican model in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. **Culture, shaping worldviews, is a powerful tool of power; what matters is not its existence but how it’s wielded and the integrity with which it’s employed.**

Let’s ask: Are we content funding, with our taxes, an educational system that excludes, stigmatizes, and ranks children rather than including and empowering them? The hypocrisy is glaring. Privileged classes, including the left, know this well: when possible, they enroll their children in private schools, which aren’t always more virtuous but have better odds. Some public schools adopt child-rights-respecting pedagogies, but they’re rarer.

Applying this logic to culture: Are we satisfied funding a hierarchical, postcolonial, and patriarchal system meant to distinguish elites from scorned popular cultures? Of course, it’s nuanced—some cultural actors work respectfully toward cultural rights. But they’re often marginalized by the cultural hierarchy and may be the first hit by funding cuts, even as they represent, in my view, the future. We must address the core issue: the *\*forms\** of cultural action.

As for democratization rhetoric, it crumbles under scrutiny. Middle and upper classes champion public culture and schools yet unapologetically opt for private education, fostering de facto segregation. The same applies to cultural attendance. Subsidized festivals cater to the already-converted; renowned venues offer “excellence,” but for whom? Ultimately, overvaluing the subsidized sector perpetuates symbolic domination: that of an elitist culture (historically male, white, postcolonial), legitimized by public money, whose emancipatory promise has too often devolved into a system of distinction.

## **Artistic Freedom: Shield or Privilege?**

If we discussed subsidized artistic projects instead of funding, we’d tackle the real issue. Immediately, subsidized culture’s defenders would cry political interference in artistic freedom, claiming subsidies guarantee autonomy. But this has never been true: public cultural funding exists to consolidate political influence. Today, however, subsidized culture no longer holds its former sway. In reality, this “freedom” defense masks a protection of sectoral privileges tied to political power—once predominantly left-aligned, reflecting these professionals’ roots. But “left” doesn’t automatically mean open-mindedness or tolerance.

We must return to fundamentals, questioning the legitimacy of cultural models and professional practices—otherwise, we’ll never progress. When content is scrutinized, “artistic freedom” is brandished as a magical shield, silencing critique under the guise of resisting political meddling. This stance warrants scrutiny. From post-1870 nation-state promotion to Mal-

raux's republican cultural democratization, public support has always served to shape public space, showcasing what's deemed worthy of the collective.

Defending artistic freedom sometimes borders on defending the status—even privileges—of a microcosm unwilling to rethink public cultural missions amid societal shifts. Local cultural officers express despair over cuts leading to closures, but this mainly reveals a competition exacerbating asymmetries and marginalizing experimental forms.

## **Toward Democratic Renewal: Daring the Substantive Debate**

Budget cuts, like those announced by regions such as Pays de la Loire (a 50% reduction, per Alexandre Thébault, culture delegate), disproportionately weaken grassroots and citizen-led structures reliant on local funding—those embodying a decentralized, territory-anchored vision of culture and cultural rights. This underscores the urgency of debating *\*content\** over budgets. Adjustments often target the most vulnerable initiatives, risking the marginalization of experimental forms or those serving culturally marginalized publics.

Some local officials, occasionally against the state, defend emancipatory policies (e.g., Avignon's mayor Cécile Helle prioritizing working-class neighborhoods), but such resistance is isolated. It doesn't reverse the silent restructuring underway: funding concentration, fierce competition, erosion of the republican pact, and a return to viewing culture as mere ideological vector.

This is why, in my work with artistic teams, I focus on: \*What are we doing? Why? For whom? How?\*

These questions could transform debates into constructive, emancipatory dialogues rather than superficial budget squabbles.

Policymakers, who arbitrate priorities and reshape cultural legitimacies, must reconnect with artists on this deeper level to avoid competitive instrumentalization and restore culture's role as an inclusive commons.

**The way forward on cultural funding lies in linking arms with officials on the democratic \*purpose\* of these investments—digging deeper than surface-level disputes, embracing dialogue and self-questioning.** In short: forging new cooperative paths.

To move beyond financial grievances, we must courageously confront the real questions:

- \*What do we want to pass on?\*
- \*Who decides what's passed on?\*
- \*How do we ensure citizens' real inclusion in defining the commons?\*

Culture can no longer evade a profound reckoning with its content, hierarchies, and dissemination modes. It will survive only if a broad, unflinching dialogue—among artists, institutions, officials, audiences, and citizens—opens on the vocation of public cultural action and its rightful place in a renewed democracy.

As Hannah Arendt wrote in *\*The Crisis in Culture\** (1961):

« Culture, which is what endures in the world as works, needs a public space to appear and be transmitted.

For culture and politics belong together: it's not knowledge or truth at stake, but the sharing of a common world."

»

As long as cultural policy remains an afterthought (or a residue of institutional power), it will be neither democratic nor emancipatory. The challenge: to confront this foundational debate—not just the use of public funds, but the definition of what constitutes culture today, and who holds legitimacy. Without this, culture will remain the misguided subject, the symptom of a democracy afraid to look itself in the mirror.

# CHAPTER 11: ARTISTIC ROLES AND PRACTICES

Artists are at the heart of the cultural sector. Without them, there would be no works, no performances, no offerings to share. But what role do these artists actually play in society? How do they position themselves in the political space, whether intentionally or not? In this chapter, I propose a reflection on the different possible artistic postures, their social and political implications, and ideas for necessary evolutions so that publicly funded art can truly fulfill its democratic mission. The aim is not to create a hierarchy of practices, but to clarify them, so that everyone can find their rightful place and cultural policies can evolve accordingly.

The first section, “The Evolution of Forms of Artistic Creation,” poses a fundamental question: should we differentiate the cultural production practices of the subsidized sector from those of the commercial sector? The answer is yes, but not on the basis of content—avant-garde work in the subsidized field and more mainstream approaches in the commercial sector. What must be distinguished are the ways of making art and the very conception of art supported by public funds. These practices, financed by citizens’ taxes, must by definition be democratic.

In the commercial sector, the objective is clear: achieve minimum profitability to ensure financial balance. But in the subsidized field, this logic is inapplicable. The objective is not financial balance but the optimal exercise of democracy through these means. One might think this equates to attendance—the more spectators, the more the democratic objective would

be achieved. This is an error: democracy is not measured by the quantity of participants, but by the democratic impacts of the methods of participation, creation, and mediation. Evaluation must therefore focus on these methods and their impacts, not on attendance figures or the “artistic value” of the works.

I propose rethinking the forms of creation so they better fulfill their democratic role. Take the example of live performance. In the private sector, a team produces a show whose ticket sales ensure profitability. But in the subsidized sector, if the venue is nearly empty—which is frequent, as subsidized theater supports creation heavily but diffusion far less—the deficit would be colossal. An expensive show, seen by a handful of privileged individuals, does not meet the objectives of public spending. With the same resources, everything could be reimagined: rather than an expensive and elitist show, why not favor shared artistic experiences, inspired by John Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy? Rather than a single show directed by one director, why not organize co-creation workshops with citizens? Formats could be multiplied—shows, readings, encounters—mutually enriching artists and participants alike. In short, many more “small shows” in place of one “big show.”

The future of cultural policies requires an overhaul of production methods and a redefinition of art itself: no longer as a dominant object, but as a shared practice—which is far more demanding, as it involves and transforms everyone. Having accompanied teams through this transition, I observe that far from harming artists, this approach fulfills them. Fears of “dilution of excellence” are unfounded: on the contrary, this path deepens the connection between art and society.

In the second section, “Primary Cultural Practices and Secondary Cultural Practices,” I propose an essential distinction for understanding the actual place of institutional cultural offerings in citizens’ lives. I call primary cultural practices the everyday cultural practices, those embedded in daily habits: listening to music through headphones or at home, turning on a radio station in the morning, watching a Netflix series in bed, opening TikTok to relax. These practices are rooted in daily life, numerous, and are not considered with sufficient seriousness in our reflection on the cultural offerings made in cultural venues.

One could also speak of internal cultural practices and external cultural practices. What happens in the space of internal practices—whether in bedrooms, on public transport, in classrooms, or in cafés among friends—has not yet been seriously studied, biased by the simplistic view of the problem of screen time among young people, and not at all considered as an adult practice (even though it is massive).

The aim is not to oppose these two types of practices, but to weave the connection between them, while keeping in mind that our cultural offerings are secondary in people’s lives. To compensate for this, we attribute a very high symbolic charge to external cultural practices: we claim that what we offer is of excellent quality, that it will be much better remembered, appreciated at a much higher level. These are representations designed to reassure us, to self-legitimize ourselves as professionals. Yet this is absolutely not the case. Our offerings are secondary in people’s cultural practices and in their lives. The vast majority of cultural professionals I work with, for example, have no practice of TikTok and know nothing about the modalities of cultural practices on this platform. A large proportion even take pride in not wanting to know it,

even though it is the main channel for the cultural practices of the young people they address. They want to make themselves believe that TikTok boils down to one-minute videos of people dancing. Yet in 2025, these same professionals hold significant decision-making power. I am not saying that professionals should spend their days on TikTok, but simply that it is essential not to be in denial about the primary cultural practices of the people we address. For inevitably, our cultural offerings, secondary as they are, are dialecticized in relation to primary cultural practices. How can we formulate relevant offerings if we know almost nothing about what they will be compared to, and even more so if we hold them in contempt without even making the effort to understand them?

I conclude the text on the subject of cultural rights: since citizens have prepaid something through taxes, we have duties toward them—the duty to respect their cultural identities, and therefore their cultural rights, which means starting by taking an interest in these people before beginning to work on the cultural offerings we will provide them. This is our function, this is our duty, this is our profession.

In the third section, “On the Role of Artists,” I propose a reflection on the different political postures of artists, whether they are aware of them or not. What is an artist for? How do they represent themselves in social space? What political place do they occupy in the world? Some artists maintain that their work is purely aesthetic and that they have nothing to do with political considerations, declaring themselves absolutely apolitical. But in reality, an artist who wants their work to be performed and heard by the greatest number will want to enter the system of cultural hierarchy to be recognized, published, performed, distributed. Thus, the person who thought they were not

politically engaged finds themselves in an unconscious but very clear political engagement: that of bourgeois reproduction.

I identify three models of artist postures, three different political positions:

1. The artist of bourgeois reproduction, focused on their artistic object, who awaits legitimization within a hierarchical system.
2. The artist of cultural democratization, who wants their works to be visible, accessible, and sensibly comprehensible to all—an artistically demanding approach, without demagoguery.
3. The artist of cultural democracy, who undertakes residencies in neighborhoods, co-writes shows with residents, allows themselves to be transformed by the people with whom they work, creates spaces for exchange from which demanding works are produced.

In this section, I try to honestly address the tensions experienced by artists. Many experience the requirement for cultural action as a constraint. They must do a certain number of hours of cultural action, accompany audiences, run workshops for children, and they experience this poorly. Some speak of “community service for culture.” For these artists who are not comfortable with this, it is unfortunate—both for them and for the people they address, who can clearly sense that all of this is forced. Without intending to, these artists carry a class contempt based on very brutal cultural criteria. Conversely, some artists feel comfortable with improvisation and rich sharing with audiences, but do not feel comfortable with the “grand” performance expected of them—and then it is these

artists who are looked down upon and underfunded.

I advocate for an assumed diversity of artist postures. Clarifying these positions would allow for the construction of contexts more conducive to everyone's emancipation. One could envision a "relational aesthetics" or a "political aesthetics," where the aesthetic criterion would be repositioned at the level of human and social relationships, viewed as a form of art. If we refer to John Dewey (art as experience), we can truly envision a mutation of the definition of aesthetics, toward a new anthropology of art.

The fourth section, "Participatory Creation and Artificial Intelligence," explores the possible intersections between these two rapidly expanding fields. I first distinguish two approaches to participatory creation: the participatory approach, where participants take on the role of interpreters in service of the artistic project conceived by the artist who retains final control; and the cooperative approach, where the artist designs protocols for encounter, privileges the process of interaction, and accepts submitting their own ideas to the test of collective contributions. I then identify four modalities of using artificial intelligence in creation: the augmentative modality (AI as a tool to save time, create syntheses), the creative modality (AI as a true collaborator, fed by what emerges to engage in creative interaction), the subject modality (AI as the central theme of the work), and the interactive modality (AI in scenic or participatory automation devices). The intersection of these approaches and modalities offers multiple possibilities, but requires great clarity in the chosen protocol. I warn against the main danger: feeling overtaken by events when one tries to do too much. It is better to do a little less, to be in great accuracy and great respect for everyone, rather than having to take back power so that things can be final-

ized.

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*This chapter will be particularly useful to artists seeking to clarify their positioning and to assume their political posture, whether conscious or unconscious. It will interest directors of cultural organizations who wish to rethink the forms of creation they support so that they better fulfill their democratic mission. It will offer elected officials and decision-makers elements for reflection to move beyond the quantitative criterion of attendance and evaluate the real democratic impacts of projects. It will give mediators keys to thinking about the articulation between primary and secondary cultural practices, between intimate cultures and institutional offerings. Finally, it will offer everyone a renewed vision of art: no longer a dominant object to contemplate, but a shared practice to live together.*

# Evolving forms of artistic creation

## **An anthropological reflection on the forms of subsidized artistic creation.**

*Subsidized art must distinguish itself from the commercial sector through a fundamentally democratic approach, favoring shared experience over elitist creations, to better fulfill its public mission.*

## **Clearly distinguishing between commercial and non-commercial sectors**

An anthropology of cultural sector practices seems essential to me. Should we differentiate the cultural production practices of the subsidized sector from those of the commercial sector?

In my view, this distinction is absolutely necessary—but not based on content (i.e., the type of work promoted, such as avant-garde in the subsidized field versus more mainstream approaches in the commercial sector). What must be distinguished is something entirely different: the ways of making art and the very conception of art supported by public funding. These practices, financed by citizens' taxes, must by definition be democratic.

In the commercial domain, the objective is clear: achieve minimal profitability to ensure financial balance and, ideally, generate profits. But in the subsidized field, this logic is inapplicable. It would be ontologically wrong and ethically reprehensible. Yet, we too often see commercial logics—particularly in audience relations—transposed into the subsidized sector. To me, this is a democratic scandal, a distortion of the very nature of public funds and their objectives.

In subsidized culture, the goal is not financial balance but the optimal exercise of democracy through these means. One might think this overlaps with attendance—the more spectators, the more the democratic objective is achieved. Wrong: democracy is not measured by the quantity of participants but by the demo-

cratic impacts of participation methods, creation, mediation, etc. Evaluation must therefore focus on these impacts. Admittedly, this is complex, but it is necessary work that must continually be refined.

## **How does this influence the form of artworks?**

Take the example of live performance. In the private sector, a team (technicians, writers, actors, directors, etc.) produces a show whose ticket sales ensure profitability. The audience derives satisfaction from it: the system works.

But in the subsidized sector, if the venue is empty—which is common, as subsidized theater supports much creation but little dissemination—the deficit would be colossal. Some argue that the goal of cultural policies is to support creation, regardless of the deficit. Fine. But if we examine the texts closely, we see that this support aims for a diversity of creations disseminated in society, transforming social practices and contributing to democratic evolution. An expensive show seen by a handful of privileged individuals does not meet these objectives; the argument of “ivory-tower research” funded by public money thus holds no water.

## **Rethinking everything**

How can we evolve forms of creation so they better ful-

fill their democratic role—without demagoguery or a purely quantitative vision (which would then align with commercial logic)? With the same resources, we could rethink everything. Instead of an expensive, elitist spectacle, why not prioritize shared artistic experiences, inspired by John Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy (\*Art as Experience\*)?

Imagine: rather than a single show directed by one person, why not organize co-creation workshops with citizens? This wouldn’t necessarily mean amateurism but a professional practice that integrates the public more deeply. We could multiply formats—light shows, readings, meetings—enriching both artists and participants. Instead of funding one “grand spectacle” (with low attendance), we could offer a different experience each night, fostering learning and sharing: many “small spectacles” in place of one “grand spectacle.”

This approach, close to popular education (already experimented with in the 60s-70s by figures like [André Malartre](#)), would be more joyful, more alive, and far more democratic. It would legitimize demanding artistic practice without hierarchy between “overvalued” artists and “passive” spectators.

Some artists will reject this approach. Fine. But then, they should not use public funds for projects unrelated to its purposes. Let them turn to the commercial sector. As for the argument of “artistic exigence,” it remains valid—but why not create works just as ambitious, less costly, and more accessible, using digital tools?

## **Moving everyone forward**

The future of cultural policies lies in overhauling production methods and redefining art itself: no longer as a dominant object but as a shared practice—which is far more demanding, as it involves everyone.

Having supported teams in this transition, I've observed that far from harming artists, this approach fulfills them. Yes, it requires self-reflection, but this is beneficial. Fears of "diluting excellence" are unfounded: on the contrary, this path deepens the bond between art and society. Most professionals who try it find renewal, turning not to defending an outdated tradition but to inventing forms in tune with today's world.

# Primary and secondary cultural practices

## **For a cultural dialectic of public proposals.**

*Daily cultural practices (internal) are underestimated compared to external cultural offerings, yet the latter are secondary in people's lives. Professionals must acknowledge this reality.*

## Two Levels of Cultural Practices

I refer to *primary cultural practices* as the daily cultural habits embedded in people's routines: listening to music on a portable device, turning on the radio in the morning, watching a Netflix series in bed, scrolling through TikTok to unwind, etc. These are deeply rooted, widespread practices that, in my view, are not taken seriously enough in our reflection on the cultural offerings provided by cultural institutions.

We could even adjust the terminology and speak of *internal cultural practices* and *external cultural practices*. This might evoke the *bedroom culture* concept proposed by Simon Frith (1978), later taken up by Sonia Livingstone (2002), François de Singly (2006), and then Hervé Glevarec (2010). However, these sociological studies do not consider the bedroom as a space for cultural dissemination that competes with external spaces like movie theaters, theaters, or even television. Dominique Pasquier's work is based on studies of social media usage predating the rise of Netflix and TikTok. To my knowledge, there is no sociological study yet on the "update" of bedroom culture. What happens in the realm of internal cultural practices—whether in the bedroom, during commutes, in classrooms, or even in cafés with friends—has not yet been studied rigorously, as it is overshadowed by the simplistic view of screen time as a youth issue and not at all recognized as a widespread adult practice (though it is). I invite sociologists to delve into this topic with qualitative research.

## Working Toward Complementarity

My point here is not to pit the two types of cultural practices (internal and external) against each other, but rather to weave connections between them, while keeping in mind that our cultural offerings are secondary in people's lives. To compensate for this—something we're well aware of, since we too watch series on our phones—we assign a highly symbolic weight to external cultural practices: we claim that what we offer is of excellent quality, that it will be remembered and appreciated at a much higher level precisely because it exists outside the everyday. These are representations meant to reassure us, to self-legitimize us as cultural professionals, and to convince ourselves of the superior value of what we do.

Yet, this is absolutely not the case. Our offerings *are* secondary in people's cultural practices and in their lives. I believe it's important to be aware of this, to be clear-eyed about it, so that we—as professionals in the cultural, social, and educational fields—can question ourselves about our openness to others. We assume our offerings are better, but in reality, we know very little about people's primary, daily cultural practices.

## Respecting Cultural Rights

Here's an example: the vast majority of cultural, social, and educational professionals I work with have no engagement with TikTok and know nothing about the modes of cultural practice on this platform, the types of content shared there, or the creativity young

people display in that space. They all believe TikTok is just one-minute dance videos. Yet, in 2025, these same professionals hold significant decision-making power.

What I want to highlight here is not that cultural professionals should spend their days on TikTok, but simply that it's essential not to be in denial about the primary cultural practices of the people we address. Because, inevitably, our secondary cultural offerings are dialectically framed, for citizens, in relation to their primary cultural practices. Our proposals are contextualized, compared, evaluated, and perceived based on these primary practices, which remain largely unknown to us.

So how can we formulate relevant proposals? I'm speaking here within the realm of *subsidized culture*—that is, culture funded by citizens themselves through taxes. Private cultural offerings can do as they please: people choose to buy or not, but they haven't prepaid for what's offered to them. However, once they have prepaid for something, we have duties toward them: to respect their cultural identities, and thus their cultural rights—meaning we must first take an interest in them before developing the cultural offerings we will provide. This is our role, our duty. It is our responsibility.

# On the role of artists

## **For a politics of the artist.**

*The political role of the artist is never neutral. Whether they want it or not, their social position and aesthetic choices reflect an engagement, conscious or unconscious, in the life of the community. Becoming aware of it and defining it allows for better execution of cultural projects at all levels.*

## Often unconscious roles

What is an artist's purpose? How do they see themselves in the social space? What political place do they occupy in the world? And for that matter, should an artist even have a political role in the world?

Some artists argue, for example, that their work is purely aesthetic, aiming for plastic, theatrical, or musical perfection, and that they have no interest in political considerations, declaring themselves entirely apolitical. That is their perspective. But in reality, an artist—for instance, a classical composer who claims to have no political concerns—will still want their music to be played and heard by as many people as possible. They will thus seek to enter the system of cultural hierarchy, whether in the commercial or public sector, to gain recognition, be published, performed, broadcast, and potentially make a living. In doing so, the artist who believed they were not politically engaged finds themselves, in fact, in the unconscious but very clear political engagement of bourgeois reproduction. By focusing solely on their artistic output without considering the criteria for their work's social inscription—yet still expecting validation within a hierarchical system—they are *de facto* adopting a political stance.

One might argue that I am making a somewhat hasty judgment, but this is precisely the role of sociology: to explore the underlying forces and issues in which human beings are entangled within society, often without being aware of it themselves.

## **Becoming aware for the future**

I believe—and this is the point of this article—that it is important for an artist to be more conscious of their positioning. This is useful, first, for their own well-being and for finding their rightful place in the world as they envision it, and second, for contributing to shaping the future of the artistic and cultural sector. Cultural choices and policies, whether public or private, will be influenced by artists who are more clearly positioned, thereby enabling institutions to evolve. The world of art and culture is one of interaction between different actors, and each has their part to play—including artists.

I am not saying that all artists must absolutely become aware of their social role, but I do think those who do so are very useful to others and to the future of culture's essential function. We have all observed that culture was deemed non-essential during the Covid period, even though cultural practices, via digital means, were the primary glue that allowed human beings to continue existing as humans, as part of a social group.

## **The three roles of artists**

Take the example of a visual artist who absolutely wants their work to be displayed in public spaces. Without realizing it, they embody values of cultural democratization. They may wish, like Jean Dubuffet, for their works to be visible, accessible, and emotionally comprehensible to all. In the very forms of their art,

there will be a desire for accessibility—which is absolutely not demagoguery but an artistically demanding approach.

Take another example: an artist who only creates participatory performances, conducts residencies in neighborhoods, co-writes plays with residents, and performs in their homes. This artist allows themselves to be transformed by the context in which they are situated, listening to the cultures of the people they work with. They create spaces of exchange from which artistically rigorous works emerge. Here, we are truly in an approach of cultural democracy, supported by cultural rights.

In these three models of artists I have just described, we can clearly see three different political stances. I am not ranking them—that is not the point here. But I do think it is useful to clarify these positions.

## **The legitimate experiences of artists**

Take the case of live performance: cultural policies place significant pressure on art and culture to reach as many “audiences” as possible. Many artists, for example in theater, experience this demand as a constraint they are uncomfortable with. They are required to do a certain number of hours of cultural outreach, engage with audiences, run workshops for children, etc., and they resent it. I have even heard some artists refer to it as “community service for culture”... On the other hand, some artists are very comfortable with these cultural activities and find great pleasure—and above all, meaning—in them as part of their artistic

work.

This is a legitimate political obligation, but for artists who are not at ease with it, it is unfortunate—both for them and for the people they interact with, who can sense that it is forced. Unintentionally, these artists convey class disdain based on very crude cultural criteria. They address people they are not genuinely interested in, and due to lack of time, they present them with a performance or a brief experience before or after the show. Many artists feel uncomfortable in these interaction frameworks, sensing they are caught in a system of postcolonial domination, of which they are the agents—if only by the color of their skin and that of the people they address.

Conversely, some artists would prefer to simply do their show, acknowledging that it is aimed at bourgeois audiences. Why not? There's nothing wrong with that. Other artists, however, feel at ease with improvisation and rich exchanges with audiences, conducting long residencies in neighborhoods, businesses, or social structures. They collaborate with people, take an interest in others, share their culture, and move toward artistic creations that embody a deep sense of connection. These artists do not feel comfortable with the “grand” performance or the perfect aesthetic object demanded of them in theater. They would rather spend all their time improvising with people. The problem is that for these social actions to take place, they need the legitimization of the “real” show to which people will be brought. These artists are clearly engaged in cultural democracy, supported by texts on cultural rights—which are official in France—but they cannot fully be artists in the way they wish.

## **The road to hell is paved with good intentions**

I raise this issue because I believe that, for both sides, if we were clearer about our diverse artistic postures and positions, we could construct future contexts for the dissemination of art and culture that are more conducive to the emancipation of the people we address, as well as of artists and cultural system facilitators.

One might argue that the French cultural democratization system is precisely designed to give access to people who would otherwise never have encountered “legitimate” culture. There are examples of individuals who, thanks to this system, have risen from their initial class to attain other sociocultural levels. It is the same republican project as that of schools, which claim to enable people to escape their original class and ascend the republican sociocultural hierarchy through democratic access to knowledge. This is true, but it concerns only a tiny minority—those who succeed in conforming to the codes of the bourgeois domination system. For the majority who do not fit these codes, school is a system of social exclusion, an extremely clear, effective, and brutal segregation. It does not operate with goodwill, as the selection criteria reflect extremely narrow visions of intelligence and human competence. Unfortunately, this is what the school system produces, despite all the good intentions of educators.

In the organization of public culture in France, the same process occurs: for the few who may access another social class, the majority of young people forced into cultural institutions will be permanently put off and will have understood very well that these

places will never welcome them with open arms. Thus, these people are excluded from the system.

I know some will immediately object to what I am asserting here, arguing that there are only good intentions and that it is easy to dismiss the goodwill of professionals. But I do not wish to dismiss any intentions. I simply want to clarify that art and culture operate within social frameworks, and we must not be hypocritical about this. It seems useful to me to position ourselves more clearly within these social systems so that everyone can find their rightful place, their emancipation, and so that public policies can evolve in line with the objectives set by law. I am speaking here of an evaluation of policy outcomes, focusing on the role of artists and how they perceive themselves.

I am also not saying that all artists must engage in deep political reflection. But artists have a role to play, because the artistic and cultural system is made up of all these actors, and artists obviously have their full part in it. Even if some do not wish to engage in these reflections, the fact that others do will undoubtedly benefit everyone.

## **For an affirmed diversity of artistic postures**

The question I am posing, then, is that of the artist's role today. In other words, what does it mean to be an artist nowadays, and how should one position oneself? Should one focus on aesthetic issues or political ones—that is, on the life of the community?

When we speak of the quality of works, we often

adopt a purely aesthetic perspective, in the manner of Malraux. However, it is important to recognize that some artists wish to explore other dimensions but feel constrained by this aesthetic-centered legitimization.

We could envision a “relational aesthetic” or a “political aesthetic,” where the aesthetic criterion is redefined in terms of human and social relations, seen as a form of art. Referencing [John Dewey](#) (Art as Experience), we can truly imagine a shift in the definition of aesthetics toward a new anthropology of art—just as the discipline of design has moved beyond the object to focus on experiences (now at the heart of modern industries, with UX Design or experience design).

# Participatory design and Artificial Intelligence

## **Protocols and precautions for controlled innovation.**

*When participative creation and AI meet, four modalities of use and two artistic schools intertwine. A practical guide to navigating between innovation and mastery.*

## Two approaches to participative creation

Participative creation is a multifaceted field of artistic action, often led by an artist or artistic team. To simplify, we can distinguish two schools or approaches: the participative approach and the cooperative approach.

### **The participative approach:**

In the participative approach, participants take on the role of performers serving the artistic project conceived by the artist. Even when the work—whether theatrical, literary, choreographic, or musical—is developed from participants' contributions, the artist maintains final control over the result. This process can prove deeply enriching, provided that the rules are clearly established and everyone understands the decision-making power that the artist maintains throughout the process.

### **The cooperative approach:**

The cooperative approach operates from a very different dynamic: the artist designs encounter protocols, prioritizes the interaction process, and accepts subjecting their own ideas to the test of collective contributions. This method can completely transform the distribution of roles and responsibilities initially envisioned. In a theater production, for example, the artist who is usually the director might become an actor, while another group member takes on the directing role. Moreover, certain creations can emerge even in the absence of the initiating artist, thanks to the conditions and spaces for encounter they have established. Theater director Pippo Delbono works extensively in this manner, which is why in his performances, one senses a form of absolute rightness in the actors' pres-

ence on stage and their interaction with theatrical images, because they have often formed them together, in this shared universe where they have their full place of invention and expression. This is also how I worked on the staging of the short show *Bonjour ma belle* (video recording) 10 years ago for students at the Fémis and CNSAD, leaving the students alone for a while, in a certain spirit, so that their perceptions of the future, which was the subject of the show, could emerge on their own.

The risk-taking is much greater because the result is much less predictable than in the other process, and it is a longer, more demanding process that requires, contrary to what one might think, much more work and much more finesse in balance and attention to all the bonds that form the creative team assembled for the project.

## **Four modalities of artificial intelligence use**

Artificial intelligence, in the way it is employed in artistic creation, also has distinct modes of use, four in my opinion:

### **1. The augmentative modality**

In the augmentative modality, artificial intelligence is used as a tool to save time, create syntheses, for example from the transcription of a conversation between people. We can even ask artificial intelligence to write a theater scene that incorporates ideas shared in the conversation. Yes, there is a small creative component, but we're more dealing with a "ghostwriter," as it was called (what an ugly word), that is, an extreme-

ly competent person at writing, who writes for others without signing the books, but who has no ego, no identity, like AIs...

And artificial intelligence doesn't just write. In the augmentative modality, we can produce images or music, for example.

## 2. The creative modality

This approach is the one that interests me most. We will instruct the machine through different entry points to invent, to work with chance. Here, it's up to us to establish protocols—I will propose some—so that artificial intelligence can truly be a collaborator. It's not about making syntheses or doing “in the style of,” but rather that it feeds on what occurs to be in creative interaction.

Several setups can be implemented:

- **Direct oral exchange:** A phone equipped with a conversational assistant with voice recognition actively participates in creative discussions.
- **Visual interaction:** The AI regularly receives photographs during work sessions, documents, images, gestures, and generates creative proposals in response.
- **Inter-AI dialogue:** A particularly promising setup where two distinct artificial intelligences (ChatGPT and Claude, for example) dialogue with each other based on the same source documents. They co-construct, question each other, debate, or are even invited to contradict each other, to develop together, for example, the text of a scene. If we put two artificial intelligences in discussion with each other, we're not in sim-

ple augmentation, there will really be a creativity specific to the confrontation between the reasoning modalities of these machines, which, due to the interaction, will multiply creative capacities that are necessarily quite limited in a given model, but which, through the confrontation of two different models, can, in my opinion, open doors to very important narrative discoveries, for example.

- **AI mediator:** The AI can also serve as an interlocutor within a human collective, participating in conversations and providing structure or questioning. If humans wish to freely explore bold ideas, the AI can progressively structure their proposals through its questions, with text displaying in real time on screen during exchanges. The AI's listening capacity represents a major asset. Where humans struggle to maintain genuine listening, project their own ideas, quickly tire from this energy-consuming exercise, the machine remains intrinsically listening, without fatigue. This quality makes it a valuable partner for fostering creative cooperation between people.

### 3. The subject modality

Artificial intelligence here becomes the central theme of the work, the subject of the performance, film, or poetry collection. This approach has existed for a long time in theatrical, literary, and cinematic science fiction, well before the democratization of conversational AIs in November 2022. The film project *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* by Stanley Kubrick, ultimately directed by Steven Spielberg years after Kubrick's passing, constitutes an emblematic example.

In the context of participative creation, this modality presents particular challenges. The attention given to process as much as result, an essential characteristic of this approach where the result often benefits from telling its own process rather than freezing into a finished aesthetic, complicates the integration of AI as a subject.

One possibility would be to organize human co-writing on the theme of AI, for example around the idea of an AI psychologist. Participants would exchange on this subject while progressively testing, on their own, concrete experiences with AI-therapists, then sharing their discoveries to enrich the theatrical project. This approach seems ultimately more promising than I initially envisioned.

#### **4. The interactive modality**

Particularly suited to live performance, this modality exploits scenic or participative automation devices. For example, a performance where the audience would ask questions via smartphone, receiving responses from an AI based on the ongoing stage action.

A more elaborate device could comprise three spaces: a zone for spectators and two scenic zones where audience volunteers, briefly prepared, would become actors. In one, they would perform a short scene repeating with improvised variations. In the other, participants would dialogue via their phones with the AI that would reveal, for example, the unconscious thoughts of the observed characters. The phones would be filmed live, with responses displaying on a large screen, bringing completely unpredictable elements to the performance.

This format could work in 15-minute cycles, with rotation of participants between stage and audience, creat-

ing continuous interaction where the AI would play an essential autonomous role in the artistic device. This dimension of autonomy constitutes precisely the most fascinating aspect of contemporary AIs.

## **Crossing approaches: stakes and precautions**

The intersection between the two modalities of participative creation and the four uses of AI offers multiple possibilities, but requires great clarity in the chosen protocol and in what the artistic team is ready to welcome.

Indeed, a cooperative creation project integrating a creative AI can take completely unexpected directions. This openness requires a work framework, time, and technical means capable of absorbing significant changes. When these conditions are not met, it may be wiser to opt for classic participative creation assisted by augmentative AI, or to choose AI as a subject within a known cooperative framework, to limit destabilization risks.

The main danger in any participative project occurs when the “supporting structure” (in the symbolic sense, it’s generally the artist’s role), because one is always needed, even if the bearer is not necessarily a chief, feels overwhelmed by events. This symbolic structure, necessary for gathering participants and compatible with cooperation, can then tense up, become rigid, and lead the project to the opposite of its initial ambitions.

One must be very careful in this type of project, care-

fully measure one's ambition and means. Often we want to do a lot, we want to do the brilliant project where everything is completely participative, artificial intelligences are everywhere, etc. Be careful, it might be better to do a little less, but be in great accuracy, in great respect for everyone, and not find ourselves overwhelmed, having to ultimately take back power so that things can be finalized and arrive at an effect opposite to what we initially wanted.

This can happen. And it's precisely for this reason that I share this methodological reflection. It's to set milestones and better understand where we're stepping and what we're capable of welcoming, and also what interests us in doing at this intersection between participative creation and artificial intelligence.

## Table of modalities

Here is a table to clearly visualize the methodological intersection employed in one's creation:

### AI use modality

→	<b>Augmentative Creative Subject Interactive</b>
<b>Participative creation ↓</b>	
<b>Participative Cooperative</b>	

## CHAPTER 12: OUTLOOK AND COMMITMENTS

This final chapter concludes the book with a call to action. After analyzing the profound transformations in the sector, rethinking the roles of artists and the forms of creation, it is time to look toward the future and fully assume our civic responsibility. The financial turbulence the French cultural sector is experiencing in 2025 is not merely a budgetary crisis: it reveals a deeper political fragility, a deficit in the bond between cultural professionals and the citizens they are meant to serve. This chapter proposes concrete avenues for rebuilding this bond—not through a logic of corporatist defense, but from a genuinely democratic perspective.

The first section, “The Free Institution,” opens an alternative to logics of cultural domination. Faced with systems of hierarchy and symbolic power that structure the cultural field, I propose a framework that legitimizes creation without imposing a corporatist pathway. Through my thirty-five years of experience, from early short film screenings at universities to the Pocket Films festival, I show how to institute without dominating, how to authorize creation before it even comes into being. This approach, rooted in the values of cultural rights now enshrined in law, constitutes a concrete response to the democratic challenge of culture.

The second section, “Why Are Cultural Actors So Fragile?,” analyzes the conditions of vulnerability of cultural institutions in the face of political decisions. From Arcadi in Île-de-France in 2018 to the Agence culturelle Grand Est in 2025, among others, the disappearance of cultural structures amid general indiffer-

ence reveals a systemic problem: the invisibility of these institutions in the eyes of citizens. I develop here the concept of antifragility as applied to the cultural sector and propose to refound the democratic meaning of institutions through openness to citizens and the construction of shared narratives.

The third section, “On the Fragility of Corporatism,” questions the limits of categorical defense, drawing on the condemnation of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region for the suppression of a subsidy. Building on Michel Schneider’s analyses in *La comédie de la culture* (1993) and the incisive text by Kader Attia and Eva Doumbia following Nahel’s murder in 2023, I show how the supposed “freedom of expression” of cultural institutions often masks the defense of privileges held by a caste disconnected from citizens. I propose moving beyond corporatism through the creation of artistic and democratic spaces for dialogue.

The fourth section, “For a Civic Re-engagement of the French Public Cultural Sector,” constitutes the programmatic heart of this chapter. I establish here a framework for reflection on the duties of professionals toward the citizens who fund their activities. The distinction between public culture and commercial culture, the lucid analysis of the “disenchanted parenthesis of Covid” during which the sector allowed itself to be shut down without resistance, the invitation to “learn to disobey” in the face of arbitrary decisions, and the hope placed in civic cooperations together outline a roadmap for the future. Three concrete lines of work are proposed: strengthening the bond with citizens in local territories, rethinking evaluation and criteria, and fully exercising our civic responsibility.

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*This chapter will be particularly useful for professionals seeking to move beyond a victim posture to become actors of their own future. It will interest directors of cultural structures who wish to rethink their relationship with citizens beyond the logic of audience numbers. It will offer elected officials and decision-makers elements for reflection on what they are entitled to expect from the cultural sector they fund. It will give artists keys to assuming their political responsibility without renouncing their artistic demands. Finally, it will propose to all readers a vision of the future: not the nostalgic defense of a bygone world, but the patient construction of a truly democratic cultural sector, rooted in local territories, in the service of everyone's emancipation. For this is indeed what is at stake: that public culture not become solely a commercial enterprise, but continue to be held to missions that are not the missions of commerce, but the missions of democracy. It is never too late.*

# The Free Institution

## **Opening spaces for creation outside the logics of cultural domination.**

*For thirty-five years, in response to the systems of domination that structure the cultural field, I have been proposing an alternative approach: the free institution, a framework that legitimizes creation without imposing hierarchy or corporatist pathways.*

## Cultural corporatism as an obstacle to creation

The fundamental problem of professional cultural circles lies in a constitutive tension: art and culture, when they benefit from public funding, should serve creation, its sharing, and the benefit it provides to people. Yet corporatism and the compartmentalization of functions (production, distribution, mediation, lighting, sound, logistics, etc.) too often lead technical actors to occupy a position disconnected from the artistic project they are supposed to serve.

Take the example of people who work in reception at a theater. They may have artistic aspirations, but their duties in no way call upon their creativity: they must conform to a pre-established artistic hierarchy: they must absolutely not be artists! Yet their creativity could, on the contrary, nourish their profession. This domination is also exercised in the relationship with the public, maintained in a position of passive receiver. Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel demonstrated, as early as 1966, that the « *need for culture* » is socially constructed and that the theory of aesthetic « *revelation* » rests on an ideology of gift, which naturalizes cultural dominations without questioning the privileges that determine them (*The Love of Art*, 1966).

I do not claim that all methods of making subsidized art are non-artistic. But the system remains pernicious: instead of cultivating art, relationships of domination, competition, sexism, and power too often prevail. Symbolic power, the kind that confers legitimacy, permeates and dominates, far too much in my view, the entire institutional cultural field.

## Early resistance to logics of domination

When I was in high school and then university, I intuitively began organizing short film screenings. I made films and was happy with this practice, but something in me resisted the game of hierarchy and domination, the obligation to follow a corporatist path. I found this trajectory violent and problematic, to the point of never really integrating into a professional milieu by accepting its dominant/dominated logics.

I made films personally, I accompanied other people in their creative process, I organized screenings. Then I began to stimulate creation: I proposed themes, I invited people to create for the next screening. I envisioned my role as a supportive one, inviting everyone to do, including those who did not feel legitimate. As Paulo Freire writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968): « *No one liberates anyone else, no one liberates themselves alone, people liberate themselves together.* »

This is still my approach today, because I know that self-expression is good for oneself and for others, it builds us. It can also play a role in building a career, but that was not my primary goal. My subject was creation, the meaning of creating and sharing. This is why I felt as much at home creating films as showing them, mine as well as those of other people, without establishing hierarchy, as well as in transmitting techniques.

## The power to

## **institute without dominating**

I certainly made an editorial choice: I did not necessarily show everything that was proposed to me. It was a subjective choice that I assumed as such, and there was animosity toward me from people whose films I had chosen not to screen. But I envisioned that these people could organize their own screenings themselves if they wished. I did not position myself in a place of power: I was willing to support them in organizing their events.

This is what I call a **free institution**. The films I showed were instituted, recognized, legitimized by the simple fact of being screened in public. But this free institution was completely distinct from a logic of domination and corporatist pathways. People could make films and were supported in this process: I legitimized them, I instituted them even before they had made a film. This prior legitimization aligns with what the Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights (2007) calls the right to « *participate in cultural life* » with respect for everyone's dignity.

I am convinced that some people might never have made a film without this framework, because they would have felt too dominated by traditional legitimization circuits. This approach I describe, I implemented it starting in 1988 at the Sorbonne-Nouvelle University, but also on many other occasions.

## **The Pocket Films**

## **Festival: democratizing the tool of creation**

Another emblematic example is the Pocket Films Festival, which I created in 2005 at the request of the **Forum des images**. At that time, mobile phones were beginning to film. I then understood that we were entering a new era where everyone could create very easily. So I founded this festival to recognize and legitimize these emerging practices. This corresponded perfectly to my approach of the free institution: providing a framework of legitimization for creators who would never have taken traditional paths.

I also taught for a long time at Le Fresnoy, National Studio for Contemporary Arts, at La Fémis, in many universities, and led many professional training sessions, with non-academic creativity methods, non-conforming to standardized professional work methods. My role consists of opening doors. This is the function of the free institution. As John Dewey reminds us in *Art as Experience* (1934), « *the value of experience lies not only in the ideals it reveals, but in its power to unveil various ideals* ». Art conceived as experience allows us to restore everyone's power to act.

I speak of « institution » because in these short film screenings I organized, the films were instituted, projected to spectators. But it was an institution that was completely distinct from a logic of domination. Some certainly succeed in making works within the framework of a traditional corporatist path. But we know that many works never see the light of day, because their authors do not possess the aptitudes to evolve in professions and corporations that remain violent systems of domination, also marked by sexism (knowing

that the latter is obviously violent for women, but also harms men in their construction).

## **Authorization as a founding gesture**

This approach could be qualified as amateur artistic practice. Certainly, this can apply. But it also concerns professional practice: it is about reinventing ways of doing. I do not claim to be the only one working for a free institution, but if I allow myself to write about it, it is because I believe it is essential for the renewal of creation.

Opening spaces for free institution whenever possible requires, as a professional, fundamental questioning of one's posture. They make us change position, they invite us to step down from the pedestal of knowledge (as if we knew better than others simply by occupying the place of the « teacher »), to enter into a horizontal relationship of mutual exchange, of shared inventions.

This is an essential point in the workshop protocols I lead. I myself often discover the films at the time of their screening. I have people work autonomously, and I am the first spectator, with the collective. And as much as possible, I also participate in creation, to risk myself as well in this expression. I have not accompanied anyone step by step: I have provided a framework, a free institution, creation happens autonomously, and then an opening occurs.

If instructions have not been followed, it is not problematic at all, because the issue is not a value judgment, but this particular framework, which has authorized people to do, people who would never have au-

thorized themselves without this framework of free institution. This is truly the essential point: this *authorization* produces major artistic and social openings for the renewal of living creation.

## **A republican requirement**

I am referring here to funding through public contribution, that is, funding that aims to defend the Republic and the emancipation of citizens, for themselves and for those around them. Let us never forget this: power mechanisms are, in my view, in radical opposition to the values that found our republican texts. The Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights (2007) states that « *cultural rights aim to guarantee everyone the freedom to live their cultural identity* ». These rights invite cultural democracy rather than top-down cultural democratization.

The free institution I propose is not a marginal utopia: it constitutes a concrete response to the democratic challenge of culture. As Jean-Luc Godard said, whose technological dream is being realized today by TikTok, the challenge is to « *freely make films for one's friends, to be able to edit and distribute them* ». What we must build are spaces where this freedom to create is not only possible, but legitimized from the outset, without obligatory passage through the filters of cultural domination.

This approach demands a profound transformation of professional postures. We must step down from our pedestal as experts to enter into a truly horizontal relationship. Only under this condition can the cultural sector reinvent itself and rediscover its emancipatory

function, in service of all citizens and their creative dignity.

# Why Are Cultural Actors So Fragile?

**A plea for a democratic refoundation of cultural institutions in the face of political arbitrariness.**

*From Arcadi in Île-de-France in 2018 to the Agence culturelle Grand Est in 2025, cultural agencies are disappearing into indifference. Beyond the observation, a reflection on the conditions for a sector's resilience.*

## When Cultural Institutions Disappear Without a Trace

In 2018, Arcadi, the regional cultural agency of Île-de-France, which had existed for twenty-five years and provided considerable service to the dissemination and production of performing arts in the region, was closed by Valérie Pécresse, President of the Region. Arcadi was one of my partners at the time, particularly through the co-production of a [research-action project on teenagers and cinemas](#). I witnessed how this major player disappeared without leaving a trace. What is striking about this disappearance, as with others, is the almost total indifference that accompanied it. The website was deleted very quickly. And today, apart from those who experienced it, there is virtually no accessible account attesting that this agency existed and was useful.

History repeats itself. In November 2024, the Agence culturelle Grand Est, an institution created nearly fifty years ago by Alsace and strengthened at the regional level after the territorial reform, learned that it would lose 60% of its regional subsidy from 2026. It was its president, Martine Lizola, who is also president of the Culture and Memory commission of the Regional Council, who announced this without any consultation, fully assuming this choice. As Joël Brouch, director of OARA, points out: « *A few minutes are enough to weaken or eradicate a cultural actor.* » This is very true. How can we understand this and act, and in what direction?

This decision is not part of an overall budget restriction to which cultural structures would also be sub-

ject. It is a genuine political choice about the place accorded to subsidized culture. The Grand Est Region has moreover limited the subsidy reduction to 10% for other structures in Alsace, Champagne, and Lorraine, presenting this reduction as “limited.” What may appear as cynicism is in reality a political choice that I believe is important to understand, in order to learn how to position ourselves, and I hope to move forward! But in a direction that will probably not please those who want to defend their small powers.

## **The Invisibility of Institutions in Citizens’ Eyes**

Professional support is expressed on LinkedIn and at a few insular gatherings. These expressions of solidarity have strictly no effect. The decisions of elected officials prevail and cultural structures disappear according to political agendas. The question that arises is this: why does this type of institutional change leave citizens indifferent?

In principle, citizens should defend this type of agency. They should know what these structures bring them, support their maintenance, refuse to vote for candidates who threaten them. But the reality is quite different: most citizens are unaware that these institutions even exist. They therefore have no way of understanding what will be taken from them by their disappearance.

Furthermore, citizens’ cultural practices are massive, but they mainly go through digital platforms, the primary space for cultural consumption, and through private actors: major concerts, festivals, commercial

events. Subsidized culture, though funded by their own taxes, and the institutional mechanisms that enable it to function, remain largely illegible to them. Insofar as they do not perceive its impact on themselves, it is logical that these cuts go unnoticed.

The small professional milieu complains, of course. But since citizens, who should be the first concerned, are not aware of what these cuts take from them, political leaders enjoy total impunity and freedom. We see here that cultural actors, who readily present themselves as leading social actors, are not really so—otherwise, they would be identified as such by citizens. Why?

## **Narrative as a Condition for Survival**

Subsidized cultural structures live in almost complete dependence on political decisions. They are therefore in absolute fragility. Yet I am the first to think that these funding cuts harm citizens, even if this harm is not perceived as such. A harm that unfortunately affects mainly the wealthiest citizens, even though they are paradoxically not the ones who pay the most taxes.

Faced with this kind of problem, one must of course complain, be lucid, report on it. But above all, for still-existing institutions, there must be an awareness of a necessity: that of creating narrative. It is essential to tell citizens and politicians about the work of these institutional actors. For if there is no narrative of what they do and their social role—that is, the meaning of their funding by public money—neither elected

officials nor citizens can understand what they are for. Only a guild understands their usefulness, whereas the purpose of public money is not to support the cultural sector guild: it is to serve citizens.

What was revealing in Arcadi's case was the disappearance of the website, which contained all the narratives. There is significant political revisionism here. If "antifragile" narratives had existed—that is, narratives disseminated elsewhere than on the agency's official website alone, partnerships with newspapers, real work on territorial storytelling—well, even after the Region closed the site, the political existence of this agency would have continued. All these narratives weave something together. Thus, it would have been more difficult to close it without almost anyone in the public noticing. But why are there so few public narratives of public institutions?

## **Antifragility as a Strategic Horizon**

I advocate for the preservation of a strong and useful subsidized cultural sector in France, because it is, in my view, extremely precious for democracy. To achieve this, we must create and share narratives, and develop a pedagogy of the institution—that is, explain at all levels what institutions are for. Not in the form of a corporatist claim like "they're going to close us down, help us," but by making people understand how citizens, perhaps without knowing it themselves, are actually actors in these institutions.

This is how we can work on antifragility. To use Nassim Nicholas Taleb's concept, developed in his book *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder* (2012),

which I adapted to the cultural sector in the article [For an Antifragility of Cultural Projects](#), it is about strengthening oneself through the attacks themselves. These attacks, instead of suffering them and complaining about them, must be considered as potential lessons, opportunities to learn, to grow, to develop new tools and increase our confidence.

But why is this approach not practiced more? Because, in the institutional layer cake, including that of cultural institutions, there are positions of power. The very opacity of institutions' functions, in relation to one another, allows powers to be established, if only symbolic ones, of those who know what things are for versus the ignorant who do not. This logic of distinction through expert knowledge, which Pierre Bourdieu analyzed in *Distinction* (1979), also operates within the cultural sector itself. This is what must be opened to democracy.

## **Refounding the Democratic Meaning of Cultural Institutions**

Refounding the democratic meaning of cultural institutions means opening them to their civic usefulness. It means opening them to understanding and to citizens themselves taking hold of tools that should belong to them. But since we are in models of power and domination, the professionals in place complain among themselves without having been ready, beforehand, to relinquish their power for the common good—that is, for the collective benefit that the organizations they lead could produce.

La Collaborative, a network of regional performing arts agencies, recalls in its statement of support for the Agence culturelle Grand Est in 2025 that these structures play « *an essential role: supporting artistic teams and performance venues, supporting the circulation of works, advising local authorities, networking, resources, equipment and expertise in service of public policies* ». But this role remains invisible to the general public. It is an entire ecosystem—“artists, structures, local authorities and inhabitants of territories”—that finds itself weakened without those most concerned being aware of it.

Let us learn from all this. Let us radically modify, from now on, the operating methods of territorial cultural institutions, whatever they may be, including artistic teams. Let us open them to citizens. Let us organize consultations. Let us rethink artistic spaces as contributive spaces and not as spaces of domination. Let us relinquish our powers. Having power over oneself as an individual, yes. Having power over a private structure that belongs to us, yes. But having power over a structure funded by public money, no, a thousand times no! This money is not meant to be placed in the hands of people who arrogate to themselves the power to operate it for us.

## **Toward an Effective Cultural Democracy**

Why? Because these powers are the opposite of democracy. Democracy is *dêmos kratos*, power to the people. Everything that concerns the people, the decisions, the people must make them. One might object that citizens do not have the time, and that this is why we delegate, why we elect representatives and then

let them act, trust them. But this delegation without oversight is not democracy. As Cornelius Castoriadis reminded us, « *an autonomous society implies autonomous individuals* » (1975).

We already have the possibility, within cultural institutions, to experiment with democratic processes. We have all the more freedom to do so because it is situated within an “artistic” framework where experimentation can be the norm. Let us do it. Let us refound democratic spaces in our cultural institutions. Let us cede power to citizens. And thus, we will strengthen our institutions, which will regain democratic power, independence from the powers in place, precisely because they will be re-anchored in democracy and not in dependence on political powers.

This refoundation requires moving from what French cultural policies have long called “cultural democratization”—a top-down transmission of legitimate culture to the people—to a true “cultural democracy,” where citizens are recognized as producers of culture and not only as recipients. It is on this condition that cultural institutions will cease to be fortresses vulnerable to political vagaries and become living spaces, anchored in the social fabric, capable of weathering storms because they will be supported by those they serve.

# On the Fragility of Corporatism

**When the defense of cultural privileges masquerades as freedom of expression.**

*The recent condemnation of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region has aroused enthusiasm among performing arts professionals. Yet, this provisional legal victory masks, in my view, a real problem: the corporatist defense of a caste at the expense of cultural democracy.*

## The Illusion of Victory and Corporatist Naivety

The performing arts profession is celebrating the first-instance condemnation of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region for “irregular refusal to disburse cultural funding.” On October 14, 2025, the Lyon administrative court sanctioned the cancellation of a subsidy to the Théâtre Nouvelle Génération, a decision motivated by political considerations. However, I believe that cultural professionals are celebrating too soon:

- First, because this condemnation is only at first instance. The region has appealed and the final outcome remains uncertain. To believe that this is a definitive victory when the procedure will likely continue up to the Court of Cassation shows a certain naivety. As proclaimed in the October 2025 newsletter of Syndeac, this decision « *constitutes a strong signal in favor of freedom of expression and the independence of cultural institutions. It reaffirms that public funding cannot be used as instruments of political pressure and that it must remain based on transparent, equitable criteria that respect the principle of equality among cultural actors.* » But this formulation reveals precisely the problem: it confuses proclaimed independence with real autonomy.
- Second, and this is the heart of my argument here, because this supposed independence of cultural institutions is a myth. Who appoints the directors of institutions? Elected officials. The very choice of people who lead these structures already consti-

tutes a political program. Historically, this choice tended toward left-wing sensibilities. Today, it leans toward right-wing choices. But it's no more political now than before; it has always been so.

## **False Independence: A Structural Lie**

Michel Schneider clearly establishes, in *La comédie de la culture* (1993), the nature of public funding:

« « Modern states that subsidize creation, veritable collective patrons, are not in continuity with princes, because between them and the princes lies precisely the advent of democracy and the distinction it made between public and private money. Public money does not belong to those who dispose of it. Its use is not only embedded in a set of rules and procedures that prohibit its individual appropriation, but it is of a different nature, politically and socially, from private money. »

»

This distinction radically changes what can legitimately be called “freedom.” Schneider continues:

« « The people's elected representative does not dispose of it solely to magnify his person, his party, or his reign. This is a distinction that I had great difficul-

ty getting accepted in discussions about certain artists' fees. »

»

He thus demonstrates that public money obeys democratic rules that prohibit its discretionary use.

Professionals assert their independence regarding programming and artistic choices. But this freedom remains largely illusory. If a show truly displeased for political reasons, to believe that elected officials wouldn't interfere amounts to willful blindness. What frames this supposed freedom of expression are, in reality, cultural programs that don't fundamentally disturb the social reproduction in place.

This is a lie that I think is important to denounce. In all this discourse about freedom of expression and independence, we never talk about audiences, their freedom, their respect, the cultural diversity of the people we're addressing. Kader Attia and Eva Doumbia express this forcefully in their text « *De l'inefficacité de nos œuvres dans la vie réelle* » published in July 2023 after the murder of Nahel by a police officer:

« « The power that funds us to denounce it makes our words the weapons of our own silences. By celebrating our works, by subsidizing them, by giving us the mission of this "inclusion" of those who resemble us, the power, because it allows violence and murders by officials who are depositaries of its authority, transforms us into inconsequential puppets and useless idiots. »

[...]

« Nahel's death shows the ineffectiveness of our works in real life. Our names at the bottom of tribunes and manifestos fail in the same way. These last few days, the hope aroused by minutes of silence and texts read at the beginning or end of performances fades when reading articles from CNEWS, BFMTV, or Le Parisien. »

»

## **Whose Freedom Are We Talking About When We Invoke "Our Freedoms"?**

In reality, what's at stake is the defense of the privileges of a caste, the caste of the cultural sector, which, claiming to work for freedom, actually chooses for everyone and thus infringes on the freedom of audiences. When we say "our freedoms," whom are we talking about? One need only look at the sociology of subsidized theater audiences to immediately understand that this is not about freedom for all.

Michel Schneider notes ironically in *La comédie de la culture*:

« « On the strictly social level, in fifteen years of voluntarist policy, the number of regular participants hasn't budged. These practices haven't spread more widely among the public and remain occasional for the vast majority of those

who engage in them. The social composition of culture enthusiasts has remained rigorously identical since 1973. More seriously, we'll conclude from these findings that state financing of culture, like that of health or education expenditures, moreover, operates what is conventionally called a negative redistribution in relation to income, since the resource is levied on everyone, rich and poor (with the weak progressivity of French taxation), while cultural expenditure mainly benefits holders of high incomes, and is not only proportional but strongly progressive in relation to income. »

»

Kader Attia and Eva Doumbia develop this critique with a painful lucidity that deserves to be quoted at length:

« « The parents, cousins, brothers, sisters, spouses, the neighbors of victims of police crimes, of the racism we denounce are the absentees from the cultural venues where we tell their stories. Thus we contribute to making their lives into fictions. Like a city's toponymy often suggests the disappearance of a place or person, they lose their own essence and become abstractions. While we receive applause and ovations for having denounced wars and shipwrecks that lead to the death of so many misnamed "migrants," chil-

dren continue to be pursued by dangerous police officers and entire families drown in the Mediterranean... »

»

Their observation is lucid: institutional culture transforms real lives into abstractions, dramas into applauded fictions, engagement into posture. The fear that reduced public funding will give politicians more power to instrumentalize culture as propaganda is unfounded. Why? Because today, this is already the case.

## **Symbolic Privilege and Submission to Money**

One might object that the cultural sector is underfunded, that professionals don't earn much money. But privileges are not only financial. It's a symbolic privilege: that of being part of a superior caste that has the power to spend public money and which, completely unconsciously, is programmed by the political power of the supervising authority.

Michel Schneider aptly describes this perverse mechanism:

« « Let art divorce from meaning, form, beauty, let it say nothing to anyone anymore, let there be no more works or public, no matter, as long as there are still artists and politicians, and they continue to support each other: a subsidy for a signature at the bottom of an

electoral manifesto. The curtain falls, the play must be judged. Ministry of Culture? No, government of artists. But culture cannot be governed, and it is not a means of government. Nothing is worse than a prince who thinks he's an artist, except an artist who thinks he's a prince. »

»

The Covid episode demonstrated this brilliantly. Cultural professionals applied arbitrary and incoherent decisions without protest, all to the detriment of citizens, with the sole aim of not losing their public funding. It was at that moment that they signed the pact with the devil that authorizes everything happening today. If they had resisted in service of citizens—because let's never forget that public funding exists to serve the citizens whose taxes finance it—we wouldn't, in my opinion, be here today.

## **Rethinking Culture's Democratic Mission**

**If there is public funding for culture, it's to serve citizens. This is not demagoguery, because precisely what we have to offer citizens is emancipation, freedom, but freedom for all, not just the freedom to program when one has reached positions of power.**

Kader Attia and Eva Doumbia pose what I believe is the central question with sharp clarity:

« « What does this term "inclusion" real-

ly cover? Include whom and in what? This word rubs too closely against the unfortunate ones of “savagery” or “de-civilization” to inspire our confidence. To claim that there is de-civilization implies the loss of humanity of those who would be affected by it. Yet, we know what the denial of humanity means. Our ancestors learned it and sometimes their descendants transmitted it to us. Rather than the injunction to inclusion, we would prefer to speak of sharing and mutual learning, enrichment, encounters, diverse thoughts. And finally of justice and equality. »  
[...]

« By supporting our artistic works, the institutions of power claim to act for better living together. This is not enough. We need concrete actions against discrimination. Real resources for schools, middle schools, and high schools where we intervene and in which we can only observe the State’s disengagement. Substantial funding for social centers, activity centers, and youth centers whose workshops we occasionally produce cannot replace daily missions. »

»

I don’t want to deny the real problem posed by cuts in public funding for culture. Yes, it’s a problem, because culture is essential for a society, but it is so for everyone’s emancipation. Precisely, what professionals spending public money must defend is not freedom

of creation. If we want to be free to create, we can create by ourselves, without asking for public money; no one prevents us from doing so!

## **Creation in Service of Cultural Rights**

Schneider forcefully develops this point in his analysis of the State's role:

« « What, finally, should the State not do regarding culture? If we refuse the principle of interventions on creation itself, and direct subsidy of artists or entire sections of artistic life, such as live performance, the very expression "aid to creation" appears as a contradiction in adjecto. The democratic State is not and should not be a patron and help creation. For three reasons. The first is that modern states that subsidize creation, veritable collective patrons, are not in continuity with princes [...]. The second reason why it should not directly finance creation is that the State is a bad patron. »

»

Publicly funded creation must serve citizens' freedom through demanding but open proposals, co-constructed through dialogue. What must be defended is dialogue and democracy: how are these subsidized cultural projects serving citizens' freedom? Because there are quotes from Bruno Latour or Michel Foucault in

the shows? I'm not saying everything must be participatory, but everything must respect people's cultural rights. It's in the law. It's the mission of projects supported by public money.

## **Dialogue with Elected Officials: A Strategic Necessity**

Politicians need to be advised on the democratic value of subsidized culture. It's not about defending the freedom of expression of a small caste of artists. Michel Schneider writes it bluntly:

« « There's endless debate: who should administer culture, administrators or artists? The former are not legitimate in the eyes of the latter, who rightly do not recognize any artistic competence in them. The latter are no more legitimate vis-à-vis the functioning rules of democratic States, which require that the use of public funds be distinguished from personal appropriation. There's a simple way to decide: let's be convinced that the State, through interposed artists or civil servants, should not administer culture, should not make artistic choices, and should stick to three missions that don't imply any: heritage preservation, democratic access to works, notably through artistic education and support for amateur practice, regulation. »

»

**Because regardless of their political side, elected officials need social cohesion, citizens who feel integrated. Elected officials don't have innate knowledge. They need us to dialogue with them, to help them understand how to do better with culture. This is an essential part of artists' political role.**

## **Beyond Corporatism: Building Spaces for Collective Creation**

The problem with this legal action, which remains legitimate in the face of the scandal of Laurent Wauquiez's action, is that faced with cultural institution leaders entrenched in their privileges and their "freedom," elected officials are aware that this is about defending privileges. In a way, they're right to want to deconstruct this, because they are the ones who were elected by universal suffrage, not the directors of cultural structures.

Kader Attia and Eva Doumbia conclude their text with a call that should challenge us all:

« « It's not by building performance halls for music, dance or theater, museums and art galleries, in spaces where people who don't frequent them live that we buy social peace. We who present our works on these stages sadly observe that they also produce exclusion.

We refuse that our works allow politicians to absolve themselves of acting against racism and all other discriminations. Perhaps we should exercise our right to withdrawal. Our ancestors stopped practicing their rituals so as not to offer them to the curiosity or cupidity of their colonizers, so perhaps we should stop speaking. But how could we when anger and injustice compel us to speak? »

»

As Michel Schneider notes: « *The theory of public service, which takes into account the right-claim, was never a theory of "total State."* On the contrary, it opposed the theory of public power, and defined, within precise boundaries, for what purposes and under what modalities the State must act. »

**The role of each person working within the framework of spending public money is not only to respect the elected official, but to respect and keep alive and operational the democratic system in which that person was elected.**

## **Proposal: Creative Spaces for Dialogue**

**The real fight is in defending democratic institutions. Elected officials need help, understanding, to be put back on the right side of democracy. This is everyone's role. To fight against political power that's too strong over cultural decisions, we must enter into dialogue.**

- First, each of us with audiences in our territory.
- Second, among professionals in a multidisciplinary way.
- Third, with elected officials of all sides.

## **Putting Art in Service of Democratic Dialogue**

Perhaps the cultural projects to undertake today to defend a future for culture are artistic dialogue projects. Putting art in spaces of dialogue isn't just about dialoguing seriously, it's about creating together the present and future of culture.

Here then is my proposal for cultural sector professionals: stop making elitist shows that only serve social reproduction. Change completely and create creative spaces for dialogue, artistic ones, with the highest level of both artistic and democratic rigor. Why? Because it's about public money. This demand must be double. It's this radical artistic and democratic rigor that must be brought to life and shared. And we will see political support, necessary for culture, return, if it reinvests with sincerity, openness, and self-questioning its democratic commitment.

# Re-engaging France's public cultural sector as a good corporate citizen

## **Avenues of action for a permanent future.**

*Facing budget cuts, the public cultural sector must reconnect with its democratic mission. Beyond corporatism, professionals must strengthen their ties with citizens and fully assume their political responsibility.*

## **An entrenched phenomenon**

In 2025, the French cultural sector is undergoing financial turbulence, which I believe presents an opportunity to clarify the proper use of public funds in service of culture. I hope this clarification of mine can prove useful beyond this immediate period, as the vision I propose is one I have held for a long time and, in my opinion, will remain valid for years to come. This is not merely a contingent article tied to a momentary situation, defending a particular stance, but rather a proposal for deeper reflection.

The public cultural sector—funded by citizens’ taxes—finds its meaning in the political sphere, that is, in the community. The community is not the property of elected officials; it belongs to all citizens. Therefore, regardless of who is currently in office, their mission is to serve citizens, of course within the framework of the policies they advocate—but to serve citizens nonetheless. Otherwise, they are not fulfilling their role as elected representatives; they are something else entirely. Everyone is free to do as they please in their personal lives, within legal limits, but as elected officials, they have far greater responsibilities than others. And as citizens, as cultural professionals, we too have duties.

## **Rights, duties, public and private**

Here, I would like to speak more precisely about the duties of cultural professionals who are currently suffering from significant present and announced budget

cuts. I offer my interpretation of this phenomenon and, above all, propose very concrete avenues for progress—not in the sense of defending the cultural sector for its own sake, which is largely meaningless, but in terms of the role of this publicly funded cultural sector in serving the common good. Anything funded by the common good must serve the citizens.

It is entirely possible to engage in culture privately, without seeking public support, and in that case, such cultural activities have no prerogatives, of course. Everyone is free to do as they wish. But as soon as public money is involved—that is, funding derived from citizens—we, as professionals, are in the service of those who finance us. It is not the regional cultural affairs departments or other local authorities; it is the citizens who, through their votes, have delegated decision-making power to elected officials. It is the citizens who pay, not anyone else—let us never forget that. The regional cultural affairs director does not pay; their role is merely to distribute funds as best as possible, in accordance with the law and chosen policies, which themselves must respect the law and the constitution—though unfortunately, this is not always the case.

## **Politics and artistic criteria**

Thus, we expect political and institutional leaders to act with integrity in distributing funds, and this same integrity in spending must be at the heart of the ethics of cultural professionals—artists, organizers, directors of institutions, staff, etc.—in the publicly subsidized sector.

Since we have chosen not to allocate equal amounts to all artists, we must organize the redistribution with integrity, based on criteria. There are always criteria, more or less clear, more or less vague, more or less contingent. And it is our collective responsibility to refine and reflect on these criteria. They are in constant evolution, under perpetual revision. This is the very concept of democracy and its institutions: to continually work on criteria, whatever they may be, whether in the cultural field or elsewhere.

## **The superficiality of corporatist battles**

The cultural field is no exception. And as Michel Schneider's 1993 book *La comédie de la culture* (The Comedy of Culture) well documents, the French public cultural sector is also a "court," with its own internal politics and power struggles that have absolutely nothing to do with the common good or the missions outlined in the law.

Of course, it is of utmost importance to guard against court politics, against privileges granted to some at the expense of others—and especially at the expense of what citizens receive in return for their money, which is collected from them by obligation. Our duties toward citizens are enormous. At this stage, I believe we must be very wary of corporatism—that is, professional sectors defending their narrow self-interests. Our role, collectively, is to serve the public, because this is public money.

Certainly, there are professional sectors, and these sectors doing work for the public must obviously be respected, with labor rights, fair funding, etc. But at a

time—not a new one—when political (or rather, politicized) decisions are drastically reducing public funding for the cultural sector, it seems to me necessary to adopt a more macroscopic perspective. Because if we only have a corporatist vision—tied to the interests of a single profession—we will be very weak, lacking any political argument to defend the budgets being taken from us, which hinder the fulfillment of our missions.

## **The political role of cultural professionals**

I believe we have no choice, collectively, but to position ourselves politically—that is, to focus on the meaning of our cultural actions for citizens. What must be defended are budgets, but these budgets must absolutely serve a purpose, and it is up to us to defend that purpose. If we do not, we leave politicians free to claim, for example, that culture is non-essential and that they will therefore choose to fund it less than other things they deem more essential.

Thus, it is up to us—professionals and citizens—to prove to them, to explain why, in our view, culture is essential. But this is not just rhetoric. We must truly understand for ourselves why and how we are engaged in this essential role of culture for the common good. It is not enough to say it; we must be able to argue it. We need not only arguments but also a subject for those arguments—meaning we must be personally committed.

For me, this is not about constructing a pseudo-democratic argument as a rhetorical tool to defend corporatism. No, that is not at all the purpose of the reflec-

tion I am sharing here. Rather, it is about cultural professionals reinvesting in democratic arguments, re-asserting them, and defending them to elected officials, technicians, and the broader public. Because if we want to be supported by citizens, citizens themselves must be convinced that paying for culture—that their money going to culture rather than being withdrawn from it—is justified. For them to understand why, **we, as cultural actors, must first clarify for ourselves the purpose of our actions.** This seems absolutely indispensable to me. If we do not make this effort—always, but especially now, when culture is truly considered non-essential (and we are seeing the effects)—then not only will public cultural funding continue to decline, but what I consider extremely damaging for democracy is that cultural dissemination will become purely commercial, no longer bound to missions that are not those of commerce but of democracy, funded by public money whose role it is to uphold them.

Here are some proposals—or rather, lines of thought I suggest we discuss, develop, and perhaps act upon. My goal is simply to support action in defense of values, of acts that constitute publicly funded cultural offerings. I truly believe this is very important.

## **The civic responsibility of cultural professionals**

I have often observed—and I am far from alone—that the subsidized cultural world pays little attention to its civic role. The objective is to create the most beau-

tiful works possible or to curry favor with this or that institutional leader. If public money serves great works, professionals may feel little connection to citizens—except perhaps in terms of quantity, i.e., ensuring attendance, filling seats (for example, in live performance). But the question of filling seats depends more on communication than on the actual connection between the work and the citizens, especially since the artist's role is to bring the most beautiful works possible, with their artistic skills, to citizens who, through them, may discover surprising things that take them out of their comfort zones and thus enrich them further.

Why not? I am not criticizing professionals' commitment to artistic excellence, which is of course part of our duties. We are here—if we are paid, as professionals—to truly enrich audiences. So we must be demanding of ourselves; that is obvious. But then, we could stop there and say that, as professionals, our role is to be the best artists possible, and the rest is a matter of communication. Things are obviously not so simple—and fortunately so, because art is an experience, as John Dewey aptly puts it in *Art as Experience* (1928). It is this lived human experience that constitutes art—not an external object, but the experience lived by people. And especially in live performance, the audience experiences something unique during the show. It is a singular event in life, shared together—just as going to the cinema, for example, is a social experience.

One can watch the same film legally or illegally online—that is not the point here—but why choose to see it in a theater rather than at home? Precisely because the experience will be different. Leaving home is already a movement outward. And then, one might see the film with friends. But the mere act of going out

puts us in a different state of reception. So we live a different experience, and that is why we love going to the cinema. Art can also be participatory—meaning it is no longer just about cultural democratization, where masterpieces are offered by specialists to awestruck spectators, but also about participation, cooperation, and the space given to others.

In the cultural field, beyond subsidized culture, we know that the participatory dimension—the direct connection between an artist and their “fans,” as we say today—is fundamental. For example, in music, there are virtually no artists (unless they choose to remain very niche, which is entirely respectable) who are not in direct contact with their communities, whether emerging artists doing it themselves or those supported by record labels that must also engage directly with their communities to sustain streaming and concerts. So this question of the link between the work, the artist, and their audience is key today, and it must concern everyone. And I believe it is a question we must ask ourselves, because **if the link between subsidized culture and citizens were strong, it would not be so fragile right now**. People would not accept it, because a connection would be taken from them.

I believe that in times of crisis like this, if we want to move forward collectively, we must absolutely ask ourselves about our fragility. Why do these attacks go “through like a letter in the post” with citizens, while attacks on other sectors of public life spark civic mobilizations?

## Proposed lines of work

For the cultural sector, there is no mobilization (except occasionally by intermittent workers defending their status, which is repeatedly threatened). Why? How can we advance on this question of connection? It seems to me that since politics is about the collective, about society as a whole—not just political leaders—it is this very connection that must be rebuilt. If that happens, it will be much harder for political leaders, for elected officials, to seize power and make decisions for others.

One might object that elected officials have all the power. No. Currently, we do have elected officials who believe they have all the power, but they only do because we, as citizens, let them—out of comfort (see Étienne de La Boétie’s *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, 1576). So I believe there are several lines of work that fall to us, as cultural professionals:

- **Axis 1:** Work on the connection between publicly funded cultural productions and the political sphere, citizens, and people in local communities. Question and explore this.
- **Axis 2:** What follows from the first axis is the question of evaluation and criteria. What criteria can we establish for the importance of this connection? Because if we do not demonstrate that certain productions are indispensable, then yes, they are less essential than other things—and thus politically fragile. So we must delve into these issues; it is our civic responsibility.
- **Axis 3:** Exercise our civic responsibility ourselves. Our role in the political space is

full and complete. Each of us is responsible for the democratic system. Of course, there are levels. Of course, elected officials have more decision-making power in the moment than we do—that is true. But it is up to us, as citizen-professionals in the cultural sector, to fully exercise our citizenship. This is our role—not just to defend a profession, but to defend the meaning of our actions in the political sphere. It is an essential role. This is not about becoming “politicized” in the partisan sense, but about being aware of our social role. And a social role does not necessarily mean always packing venues. A social role is also about leading people to shift perspectives, to dream, to step out of their daily lives, to be shocked, to reflect, to laugh. Art does not have the same uses or utilities as roads, healthcare, schools, or policing. Each of these fields has precise attributions—and so does art, which can also reinvent itself (though, in truth, all fields can reinvent their methods).

Tomorrow, it could very well be decided that there is much less funding—even less—for national education, for example. Well, in the same way, we would have to defend its purpose. Or a government could suddenly decide to eliminate the military budget. That could be a choice. But to defend it, we would have to justify why a military is necessary for a nation—we would have to evaluate and argue for it. For culture, the stakes are the same. We must not, in my view, leave these stakes solely to elected and institutional decision-makers. It is our role to work on these issues and bring them forward—to inform elected officials and institutional leaders, and to help steer politics in the

right direction.

One might say: “But we are just artists.” Yes, but as artists, we are also responsible for the system in which we live. Citizenship is not just doing what we are allowed to do; it is also participating through what we do—and through our institutional and political engagement. Our job as artists is not only to create but also to ensure that publicly funded creation exists. And I believe it is very important to distinguish publicly funded culture from private culture. They may seem the same, and sometimes the same artists operate in both spheres, but this mixing creates an unfortunate confusion.

## **Public culture vs. commercial culture**

Beware: the criteria for public culture and commercial culture are not at all the same. Even if they may seem similar—because private culture also needs connections and encounters, or else people won’t come and it won’t generate revenue—there is a quantitative dimension in the private economy. And in the proper use of public funds, we may need things that are more independent of market logic. Economic logic is not relevant for defending democratic values. The public cannot depend on ratings—that should not be the criterion, as it is for television. The criterion must be much more about territorial cooperation, about duration. And we must cooperate far more than we do today with the social sector, with associations, etc. This is not just about connecting to issues but also about listening to citizens’ needs.

This is deeply enriching. It weaves real connections in

the political sphere. This weaving supports the entire democratic edifice. And through these connections and cooperations, we can also achieve greater capillarity between funding from diverse sources, which can mutually reinforce one another. So cooperation is a major angle to explore.

## **The disenchanted parenthesis of Covid**

Personally, during the Covid period in France, I sensed—or rather, understood—that the tide had turned. Let me explain. In this crisis, there was, on the one hand, a public health issue and, on the other, a question of how to manage it. The public health issue was roughly the same worldwide, but the political choices for managing this crisis and trying to curb this serious epidemic varied greatly—and were not always democratically acceptable, far from it.

France's policy for managing this crisis was one of the most authoritarian in the world. China was worse, true, but France heavily relied on threats, force, manipulation, stigmatization, and intimidation to extract forced consent from its citizens. Under this policy, there were a number of lockdowns and closures of establishments—and as we remember, culture was deemed non-essential, with cultural venues being the first variable to be adjusted.

Even though professionals in cultural venues did their best to comply with health directives to remain open, they were still shut down arbitrarily, while other places—I'll take bookstores as an example—collectively resisted and were not closed as much as cultural venues, even though it was established that being in a

theater or cinema at a certain distance from others was no more dangerous than being in a bookstore. This was known even with the knowledge available at the time.

So we saw that cultural venues were not treated the same as others—but above all, that the cultural sector, its professionals, and even its elected officials, raised very few collective voices. In contrast, in Belgium, cultural centers faced similarly incoherent decisions from Belgian authorities but collectively decided not to close, to continue fulfilling their democratic missions—and they stayed open. They were not endangering anyone, as they followed the shared health protocols of the time. In France, the cultural sector did everything “by the book,” but we let ourselves be shut down!

Why was there no collective movement, no refusal? These arbitrary, senseless decisions harmed the civic mission of cultural venues. We let it happen (well, not me). We made no decisions for ourselves; most cultural professionals just accepted arbitrary, incoherent rulings that prevented us from fulfilling our civic duties.

At that moment, when I saw the cultural sector’s reaction, it was like an alarm bell: I wondered what the posture of public cultural professionals and officials really was. For whom and why were they doing this work? For the benefit of citizens, who needed it greatly during that time—or in obedience to rulers making incoherent, unjust, and blatantly unconstitutional decisions? There was a blind, democratically speaking, obedience to political choices made unilaterally by a government in total opacity (via a defense council whose decisions will remain secret for 65 years).

Broadly, we accepted the unacceptable, to the detri-

ment of the link between the cultural sector and citizens, who needed it more than ever during that period.

## **Learning to disobey**

I told myself at the time that if we accepted this, we were opening the door wide to all future arbitrary decisions by politicians. If elected officials at all levels realize they can impose irrational, arbitrary decisions on the cultural sector—and the cultural sector says nothing, does not even defend its own democratic mission—then this sector is extremely fragile. It disregards its democratic duty, merely obeying orders from above rather than serving citizens.

When you serve citizens, it may be your duty to mobilize against government decisions. And that is exactly what is happening now, in early 2025. All cultural leaders want to defend their budgets. The same should have happened during Covid. But why didn't professionals mobilize then? For the same budgetary reasons: they feared opposing the government would cost them funding—but this was short-sighted. If we do not resist authoritarianism, we validate it.

They did not dare rebel against arbitrary decisions for fear of budgetary reprisals, but in doing so, they sawed off the branch they—and all of us—were sitting on. When you obey absurd orders, you are responsible for your obedience. This is the entire lesson of the Nuremberg trials: you are guilty of obeying vile orders (all proportions kept, of course—but the logic is the same).

The cultural sector made itself guilty of obeying arbi-

trary, incoherent decisions, and it failed to act collectively. Had it done so, as in Belgium, it would have had weight and could have changed the game—claiming its political place in the moment and for the future. It should have claimed it, because it serves citizens, not rulers.

And why didn't it? Out of fear, of course. But fear is first and foremost a fantasy, a projection. The problem is that this majority acceptance signed off on all future abuses by political leaders. And they are happening now.

So it is not at all surprising today that there are such cuts. Political leaders know there is absolutely no risk—that they can save money here without difficulty, without facing opposition.

Moreover, the cultural field is, in principle, a crucible of democracy—and thus potentially of dissent. So it is more comfortable to silence voices that might say things you do not want to hear. That is, after all, the role of artists—it was even the role of the king's jesters.

I do not recount this to cast blame but to highlight the very strong message sent at that time. What played out—what clearly shifted—was a relationship of dependence, not independence, and a disconnect from the social role of art and culture.

## **Hope in citizen cooperation**

I am aware that what I am expressing here may not be pleasant to hear, but if I dare broach this potentially

polemical subject, it is to bring us back to our political consciousness as professionals. And I am convinced it is never too late to rebuild connections.

If the connection is truly rewoven, if evaluations are truly conducted, if we see ourselves as responsible for a democratic and civic commitment—given the source of the funding for our actions—and if we establish co-operations, I believe this foundational work can allow us, today and in the future, to reweave the social and political meaning of publicly funded culture in France. I believe in this. It is never too late, in my view, to do foundational work from a place of shared awareness.

And yes, becoming aware of one's mistakes is not always pleasant—but this is not about judging ourselves, only about trying to be lucid and seeing how we can move forward with meaningful work.

I believe corporatism—defending a single profession—is not nearly powerful enough to make progress. I believe this crisis is precisely the opportunity to redefine the meaning of our actions, of our roles as professionals living from these jobs. I am not speaking of activism but of responsibility regarding the source of our funding—nothing more.



# **Defending culture differently: methods for tomorrow**

Benoît Labourdette

My multidisciplinary practices—spanning creation, cultural action, training, and support in a wide range of cultural, social, and educational contexts across France—provide me with a privileged, subjective, and in-depth observatory of the cultural sector in France.

This sector is weakened by its position, often deemed “non-essential” by many political leaders, by the competition from digital platforms in cultural practices, as well as by challenges and obstacles related to the difficulty of establishing interdisciplinary collaborations and the scarcity of evaluations, which are often poorly conducted and instrumentalized.

My observatory allows me to identify dynamics that work, as well as difficulties I observe. Here, I propose to share my analyses, methods, and suggestions, hoping they may prove useful. My goal is to contribute to a stronger cultural sector in the future, as I believe that defending a cultural sector funded by taxpayers’ money holds the potential for emancipation, the development of freedoms, democracy, and the capacity to act—in a way that is fundamentally different from what private actors produce.

This is possible if there is no hypocrisy, and in my view, it comes at the cost of a commitment to lucidity and self-questioning, a choice to deconstruct representations, and perhaps to challenge certain privileges and systems of domination.

