# The creativity of populations revealed through artists as a vector of proximity for live entertainment - Results of experiments

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**Abstract:** The research objective is to understand the way in which the implementation of an artistic and cultural situation comprising an object and a context, both being vectors of the dimensions of experience, serves to reduce the perceived distance from the cultural object by creating proximity in order to increase appropriation of the cultural offer. This hypothesis is tested within the experimental framework of resident artistic workshops at a university (the potential receivers of 18-25 year old students constitute a privileged target for cultural policies currently undergoing "renovation"). Varied analysis of the qualitative data collected allows us to present the first results of this ongoing project. This analysis tends to illustrate that the appropriation of the cultural object is better when the interaction between the subject and the object allows for an iterative logical process to take place, whereby on the one hand, the given possibility of an active role in the creative process stimulates self-confidence and provides a framework and on the other hand, the existence of sincere room for manoeuvre for the individual in order for the object to become something he can identify with.

*Keywords: Experience consumption; perceived distance; proximity; appropriation*

# Introduction

The value of an object is not only linked to its usefulness, but also to the desire for that object, thus bringing the subject into consideration. If the object is not desired then it is without value (Orléan, 2011). Whereas, in the cultural arena, stimulating the desire of aesthetic objects is an essential challenge for professional actors and this quest is even more evident today, given that the democratisation levied in the 60's through cultural policies – to make the works of art of humanity available to the maximum number of people[1] – has only partially been met, notably concerning live entertainment produced by state sponsored non-profit making organisations. Cultural desire materialised by consumer behaviour resulting in attendance concerns only a limited segment of citizens whose socio-demographical characteristics have been stable for the same period and whose average age continues to increase (Benhamou, 2011). Even if the recent research carried out by Olivier Donnat illustrates that French cultural attendance is showing a slightly increasing tendency (notably in the case of live entertainment), he confirms the observation that the democratisation of culture is an ethical ideal which, in spite of the efforts made by professionals in the sector, is difficult to achieve (Donnat, 2011). Therefore the questions remain *why* isn't cultural desire manifest in wider segments of the population and *how* can it be stimulated in those who are distanced from it.

## 1. Research stakes and theoretical framework

Since the 1960's cultural policies have doted the territory with structural equipment in the belief that they were necessary to diffuse artistic works to the maximum number of people. At the same time, the myth of revelation dominated the professionals in the field: the public would undoubtedly appropriate the propositions put to them due to their aesthetic quality. Cultural mediation which appeared in the 1980's was supposed to put this means of representation into perspective and allow works of art to be transmitted alongside knowledge transfer.

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[1]     [1] See French decree reference 59-889 dated 24 July 1959, defining the primary mission of the Cultural Affairs Minister «to make the works of humanity and firstly French works of art, accessible to the maximum number of French people possible; to ensure the largest possible audience to our cultural heritage and to favour the creation of intellectual and physical works of art to enrich this heritage.».

This change of posture brings with it several undertakings by professionals in the sector with the aim of making the environment more favourable for the most possible number of citizens with more varied socio-demographical characteristics:

- guarantee of geographical proximity by a dense web of installations across the territory;
- diversification of programming choices and improvement of visual recognition of the offer thanks to a reinforcement of the artistic identity of sponsored theatres that specialise in dance, vocal or dramatic arts, for example;
- strong commitment to multi-channel communication actions;
- reduced tariffs or even free of charge...

In spite of this, the demand for cultural services and products has evolved very little from either a quantitative or qualitative point of view, and particularly in the case of sponsored live entertainment, a sector defined by the offer. This sector's public is sociologically homogeneous (mid to high socio-professional categories) and it increases very little.

This situation seems to translate the persistence of barriers to cultural access and questions the capability of the undertakings to remove them. They concern two types of non-consumers (Passebois-Ducros, 2008):

- Absolute non-consumers, for whom the offer could suit but who are not interested in it due to lack of affective proximity. The symbolic distance is great and they do not appropriate the propositions. The recurrent saying «it's not for me» continues to be used frequently.
- Relative non-consumers, who have looked at the offer more closely but do not go ahead because they cannot identify with it.

In order to understand the barriers which keep these consumers at a distance from cultural propositions, we need to better understand the determinants of their behaviour. Research has shown that behavioural models which put forward the consumer's rational thought processes within the characteristically irrational field of consumption (we make a distinction here between think and feel products (Claeys, Swinnen, & Vanden Abeele, 1995)), have their limits (Filser, 2008). These **cognitive models** centre on the decision-making process and the maximum number of resources dedicated to this choice. They focus on consumer's individual characteristics and how they are likely to affect the processing of information. From 1982, Holbrook & Hirschman suggested an experiential approach to go beyond these limits. These **experience research models** are based on hedonic values and they evaluate the behavioural variables linked to products / services / experiences, notably their emotional dimensions. They

concentrate on the importance of stimulation research processes. In these models, the role of information-seeking (cognitive factor) is not determining (Filser, 2008). Therefore there is a gap – a contradiction, even – between the various actions undertaken until now to recruit non-consumers (intensity of transmitted information, the use of cognitive means of pressure to convince) and the experiential stakes of analysed consumption (the consumer's emotional and subjective dimensions need to be taken into account). Therefore, cognitive approaches (in particular information transmission) will be efficient for those consumers already linked to a cultural institution but inefficient for non-consumers whose barriers are to be found elsewhere.

It appears necessary therefore, in order to remove the barriers to live entertainment attendance, to favour experiential approaches which give the spectator an emotional «shock», that is, an affective encounter with culture. In order to back up this affirmation, the objective of this research is to study the consequences of actions, where the artistic and cultural situation is an object within the context of experiential dimensions, on the individual's relationship with culture. To do so, we have explored three psychological processes : perceived distance, proximity and appropriation. In fact, one element which explains live entertainment non-attendance appears to be that the non-consumers perceive a distance between cultural objects and the social contexts in which they live. This distance can effectively be a source of discomfort which contributes to an increase in the perceived risk of having a bad experience whilst having a negative impact on the consumers' attitude towards the product (Gallen & Siriex, 2011). When the perceived distance between the consumer and the product is too great, the appropriation process is prohibited.

Appropriation corresponds to the development of a relationship link, the subject's attachment to the object, with a double-sided power: on the one hand, *the power of the subject*, the former being able to personalise and change the object, making it his own (Carù & Cova, 2003), and on the other hand, *the power of the object* the latter being able to penetrate the subject's personal sphere, until it eventually becomes an element he can identify with (De Singly, 1996). It would seem from this definition that actions undertaken to widen the public segments are undertaken with the objective of obtaining appropriation of cultural propositions by the targeted individuals.

Alongside the idea of distance, the idea of proximity comes naturally to mind. In the same way as for distance, here we need to consider perceived proximity. The distinction between these two notions, that we could consider as "simply" complementary is the way in which previous theoretical studies have treated them. Aside from their geographical acceptance, the

attention given to these two concepts is recent which explains a certain heterogeneousness in approaches. Therefore, perceived distance can be evoked in the context of psychological discomfort and approbation in a unidimensional way (Gallen & Siriex, 2011) or by distinguishing four different aspects:  spatial, social, temporal or hypothetical (Audrezet & Caffier de Kerviler, 2011). The exploratory studies carried out by Bergadaà & Del Bucchia (2009) conceived different dimensions: access proximity, relational proximity, process proximity, identity proximity and functional proximity. Our own position concerning our exploratory study leads us not to favour one approach over another, but to bear them in mind at the analysis stage.

Taking into account firstly the difficulties faced by the cultural sector, live entertainment especially, to reach a wider audience and secondly the theoretical elements that we have concerning experiential consumer behaviour and the concepts of distance and proximity, we have put in place a research framework in order to answer our question: how can an artistic or cultural situation in which experiential dimensions of consumer behaviour are particularly present, contribute to lessen or remove the distance perceived by people presented with cultural objects, create proximity and facilitate a better appropriation of artistic propositions over a territory ?

We have established three hypotheses which correspond to the three concepts we have highlighted - distance, proximity, appropriation:

- H1: the experience of an artistic and cultural situation combining an object within the context of experiential dimensions contributes to reducing the perceived distance from the artistic propositions;

- H2: the experience of an artistic and cultural situation combining an object within the context of experiential dimensions contributes to creating perceived proximity with the artistic propositions;

- H3: the experience of an artistic and cultural situation combining an object within the context of experiential dimensions contributes to developing better appropriation of artistic propositions.

## 2.    Choice of research methods

### 2.1. Empirical tests through experiments

Carù & Cova (2006) underline the importance when setting up these experiential approaches of taking into account the possibility of actions left to the consumer as inventor, builder and

producer of his experience. This statement is backed up by Brunel, Gallen, & Roux (2009) statements that emphasise the praxeological dimension of appropriation: it would appear necessary that for appropriation of the object to happen, the subject must be in the **action**, based on a sensory experience, allowing a transformation to take place.

An "extreme" application of this principal in the field of cultural activities means giving special attention to co-creation experiences between one or several artists and groups of the public who we are seeking to be creative, notably in the case of resident artistic workshops.

For this reason, a number of resident artistic workshops were set up at Nantes University. They took place over the second semester of the 2011-2012 academic year. These workshops take place in an objectively defined geographical territory, a place where students live and study. The aim of these experiments is to closely look at a very precise group of public: undergraduates from 18 to 25 years old. This element is coherent with our work because this segment of the public crystallises the current challenges within cultural policy in terms of rejuvenating and renewing potential consumers. Indeed, students are of an age and situation where they are in the process of self-construction, by « breaking away », during a time of self-analysis and questions relating to identity vis à vis handed-down schemes and guidelines, notably from the family environment. It is a period for « deconstructing » oneself in order to « redefine » one's identity. It is a time of one's life in which a greater porosity can be created in order to absorb new propositions, notably artistic offers.

In particular, a group of artists called « Interim » was chosen (http://www.interim-artistes.info/) to work for a five month period on the campus during which time they collected material for their individual creations and also set up co-creation workshops. Throughout the semester, other artists from various disciplines took part in the Discovery Units that also are co-creation workshops. The artists led a workshop with a regular group, there again in a co-creative action.

These steps are marked by the fact that the artists do not arrive on site with pre-conceived ideas of what they are going to create. On the contrary, they immerse themselves in the context, have familiarisation sessions, are nourished by the identity of the site, its real and idealised history and its purpose. The interactions between «personal contexts and the artistic context of each artist» serve to irrigate the personal and collective creative process.

This immersion in the context led the "Interim" group of artists for example, to live on the campus, set up their office there, and for one of them, to register as a student for the period. These choices are strongly symbolic: culture does not wait for us to go to it (« *destination*

*culture* »), it goes out to meet potential audiences (« *flux culture* »[2]). Its manifests itself through spontaneous propositions which seek to stimulate one of the five fundamental emotions: surprise.

However, the experience goes beyond the effect of surprise because resident artistic workshops invest over time to allow a form of familiarity so that the parties involved can identify with the action in order to let the word of mouth, a precious element of cultural transmission, take its course. Different opportunities for meetings are offered in this way to individuals who are not there in an "events management" capacity, as the objective is to create a more authentic, intimate and sincere link with the individuals, this being a stake in the key factors of appropriation (Chaney, 2008).

The actions led by the artists echo the university's project to: "maximise" the experiential intensity of these propositions in the hope of creating proximity out of the artistic object and the co-created context. The emphasis is therefore on the possibility for the students to be actors, <u>in the action</u>, associated with the production, in a co-productive situation, getting involved in a concrete way, revealing their creativity and talents (participation in workshops such as reverse graffiti or cooking, relaying the art awareness baton, being invited to leave a trace of their contributions...). The experiences on offer (to individuals or in a group situation) induce interactions with their senses by way of exploration and physical, emotional or artistic commitment...

Particular attention is given to the diversity of the propositions in terms of artistic disciplines so that each participant can find something via a wide range of techniques to suit his sensitivities (visual arts, cooking, videos, photography...) and to be able to express themselves through these supports. This is one of the reasons that Interim was chosen: their multi-disciplined artistic capabilities.

In this way, the total of all the workshops studied provides us with a large number of experiments which help us to better understand how propositions with strong experiential dimensions lead to a reduction in perceived distance and an increase in proximity towards the artistic and cultural proposition. In this perspective, it seemed pertinent to us to break down the concept of proximity into its five dimensions (Bergadaà & Del Bucchia, 2009; Dufeu &

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[2]    [2] This is an analogy to the distinction made in the distribution area of marketing: «*destination distribution*» (traditional points of sale that constitute a destination) versus «*flux distribution*» (new points of sale which are set up at the crossroads of the paths of potential buyers: train station and airport concourses...) (Filser, Garets (des), & Paché, 2012).

Ferrandi, 2011; Hérault-Fournier, Merle, & Prigent, 2010). This theoretical scheme was developed and tested in the area of fast-moving consumer goods. We have transposed it into the cultural field.

**Geographical proximity**

This is assimilated to access proximity. This dimension concerns the offer's capability of being present where its customers live. By suggesting resident artistic workshops at the place where the students study and live – on the campus – we have put this first dimension in place. This commitment is underlined by what we refer to as «flux culture».

**Relational Proximity**

This can exist through the direct and repetitive relations between the sales personnel and the customer. This interpersonal proximity has been developed at two levels within our resident artistic workshops: firstly the regular presence of the project management and secondly, the artists' presence at the different meetings and/or on a regular basis.

**Process proximity**

This concerns the fact that individuals involved in the sector can be attentive to the nature of the processes put in place by their suppliers/customers. It expresses the degree of acceptance concerning the means of production as perceived by the consumers.

This dimension is essential in the context of our experiments because we particularly want to verify the fact that putting members of the public (and especially non consumers) in proximity with the artistic creative process allows a better appropriation of it.

**Identity proximity**

This designates the adhesion to business values as perceived by the consumer. In the case of resident artistic workshops, culture-related values were the foundation of our action (development of an enquiring mind, opening to different forms of language...), both in the briefs prepared for the artists to assist their approach of the students and in the different forms of real and virtual communication that were created.

**Functional proximity**

This deals with the ability of the individuals making the offer to adapt to the needs of their customers in terms of quality, quantity, delays, diversity. The different workshops were set up within a number of constraints (budgetary, logistical, human...) and took into account the perceived expectations of the potential receivers/contributors.

### 2.2. Method of collecting and analysing data

Two sessions took place successively:

- The first was to observe the role of perceived distance (from the artistic object) through the students' spontaneous comments: is it expressed as a barrier?

This exploratory phase led us to carry out ten in-depth interviews with students representing heterogeneous profiles in terms of disciplines studied and culture awareness.

- The challenge of the second session was to follow and evaluate the experiments. For this, three complementary actions were set up:
  - survey questionnaires were distributed at the different workshops and made available online on the university website; they were mainly open questions in order to obtain worded responses;
  - three round table debates during the workshops in order to get an inside view of the mechanisms at work;
  - third party observations and participative observations (participation of the authors to the workshops, shared experiences among which the artistic protocol of the art awareness baton...).

The collected data has been analysed according to the principles of content analysis to ensure thorough interpretation. Therefore the main themes and sub-themes were identified (Bardin, 2007): this made it possible to structure the presentation of the results.

## 3. Results of the experiments

The results should allow us to respond to our main hypothesis, in which the setting up of artistic and cultural situations comprising experiential dimensions permits the perceived distance to be reduced, the creation of proximity and better appropriation of the cultural objects proposed.

### 3.1. The role of perceived distance from the cultural object

The first session of our research – the conducting of ten exploratory interviews with students of varied profiles – led us to confirm the existence of perceived distance from cultural propositions, which constitutes a potential barrier to the practices that take place.

We have seen in our background research of the theoretical framework that the different studies undertaken so far on the notion of perceived distance have not all taken the same dimensions to detail the concept. Our own work leads us to distinguish on the one hand,

cognitive distance and on the other hand affective distance, linked to self-image and the image of the intended public.

In fact the results illustrate that certain people feel as if they do not have the intellectual capacity to understand a cultural proposition. This is cognitive distance. Other people feel there is a discrepancy between cultural propositions and the image they have of themselves. We call that affective distance linked to self-concept. Finally, we sometimes notice the absence of being able to identify with the group associated with the cultural activity, or even a rejection of it. We will speak therefore of affective distance linked to mental representations of the intended public for the cultural activity.

*Cognitive distance*

Here we touch on the challenge of the intellectual understanding of works of art.

When this does not happen, this creates a sense of frustration which makes the experience disagreeable:

> *"the singer, his words are a bit esoteric and you don't understand it all, you know and he is not trying to explain what he does or what he is trying to say but he wants people to make sense of the song for themselves and that frustrates me [...] But I like to make sense of it, I don't like to stay empty like that, so I really like... for films too, I go mainly to what the producer was trying to do, you know ?" (Agathe)*

There are several possible reactions to this sense of frustration: trying to get over it by looking for explanations, notably on internet forums, or give up. In the latter case, the cognitive distance is not reduced and becomes a barrier to participation.

> *"I go on internet, well, that's a bit « geek »! But I go on it a bit if I'm very interested or if there's something I didn't understand, I try to look it up on the internet or through forums...On Allociné for a film." (Flore)*

> *"Sometimes I come out and say "didn't get it" Well, it doesn't matter, I say to myself, "why, why didn't you get it?" and in fact I don't reject the play, I know that sometimes when I go with my parents and friends of theirs and they say "I didn't get anything, it's annoying" no, if I don't get it, it doesn't annoy me. It's more like "why didn't we get it and maybe we weren't meant to get it, maybe that was the message, no... but I do look for an answer." (Dorian)*

The reactions that reject participation due lack of understanding seem to correspond to an aversion to losing one's bearings or putting oneself in question over the artistic object:

> *"Given that I like staying in, I am a bit of a recluse and so it's an effort for me, you know? Going through the steps of discovering and being a part of something new, going beyond my own guidelines, I have my own way of doing things, it means making an effort each time, you know" (Marie D.)*

Finally, some of the interviewees' comments led us to understand that the challenge of understanding is important and not just because it concerns artistic works but also the context in which they are offered, for example the types of communication used or off-site meetings with the artists:

> *"I like this type of communication, visual communication is very striking and we remember it. But it is not very..., it is striking but not very easy to understand, to make you want to go." (Dorian)*

> *"I would like to speak with the artist but I would not understand much or else I would feel as if he is giving me everything and I can't talk with him." (Dorian)*

We can therefore see that a first possible form that perceived distance takes is a lack of understanding. Another form comes across in the interviews: affective distance linked to one's self-image compared with the image of the people who are associated with the cultural activity.

## *Affective distance*

This form of distance corresponds to a discord between the perception of the activity or the associated public and the perception of oneself (self-concept). Here again, several reactions are possible when the affective distance is great: accept to participate all the same due to other motivating factors or because the discord is considered justifiable, avoid or reject the step of participation.

An example of a motivating factor which allows the acceptance of participation in spite of a great affective distance is friendly company. This is the case for Antoine, who goes to philosophic debates even though he's "*not a big fan*" but because he enjoys going out with his friends:

> *"Yes, because in fact, we have a friend who likes that kind of thing, you know, and we have nothing else to do, so we don't have such a bad evening, really." (Antoine)*

In the absence of this type of facilitator, the perceived distance between self-concept (notably due to habits) and the type of participation in question can lead to apprehension, which, itself is a contributory factor to avoidance:

> *"For example, it is true that my parents never took me to concerts, or practically never. And because of that, well I find it difficult to go to a concert, I really do. And I don't know how... I'm lost, you know? I guess I've been to four concerts in my life." (Dorian)*

Other times, the acceptance of this type of participation in spite of a great perceived distance was linked to the fact that the distance seemed justified, notably due to the difference in social class. The perceived benevolence of the participating public also makes the discord acceptable whereas the impression that one is surrounded by a crowd of experts who do not welcome novices, possibly combined with weak self-confidence is more likely to lead to avoidance.

> *"I don't like the ambiance so much [at the theatre], it's true, being among people who, well, give the impression that they are experts and that I am the only one who is not sure what I'm doing there. At least at the opera there is the upside of being with smart people and I like that." (Agathe)*

> *"It's true that at the opera the audience was not from the same social class as me and you could tell from the way they were talking about the performance that they had already seen the opera several times, other productions and all that. In fact I found that really interesting – it's enriching to listen to them. Also they spoke with old-fashioned vocabulary and I thought I was in another world, it was great!" In fact the audience wasn't straight-laced. There were jokes, some of them a bit below the belt but they laughed. Well, anyway I really enjoyed it." (Agathe)*

> *"I have, um, let's call it a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem which means that if I believe that there are better writers, if we take the writers workshop as an example, people who are more capable, gifted, have that something special, then I am going to feel so small it will take away all my enthusiasm." (Marie D.)*

> *"Whatever we say to the contrary, we always judge other people, even unintentionally. [...] I think that some people are passionate about a certain area [...] and they want to share that passion so maybe they are more cultured in one particular area and I'm not cultured in any one area [...]. In fact it's, how shall I put it? A sort of community [...] and I don't think I belong to any community because, as I say I don't have a speciality. I like all sorts of things and nothing specific." (Marie D.)*

The first stage of our exploratory work is therefore to confirm the existence of forms of perceived distance (cognitive or affective, between certain people and artistic objects) and the fact that this distance can be a barrier to cultural participation. The next part of our research

consists then of studying the different possible ways to overcome this distance, in the context of the creative process and appropriation mechanisms.

## 3.2. Results of experiments relating to proximity and appropriation

The second session of our empirical testing, through the analysis of the content from the round-table debates and the written responses to our surveys showed that using experiential situations favours different forms of proximity and encourages appropriation of the cultural object ("*In the resident artistic workshops I liked the contact with the artist and the proximity of the artistic works pleased me.*", "*It changed my conception of art, making it different and more accessible than I imagined. I feel closer to it. It seems easier to understand*"). We will now present the different contributions which should allow us to reduce the perceived distance by means of experience chronology. 1. Experience triggers  2. Proximity during the experience 3. post-experience effects which influence appropriation.

*The effects of experience triggers... or their absence*

Analysis of the various collected data shows that different types of experience triggers exist. It is essential to analyse them in order to understand how the dynamics of proximity/appropriation that we are analysing are triggered. The absence of triggers also allows us to clarify the processes observed. **Intrinsic motivation** (curiosity, willingness to discover and openness) and **extrinsic motivation** (the desire to meet and share) are often expressed in the collected data. These are two forms of motivation which are the basis of consumer behaviour relating to live entertainment (Bouder-Pailler, 2007).

Some examples of typical comments:

> "It's always interesting to open up", "Participating in such an offer is a way of discovering a new artistic perspective and to meet people involved in this project" ; "I like art and discovering new things" ; "That's what makes it interesting to approach food in an artistic and ludic way" ;  "I took part in the « food workshop» the title aroused my curiosity, I wanted to do something unusual, something  different. I wanted to experiment with something new and it was also the chance to meet new people and share ideas. It was a privilege." ;  "I wanted to discover and take part in an  original approach to culture"; " I wanted to meet new people and at the end of the day do something different. I wanted to observe things from the inside.".

We also observe that certain individuals do not express extrinsic motivation. In fact, their absence of interest for the cultural object is balanced out by their interest in social contact: "*I*

*don't have anything to say, I just came because the girls asked me to*" (the cameraman on a shared creative project). Whereas, cognitive psychology theory points out that the interest given to an object which has been approached due to extrinsic motivation can, following proximity with the object (in this case the cultural object), migrate to intrinsic motivation.

*Implication in a co-creative process creates proximity in its five dimensions*

The comments collected allow us to identify that participation in artistic and cultural co-creations do fall into the five dimensions of proximity with the experiences that took place.

| Proximity dimensions | Examples of comments |
|---|---|
| **Access proximity** | *"Seeing artists every day permitted me to create a link with them."* |
| **Relational Proximity** | *"Relations with the project members were very interesting."*<br>*"It's pleasant to meet artists and to receive concrete explanations."*<br>*"I enjoyed the daily contact with the artists."*<br>*"The team spirit was good, I felt a part of the group straight away."*<br>*"I appreciated the contact with the artists."*<br>*"I liked the idea that the artists communicated with us (…). I had discussions here and there with them."*<br>*"I participated in the cookery workshop. Mixing cooking and creativity is exactly what I like. It's nice, you get to know the artist. We are communicating together. It's friendly."*<br>*"I really like being in contact with the artists."* |
| **Process proximity** | *"I was able to ask the artists about what they were doing and how they were doing it. It was an opportunity to get into their world and to see things differently."*<br>*"I liked the fact that we achieved something collectively."*<br>*"The resident workshop made me understand the creation itself and to discover the marvellous universe that the artist's vision of things can be."* |
| **Identity** | *"Having been in contact with the artist over several weeks, I was able to* |

| proximity | *understand his values and his political convictions concerning his view of the world. And that's what brought him closer to me. (Reverse graffiti UED)*<br><br>*"I really appreciated that these guys (the artists) asked questions about the university which were not the usual ones that people ask about a place of learning."* |
|---|---|
| **Functional proximity** | *"I liked the idea of art being brought into the university (...) and that we develop together."*<br><br>*"It was interesting to observe (...) from the inside the necessary organisation to put the artistic process in place, with its material constraints and individual needs (management of a diverse team)."* |

Therefore, co-creation experiences seem to favour proximity between the subject and the object. However, other elements are brought up, revealing that the proximity was not as intense as it could have been:

- The intensity of the artists' presence - their visibility: "*what I noticed was the thin presence of the artists during this workshop, it went unnoticed.*". This comment illustrates one of the paradoxes of setting up these resident artistic workshops, which as we have pointed out are not intended to be marketed events but more subtle links with the potential co-creators, an intimacy which is necessary in the process of appropriation. Moreover it is difficult to relay communication to attract potential co-creators because, apart from a few meetings set up at the outset, the creative forms and consequently, their visibility, are made up as they go along: it is difficult to communicate in real time even if the social networks and the university website are widely used – to attract potential participants given the subtle, sensitive, unpredictable, even invisible nature of the processes.

- The lack of interest coming from one part of the targeted public: whereas the resident artistic workshops are aimed at the whole university community, not everyone appropriates them: "*It is a pity that everyone does not feel concerned by the propositions made on campus.*". Indeed, one of the challenges of this research is to understand the sensitivity and recruitment mechanisms concerning relative and absolute non-consumers.

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- Additionally, our data analysis reveals a determining element of proximity: the characteristics of the artist involved in the experiential process. In the artist's interactions with the co-creators, proximity is dependent on the perceived sincerity of his action, his ability to commit, his values and also the mobilisation of these choices in terms of artistic techniques. In fact, the utilisation of this factor was particularly relevant at a Reverse graffiti workshop (a technique consisting of removing natural deposits from walls to make patterns on the wall using stencils).

*Implication in a co-creative process has an effect on the participant at four levels*

**Self-concept**

The collected comments illustrate that the participants in a co-creation have a feeling of pride (a recurrent term in their comments) in relation to their capacity to do something which goes beyond their own expectations of themselves, to have pushed their boundaries further and stretched their creative capabilities. This pride will be all the more heartfelt by the co-creation participants if there is something left after their investment. Their self-image can be improved:

> *"Following my participation at the resident workshop, I am more open to others and to different means of expression. I take more initiatives."*.

**A view on the creative process**

Creating with an artist changes the view on the reality of the work (hitherto considered as «non-work»). His contribution to society is acknowledged:

> *"Having been in proximity with the artist for several weeks during our work sessions has led me to having a different view on the work of an artist, which I understand better now and have more respect for."*.

On a different register, the effect this experience has on the participant's personal, intimate, cultural universe is illustrated as follows:

> *"It made me want to invent new things, read books and construct imaginary worlds."*.

**A view on contemporary art**

The fact of being concretely involved in the process of making something changes one's view on modern art:

> *"Since I participated in the UED with my own hands, I am now more open towards modern art which had been something very far-removed from me and that I didn't understand or like. I didn't used to feel concerned and now I do."*.

**The representation of the artist and his work**

Our data analysis has allowed us to identify four different cases:

- Meeting with the artist creates cognitive discord (interior conflict). An example came up at one of the round-table debates: the social representation associated with an artist is quite negative. This comes for example from the university experience in which the scientific undergraduates make an amalgam of humanities and social studies undergraduates with the artistic world. "*Hatred*" towards artists is explicitly brought up and they are qualified as "*lazy*". Aside from these words, the individuals talk about sensitive and emotional encounters with cultural propositions outside of the campus (a photographic exhibition where they live, taking part in an opera or a singing lesson with professional artists). The emotions deriving from these experiences and the pleasure taken were spoken about positively. Therefore there is cognitive discord. We can effectively observe confrontational and opposing duality between the social representation of the artist (barriers) and the intimate/individual experience (positive).

- Meeting with the artists raises the question of their status  («what is a real artist ? »), but does not modify the perception we have of them: on the contrary, it reinforces it:

  *"What does it mean to be in contact with the artists? To be serious, we can't really call them artists. I know other artists, and anyway it's not useful in this workshop.".*

  This student has not come to meet artists. According to him, knowing some is enough to know them all. Meeting the artists changes their perception of the artist and the reality of their work:

  *"Friends had explained to me what the work of an artist is, then I met with some and now I have a lot of respect for them and I see them differently.".*

- There is no interest for the actual person that the artist is. We have identified two elements that can explain this: firstly there appears to be the fear of disappointment, that the artist does not transpire to be the person who has been idealised. The interest is given therefore to the work of art itself and the artist is a means to it. Moreover, a lack of self-confidence would appear to influence the representation the individual has of the artist:

  *"I don't feel I can approach him, I am not interested in meeting artists because I wouldn't know what to say to them.".*

Analysis of the post-experience consequences brings us to question the capability of co-creative experiences to produce lasting effects and appropriation. Some comments tend

towards these elements (following the Interim workshop: *"We must carry on with this type of experience" / "I would like to participate in other creative experiences like this."*).

As well as content concerning perceived distance (response to hypothesis 1), we can see that the first exploratory analyses would seem to bring a positive response to hypotheses 2 and 3. However, these first results must be discussed and confronted with the theoretical appropriation scheme determined by the interactions between the subject and the object.

# 4. Discussion and Managerial recommendations

Our results, in the perspective of the theoretical stakes of appropriation, designate three challenges for the ongoing research: more in-depth work in line with our questions and with the stakes of individual creativity, cultural democracy and sociocracy; the determination of mechanisms to facilitate the integration of an object within the personal sphere of a subject; the requisite conditions necessary to put these mechanisms in place.
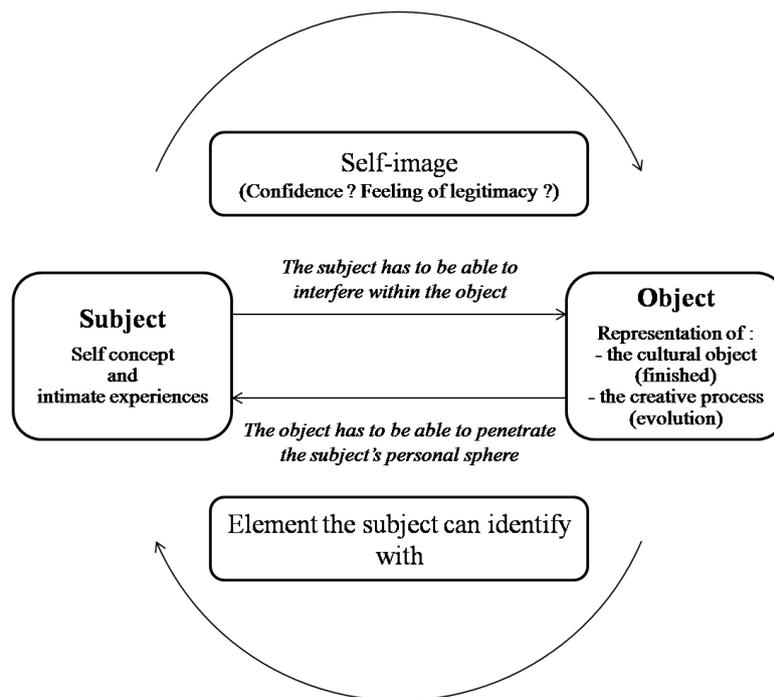


*Figure 1. The dynamics of appropriation*

Our first results illustrate that there is indeed a recursive logic between the subject and the object through the use of power which the culture industry professionals need to put at the fore so that the relational link and attachment can take place both ways. Appropriation will be likely if:

- Firstly the individual exercises his power by reacting towards the object, by personalising it, turning it around, making it his. We therefore need to create the conditions of this act with co-creation contributing to it and being envisaged in every

step of the action of putting in place cultural policy: at the time the artistic work is encountered, which was the case for the resident artistic workshops that we set up but also at the time of identifying the issuer (what values ? what sense ? what differentiation ?), at the time of the co-construction of the programming in the framework defined by this identity and at the time of putting the links in place with the potential participating public. Here there are also potential creativity areas which the subjects can be a part of. This collaborative approach can tie in with the principles of sociocracy and cultural democracy. Our results also show that in this initial movement of the subject towards the object the representation that the individual has of himself is called into play.

- Secondly, power has to be given to the object in order to penetrate the personal sphere of the subject, until it eventually becomes an element he can identify with. This argues in favour of a culture/object movement which invites itself and penetrates the individual's sphere (« flux culture » - the culture which reaches out to populations) especially that two or three of the means necessary for the integration of the object to the construction of the self (creation and conscience, the third being control (Brunel & Roux, 2006; Sartre, 1943)) are part of the process of contextual art; this also argues in favour of the construction of a community around the issuer of cultural propositions and their programming, a community in which individuals can feel that they belong and adhere to, and so making this an identifying element[3].

We can see here a double-sided power between the subject and the object is taking place. For that, both need to respond to certain conditions: for the subject to appropriate the object it must possess the requisite instruments and guidelines; as for the object, it must leave the subject some room for manoeuvre and display a certain degree of authenticity. Professionals from the culture industry should take this double-layer of conditions into account.

Therefore it is necessary to create the conditions in which the subject dares to approach the object by giving him confidence in his judgement (accompanying stake) and by giving him cognitive and emotional guidelines. The conditions must be put in place so that the subject wishes and is able to react, approach the action and personalise it, leaving his own mark: this is notably the process of contextual art.

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[3] Here, we find a stake of recent research in marketing: the creation of "small worlds" around cultural organisations, notably thanks to Internet (Preece & Wiggings Johnson, 2011).

As for the artist, he must bring a wide-reaching proposition and create the contexts for each individual to build up his self-confidence through it: the proposition should leave as much « sincere » room for manoeuvre as possible.

## Conclusions, limits and further study

The starting point of this work is the statement that what is at stake for professionals in the Culture sector and notably, sponsored public organisations within the live entertainment area, is to stimulate a desire for culture in groups of the population who are far removed from it; and to do this by removing the barriers to culture access which seem to persist in spite of efforts undertaken by professionals in this field.

Based on the theoretical opposition between cognitive models and experience research models, we have chosen to follow an exploratory protocol to examine the consequences of propositions and actions where experiential dimensions are especially developed and put to the fore, on individuals' practices and perceptions of culture. For this, we rely on three concepts which appear pertinent to better understand the distance between certain groups of the population and the cultural sector: perceived distance, proximity and appropriation. We associate with these concepts three hypotheses which correspond to the idea that participating in an artistic proposition which brings together an object and a context with strong experiential dimensions allows on the one hand to reduce the perceived distance and increase the perceived proximity to cultural propositions and contributes on the other hand to the process of appropriating artistic propositions.

To test these hypotheses, we have applied qualitative methods which we have used in two sessions in an area that seems to us particularly pertinent for our questions: a university (daily place of life for students mostly aged between 18 to 25 years old and constituting a privileged target for cultural policies faced with the necessary rejuvenation and renewal of publics) who undertook to set up several resident artistic workshops. They took place during the course of second semester of the 2011-2012 academic year.

The first session of our work was aimed at observing the role of perceived distance as orally expressed by the students in relation to artistic objects. The objective of the second session was to understand the impact of attending resident artistic workshops on this relation in terms of perceived proximity and the appropriation of cultural objects.

Our research has therefore allowed us to confirm the existence of perceived distance between the subject and the cultural object which is based on cognitive and affective vectors. In order to diminish the effect of this distance, we show that participating in co-creative situations

which give individuals, accompanied by artists in this case, an active role in the « doing » - therefore using his creativity – allows the establishment of proximity on five dimensions (access, relational, processes, identity and functional). Setting up these experiential artistic situations should allow better appropriation of cultural propositions by widening the field in practical terms (more diversity).

However, our work presents limits. In fact, there was little time between the setting up of the workshops and the analysis of them.  The work presented here is part of ongoing research, especially that survey questionnaires are still being returned to us. Moreover, the difficulties we encountered to collect data from the experiences undergone by « potential receivers » at the resident artistic workshops led us to make the hypothesis that as we are dealing with intimate dimensions they are more difficult to obtain.

Therefore, our research is going to continue through the setting up of a scientific experiment which will take up the stakes raised by the experiments analysed in this research. It is presented in the synoptical diagram below.
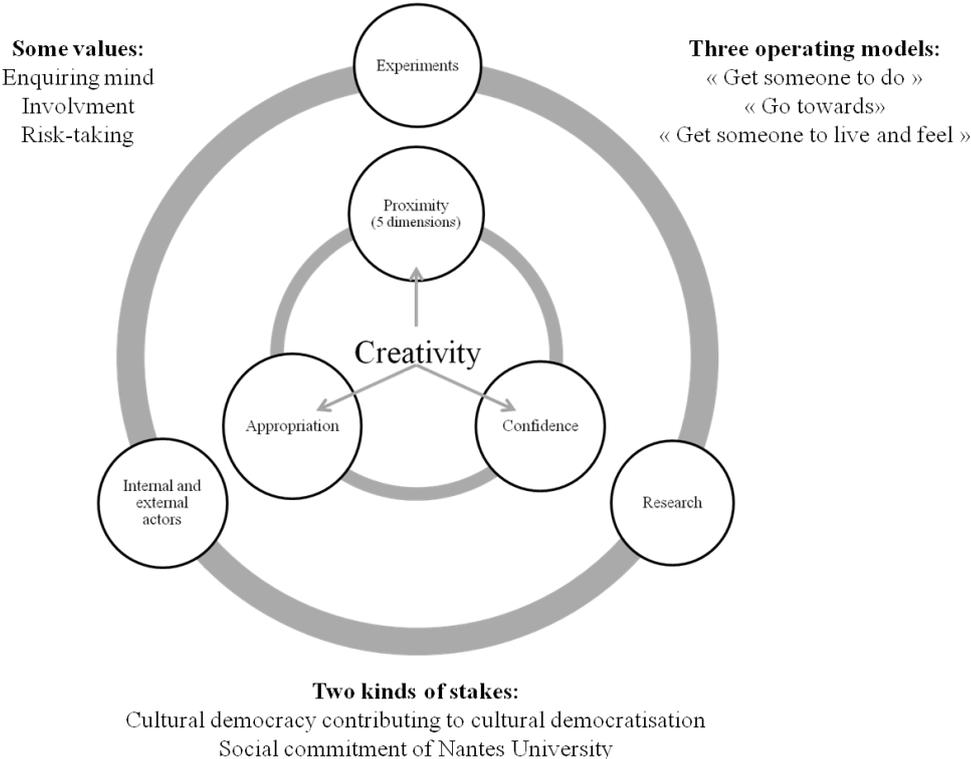


*Figure 2. Synoptical diagram of forthcoming research*

This diagram is part of the theoretical framework that we wish to continue to develop. It outlines the structural concepts already considered in this study and adds the concept of confidence (in self in relation to the cultural world), which featured in the analysis carried out. We also wish to give special attention to the notion of creativity in relation to that of

participation. We would like to take further our intuitive understanding that these two concepts contribute to an increase in the experiential dimension of propositions.

For that, we will carry out at Nantes University again, a series of experiments axed on three operating models: "get someone to do", "go towards" and "get someone to feel and live" to turn the campus into an open-air experiment with "learning spaces". It is an ambitious project in which several other researchers from a number of disciplines will be involved. It embraces the social commitment of this university which affirms its identity as a committed cultural player, as a complement to the sector professionals to meet a shared objective: how can cultural democracy (believing in the creative potential within each individual) contribute to cultural democratisation?

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