

## ARTS PLAYERS TALK TO ARTS DECISION-MAKERS

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### 10 PROPOSALS BY AUTRE[S]PARTS FOR A DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIP WITH ART AND WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES



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#### FOREWORD

Nowadays, the opinion of artists and arts players on the issues of general public interest involved in cultural development and their translation in terms of public policy is not heard in our country. Most often limited to corporatist demands or requests for funding, their voice has no weight with respect to the public arts institution. However, these are the men and women who, through their everyday

ground-work, construct the country's cultural and artistic life, provide the raw material for the administration structure, and justify the existence of the French Ministry of Culture and of the arts departments of local and regional authorities. Often, they have the feeling that they are considered as just another "application file", an object and a pawn that is named and moved without the slightest consultation, according to the will and whims of the princes who govern us.

For us, the artistic and cultural act must not be solely on the initiative of the State and the local and regional authorities. In democratic society, artistic and cultural action must be on the initiative of civil society and independent players. The field of our actions interacts with the fields of regional development and planning and with policies for urban and national development, education, etc. Therefore it is necessary to put in place real consultation with the institutional representatives of these fields, in keeping with the strength of our projects.

Therefore we are expressing ourselves to make our contribution to the development of a new, alternative arts policy, and to the experience of our working methods on the ground.

#### 1] WIDEN OUR CONCEPTION OF ART TO RENEW THE ARTS INSTITUTION.

Forty-three years after the creation of France's Ministry of Culture, the initial objective of regional development and planning is quite well accomplished, even if there are major territorial imbalances that need to be reduced. The country has a dense, complex network of arts centres and venues, events and public activities in all artistic disciplines. Therefore one may consider that it is enough to manage cultural/arts affairs according to the instruments that have been developed for many years. But these instruments are based on

an extremely limited conception of art that views it as being founded on an essential singular gesture of the artist producing an original work, which is then to be made known to as many people as possible. Fundamentally, there is an urgent need to widen this approach to art and its relationships with local communities, especially as our society has changed profoundly, particularly by becoming much more multicultural.

**PROPOSAL 1:** Autre(s)pARTs proposes a conception in which the co-generation of artistic processes by professional artists and other social players is central, since the production of an event or a concrete, tangible artistic work is a means (which is often of importance) to stress this type of approach. In any case, we consider that it is indispensable to open a real democratic debate on the objectives and end goals of arts policy. In particular, we must call upon the driving forces, which, on the fringes of the traditional institution, prepare the ground for new arts policies and for new, alternative relationships with the community.

As a grouping which, for two years, has brought together people involved in this approach, we wish to at least engage in this discussion in our own regions on new artistic practices and approaches, which can provide a basis for reflection on an arts policy that is closer to players in the arts as experienced in our geographical areas.

## **2] FROM DEMOCRATISATION OF HIGH CULTURE TO REAL CULTURAL DEMOCRACY.**

The democratisation of high culture – the "opening of humankind's capital works to as many people as possible", which was a founding utopia of France's first Minister of Cultural Affairs – has failed. Not only does the consumption of this instituted culture involve just 10 to 20% of the population, but especially it has not made it possible to cross the irreparable social border between the section of population concerned and the majority of the population. The consumers of this culture are particularly university graduates

and managerial staff, while manual workers and "white collar" workers continue to form only a very limited part of those who attend the arts events proposed by public arts amenities and the associated contemporary creation teams. Nevertheless, in parallel, cultural democracy – i.e., "developing creativity and culture, including artistic culture – available to everyone, to the highest point" – has grown in scale. This has happened through an ever-growing number of projects and initiatives which reach sections of the population (such as the people of "sensitive" or deprived neighbourhoods, etc.) that were previously excluded from the traditional range of arts on offer, with urban development policy playing a major role in accelerating this movement.

Overcoming this dialectic opposition, which is particularly marked and handicapping in our country, also requires profound modification of our approaches to art.

**PROPOSAL 2:** If the democratisation of the arts is mainly founded on concrete, tangible artistic works and on artists who have produced them, then the contemporary shift of interest to the artistic dynamic or process will not be enough to concern a larger number of people.

In order to do so, Autre(s)pARTs proposes that one must now place the centre of gravity of artistic approaches on the development of connections and relations that aim to renew our modes of symbolisation and socialisation. The question of the experienced feeling – which is specific to each of us, but which acts collectively – seems particularly decisive to us. Therefore, in the centre of artistic approaches, we must place aesthetic experiences and relationships which are activated while remaining open and which have other underlying existential and social motives. Therefore each artistic approach contains its own form and means of appreciation, which can be shared but is based on its unique relational dynamic.

## **3] FOR ADMINISTRATIVE REORGANISATION IN RESPONSE**

## TO THE EXTENSION OF THE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL FIELD

The artistic field is no longer limited to the artistic disciplines that are traditionally highlighted. The core of performing arts initially consisted of conventional text-based theatre, the classical music concert and classical/academic dance. To these have now been added gestural theatre, object theatre and street theatre, circus arts, amplified music of all kinds, diverse forms of modern and contemporary dance, and more recently the many facets of urban culture and street arts. In another field, the term visual arts now covers a very open range of distinct approaches and technical. This extension of the field of the visual arts has created enormous problems regarding their recognition by the Ministry of Culture and by local and regional authorities. The "treatment" of these new sectors by the political powers requires an equally radical transformation of the traditional operation of public administration.

In addition to this expansion of the field of artistic disciplines, there is an extension of the relationships between art and the community – in schools, hospitals, prisons, public housing complexes and underprivileged areas – which also involves a different relationship with the local and regional authorities.

Lastly, within artistic approaches, cross-cutting work is establishing itself not only through new multimedia technologies, but also through the will of the artists themselves to overcome the imposed divisions and compartmentalisation. Thus, a cross-cutting approach of "juxtaposition" – in which artists already work together, but each of them remaining in their own respective fields – is being more and more succeeded by a cross-cutting approach of "contamination" in which the different disciplines feed off each other and the boundaries between them tend to disappear.

Thus, the conception and implementation of real cross-cutting coordination between arts administration bodies are becoming more indispensable every day. Top-down discipline-based structures remain relevant with respect to the history and the aesthetic and organisational specificities of particular areas of practice or work.

But they are now totally insufficient for understanding and promoting the dynamics of expression, encounter, blending and mixing which are some of the richest and most innovative aspects of contemporary artistic and cultural development. This cross-cutting approach that is to be invented concerns all arts administration bodies, and especially the Ministry of Culture itself.

**PROPOSAL 3:** Even if it remains to be specified (see proposal 8), Autre(s)pARTs proposes the general concept of the project for artistic and cultural development, linked to local communities or geographical areas. We consider that the additional notion of a "single administrative correspondent" or a "referent administrative correspondent" is another essential element for inventing much more efficient forms of cross-cutting operation between public administration bodies.

The juxtaposition of several ministers and various local authorities requires at least the establishment of an inter-Ministry body on the national level which has the power to give a new dimension to arts policy. Therefore we argue for the creation or consolidation of a single body responsible for dealing with all projects from the grass-roots, according to the model of the former FIC (Fonds d'Intervention Culturel – Arts Intervention Fund), responsible for relations between ministers, and for the implementation and assessment of projects with a single intermediary. A regional fund covering all interventions by local and regional authorities would be created to meet similar objectives.

## 4] FOR GREATER CLARITY OF ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS.

The administration of the Ministry of Culture, like that of local and regional authorities, has grown very rapidly. For arts players – i.e., all those people actively involved in the arts – this resulted in the multiplication of intermediaries and of decision-making bodies. The administrative obstacle course is more and more complex, from the municipal authority to the DRAC [Regional Department of Cultural Affairs], the Conseil

Général [equivalent of County Council] to the Regional Council, and from the Ministry of Culture to other State administration bodies concerned. A major technostructure has been put in place between the elected representatives and the artistic grass roots. Within the very administration bodies concerned, the decision-making channels are impenetrable. Subsidies are reduced or increased without any explanation and without clearly-defined criteria. The amount of grants awarded to each institution is unknown. In addition, more and more documents are required when applying for a grant. Lastly, the payments are made later and later, resulting in bank charges that benefit exclusively the private banking sector.

**PROPOSAL 4:** Autre(s)pARTs proposes the requirement of better defining the criteria for selecting artistic and cultural projects and awarding public grants to them, including better recognition of those which do not concern solely concrete, tangible artistic works, but the processes themselves and their ability to use elements that are not initially artistic and to artistically incorporate them by taking them out of their normal setting.

The above-mentioned implementation of single administrative correspondents should go hand-in-hand with the constitution of corresponding comprehensive budget appropriations, from various administration bodies and directly attributable to projects of this type.

We argue for the creation of an appeal and mediation authority in cases of dispute or conflict.

We argue in favour of the establishment of real cost accounting in the various administration bodies, which will make it possible to produce a clear, precise public presentation every year, but also an overall presentation of the amount of grants and subsidies awarded. We propose the establishment, between civil and public organisations, of a system of interim or bridging loans that helps to deal better with the cash flow problems related to the delay in payment of public grants and subsidies.

## 5] TOWARDS NEW FORMS OF PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATION.

New artistic fields and new relationships with local communities also require the experimentation of new forms of organisation. In this respect, the idea of the team is essential. There can be no strong action without an active team that focuses on an identified project. The old ideology of the "creator" who was the sole person in charge must be increasingly replaced by that of the artistic team, made up of people with several different types of expertise (some of which are not directly artistic), engaged in a collective approach sharing one same objective in a determined period. Nowadays, the slightest negotiation or signature of an agreement with the arts administration bodies, including State bodies, is always finally the responsibility of one single body. As a result, the recognition of projects associating various artists (whether transdisciplinary or not), the sharing out of responsibilities within teams, and the establishment of less hierarchical relations are not greatly facilitated.

Then there is the question of the mobility of these teams. Since there is no clearly visible process of the conditions of this mobility, the teams are destined to either rapidly fall apart, or else to last and to attach themselves to a place more than a project, and to choose job security, which is very understandable. A social field that wishes to manage its human resources as well as possible must devise an appropriate system on the national level and provide clear information concerning this mobility. This is even one of the main missions, which is absolutely not currently considered, which professional organisations should set themselves, supported by the Ministries in charge of a widened artistic and cultural field.

**PROPOSAL 5:** Autre(s)pARTs proposes that the artistic and cultural field may be the affirmed testing ground for developing a form of training, employment and remuneration that is more appropriate for our society of innovation and mobility. In this respect, the idea of a single status for an employee who has many different and

intermittent employers must be further developed and better defined.

For a person's entire working life, this status should particularly include the most advanced forms from the right to permanent, diversified training, the right to minimum income even during periods outside of paid employment, and the ability to accumulate periods of paid employment with several employers in one single employment contract.

In return, this status would entail a series of obligations that the employee must fulfil, under penalty of being struck off and disqualified for income allowance. Apart from observing the normal or specific instructions or recommendations obtained from his/her relationship with training organisations and employers, and also refraining from using fraudulent practices in contract procedures, the employee would be required to carry out civil tasks of collective or general public interest (as part of an association or not, in the artistic and cultural field or not) for a part of his/her time outside training and paid employment.

## **6] TOWARDS A SUCCESSFUL NEW PHASE OF DECENTRALISATION OF THE ARTS.**

The decentralisation movement will continue and grow. The "EPCCs" (public arts cooperation institutions) will be put in place. This has the advantage of giving arts players a physically close relationship with local decision-makers. A real disadvantage concerns political labelling or the aversion for any team that has a controversial or critical attitude, which runs the risk of very quickly going against it and depriving it of all resources. In the last decade, and generally in cases of conflict with local and regional authorities, the Minister of Culture, sometimes after initially providing support, has sided with the local authorities. The arts players fear harsh censorship less than the attrition and wear caused by a latent conflict, administrative quarrels, deadly rumours or a horrible atmosphere which calls "creative freedom" into question much more subtly than open, affirmed conflict. Arts players are now very dependent on local and regional authorities that

are most often the owners of the premises they use and which provide a major portion of the teams' funding. Multi-year agreements are often only fragile shields.

**PROPOSAL 6:** To ensure the life of teams that present artistic projects, Autre(s)pARTs proposes that a mediation body should be set up, which is as "independent" as possible (and does not act as both judge and jury). Continually stressing the indispensable autonomy of the implementation of projects and their often indissociable relationship with local communities and with geographical areas, any team could bring its case to the mediator as soon as a conflict starts or a measure is announced which is a "fait du prince" [i.e., a "regal" measure or arbitrary act of a public authority that affects a contract or agreement to which the public authority is itself a party]. If, after an election, a local authority wants to change its policy, a procedure must be established, monitored by this mediation body. This procedure should at least help the redeployment of the team or the people concerned, and first of all in its key geographical area of intervention.

## **7] TOWARDS ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL PROJECT-PLACES RATHER THAN ARTS/CULTURE SPACES.**

Arts amenities have multiplied in the last thirty years. These major investments create a predominance of structural costs and costs of dissemination of the arts in relation to investments for production and widened arts action. Artists' residencies have unsuccessfully attempted to balance this process. The artistic teams now lack places for making and producing things, but also for basing themselves temporarily or in the long term in a given geographical area. Disused industrial premises and new artistic project-spaces offer possibilities for teams. These spaces are not just production places that are inward-looking and enclosed within themselves. They also allow new and alternative relationships with the local communities in which they are located.

They are project-places, rather than buildings mainly devoted to the dissemination and outreach of the arts. The functions of production, dissemination, outreach, training, community relations, and debate are linked to an overall project. Unfortunately, all too often, these places receive very little aid, and they remain restricted to the fringe of the traditional arts institution.

**PROPOSAL 7:** Autre(s)pARTs proposes the establishment, for the benefit of every amenity of this type, of a double minimum threshold of fixed running costs – including structural/organisational expenses and a minimum ratio for activities – and investment, to ensure the safety and normal operation of the building, particularly required by safety commissions. We also argue in favour of agreements for the occupation of premises, for a minimum period of 5 years and signed with the teams that take charge of these amenities.

## **8] TOWARDS MORE RIGOROUS USE OF THE CONCEPT OF PROPOSAL.**

More and more, the Ministry of Culture or other public authorities manage activities for which they require a prior written proposal. A proposal for a project generally lists the objectives, the methods to attain them, a work schedule or calendar, the artists' CVs, and a budget. But the general use of this procedure has several disadvantages. It is too often out of phase with an artistic approach that is full of unforeseeable factors and is intrinsically unpredictable. In addition, the difficulties or the riches encountered on the ground gradually transform the request made in the initial application. The procedure also requires great anticipation, with major delays of the decisions by the various funding bodies. Furthermore, since, in most cases, the procedure must be repeated from year to year, it obliges many players to introduce a project in order to survive, since no structural funding is planned, except in certain multi-year funding agreements. Therefore there are more and more projects that gradually lose their essential role: that of ensuring a dynamic of cultural development in accordance with objectives and not by makeshift improvisation of a

continuity of management of the teams or amenities.

**PROPOSAL 8:** Autre(s)pARTs believes in the necessity to rigorously reaffirm the functioning of an arts policy for projects. In order to do so, we argue for the widespread general use of open calls for projects/proposals, but according to a simultaneous double procedure. The first procedure would concern covering of fixed overhead costs (of the team and/or the amenity) and would be determined on the basis of a renewal structural proposal for five years' operation. The second procedure would concern the elementary proposals for artistic and cultural development, for periods of one to three years, which may or may not be renewable, depending on each case. In all cases, we argue that procedures, completion times and means of administrative evaluation should be determined precisely and adapted to the project rationale (and not the purely administrative rationale). The unforeseen obstacles encountered in the completion of projects must be resolved by contractually-binding meetings expressly planned between the various partners (including funding bodies).

## **9] TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION OF ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

The circulation of artists and groups from various foreign countries is already a common policy in France. However, most often, it remains limited to just the presentation of shows, concerts and various events, while joint productions between several countries are still especially by instituted arts organisations that have major resources. The European Union's arts policy is still embryonic and too rigid. The Association Française d'Action Artistique (AFAA – the French national agency responsible for international artistic exchanges and cooperation) is still marked by its initial role of outreach and dissemination of French culture abroad.

**PROPOSAL 9:** Re-establishing a truly international dimension of cultural exchange

implies a long-term policy that includes at least the following two aspects:

residencies in France and abroad, closer association between artistic teams for longer periods, joint work by French and foreign teams on the ground, in France and abroad;  
an authority, probably an inter-Ministry body, but a single body that would fund these processes and help teams to come from abroad.

Autre(s)pARTs proposes that twinning – which is not formal, but concrete, practical twinning – between French and foreign artistic teams should always figure in the structural project of every team or artistic/cultural amenity engaged in a transnational dynamic, as in many of their basic projects.

**10] FOR A NEW INVOLVEMENT OF THE INITIATORS OF ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL PROJECTS IN THE DEFINITION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTS POLICIES.**

The right to culture and the arts is gradually becoming an accepted part of the fundamental rights of the European citizen. This right is not only a formal wish; it must also be able to be extended to all citizens and lastly ensure the promises contained in the concept of cultural democracy. Faced with the uniformising pressure of globalisation on one hand and isolationist withdrawal based on regionalist, ethnic and religious mythologies on the other hand, it seems that culture can play a fundamental role. But, naturally, this must be on the condition that they open more and more to an increasing number of citizens, especially those who are not yet concerned by the traditional range of arts on offer. This new dimension of arts policy must involve all organisations, but especially those that already apply it on the ground. The role of teams that propose artistic and cultural projects, as defined above, becomes pre-eminent in this context. One stage of arts action has been completed: that of the amenities and the increasing range of arts on offer. Another must open, which favours a new

instituting process, developing other relationships with the local community and allowing more shared creative energy. By their very position, the “friches culturelles” [arts centres based in re-used derelict industrial premises], the new teams and the artistic project-spaces are the key partners for this new stage.

**PROPOSAL 10:** Autre(s)pARTs reasserts its aim to be a collective intermediary for all civil and public partners that wish to further examine and develop the issues, subjects and proposals that we have mentioned above.