NOTE
BOOKS

N.01

ETHICS AND PARTICIPATORY ART

ART
AND
COMMUNITY

ARLENE GOLDBARD

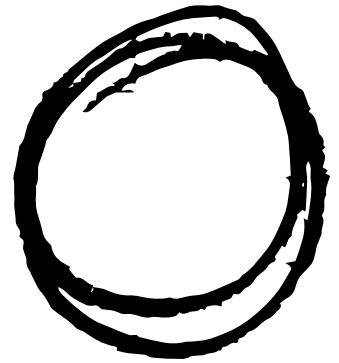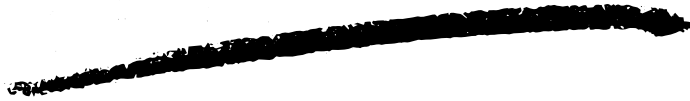FRANÇOIS MATARASSO

2021

Foreword

This pamphlet grew from an invitation to host a workshop on ethics and participatory art for people leading projects in the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's PARTIS programme. This is a topic on which we have both worked extensively, on either side of the Atlantic Ocean, and we have used the period of the COVID-19 pandemic to host some online sessions on this subject. The PARTIS workshop took place on 29 January 2021, with almost 100 participants connecting on Zoom, including from projects supported by Gulbenkian Foundation and "la Caixa" Foundation both in Portugal and in Spain.

The Gulbenkian Foundation had indicated its wish to publish a paper on the subject following the workshop, but that was not a simple request. The ethics of participatory art is a huge subject, philosophically and practically complex. It would take a book to treat the subject properly: even if there were time and resources enough, neither of us has the leisure to take that on now. So this pamphlet is a placeholder, intended to remind artists working for social change of the importance of ethics in their work, and the need to research, to think and perhaps most of all to talk about the challenges involved.

We have offered three doorways into that rich and rewarding world. First is an introductory reflection from François: his book on participatory art, published in 2019 by the Gulbenkian Foundation in English and Portuguese editions, also contains a chapter on ethics. The second part is a dialogue between François and Arlene, edited from the transcript of the 29 January PARTIS workshop; we hope it will act as an aide-mémoire for those who were present, and a taster for new readers. The third part is a note by Arlene that accompanies the workshops on ethics and participatory art that she has run for a number of years in the United States.

We have not tried to cover all the ground in this short pamphlet, which has been produced quickly after the workshop. Nor have we tried to avoid all contradictions: we agree about many things, but there are places where we have different analyses and priorities. The non-authoritative nature of these texts is a conscious expression of the contingent nature of all discussion of ethics in participatory art. Where we offer answers, they should be tested for appropriateness in your own circumstances. Even if we believe we are right about something, that doesn't make it so. Our principal aim here is to offer good questions that will encourage readers to do their own thinking.

Arlene Goldbard and François Matarasso

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A Preliminary Reflection on Art, Social Change and Ethics

François Matarasso

In 2013, when it created the PARTIS programme, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation could not have known that it would be inspire so much valuable new work. Although it has a long history in Portugal, with pioneers such as Chapitô and ACERT, participatory art was still a marginal field. Its creative innovation, evident in the work of a younger generation of Portuguese artists, inspired more questions than enthusiasm from the established art world. What were the intentions of participatory art? Was it merely a way to create new access to culture, or did it somehow threaten existing norms and values? How could the work of non-professional artists be assessed, or even interpreted? And, most obviously perhaps, was this art or social work?

With the third edition of the programme running and a fourth one starting (this last one in partnership with "la Caixa" Foundation), the answers are becoming clearer. As in any such programme, and especially one that breaks new ground like PARTIS, progress has been varied: not every project has achieved all it hoped. But the overall standard has been high, and many grants have led to work that is exceptional in national and even European terms. The best projects have begun to provide answers to those questions and above all to address any lingering uncertainty about whether this is art or social work. It is both.

The title of the programme — an acronym of Artistic Practices for Social Inclusion — was always clear. PARTIS is about social change, addressing inequality and injustice by reducing social exclusion. But that does not mean that it has no artistic ambition or value. On the contrary, the programme — like the theory of community art itself — stands on the idea that social change comes *through* artistic achievement. The two are inseparable and mutually supportive. So, for example, the personal growth that young offenders experience through their work with Movimento de Expressão Fotográfica, like the new understanding that audiences gain when the photographs are exhibited, depend on the artistic qualities of the process *and* the result.

Art is a powerful human invention. In its interpretations of reality, its communication of ideas, its capacity to inspire strong emotion and so to influence hearts and minds, it changes how we see the world and therefore how we act in it. That is why philosophers, from Aristotle to Kant and beyond, have accorded it so much attention, and why the powerful — aristocracy, church, party and corporation — have sought to control it. Attention and control may be couched in intellectual, ideological or didactic language, but no discourse around art and society can avoid ethics — the moral principles that guide human action. There has always been an implicit recognition that art raises ethical questions: the pretence that it does not is rarely more than an attempt to protect vested interests behind a mask of neutrality.

Those questions become much sharper though when social change is the stated purpose of artistic creation, as it is for PARTIS. Existing issues of interpretation, access and control are made more complex by questions of social good and individual autonomy. People who see in artistic co-creation a route to social change are unavoidably drawn into vital ethical questions. These range from the highly philosophical, such as what is a social good, to the very practical, like the question of who is paid to make participatory art, when and why – a question which is considered in the next section of this pamphlet.

The power of art to create meaning by narrating and interpreting human experience is at the heart of this, and community artists have always sought, to a greater or lesser degree, to bring that creative power into the hands of all, with the aim of supporting the emergence of more just and egalitarian human societies. This is part of what cultural democracy has meant, since the term came into wide use in the early 1970s – an end to the dominance of aristocracy, church, party and corporation in the definition of artistic value.

But ethical questions are also inseparable from the uneven distribution of power within participatory art. If that is understood – as I have argued elsewhere[1] – to mean the creation of art by professional and non-professional artists, then such inequalities are built into the practice. Professional artists do not only have more knowledge of art; they often have other educational, social and economic advantages too. Add to that the fact that they are often the instigators of a project whose purpose, financing, process and outcomes they have determined, and the imbalance in power between them and the non-professionals they invite to participate is obvious and, from a certain perspective, overwhelming. Only a commitment to ethical thinking, debate and resolution can guide how that power is used, shared and even transferred through the co-creation process.

Many, perhaps most participatory arts projects are based on a stated aim to benefit a particular group of people, even to improve their lives. The people promoting such projects have good intentions, no doubt, but most do not often

ask themselves the question that has preoccupied me through decades of work as a community artist: what right does one person have to try to change another? That question becomes even more difficult when participants — whom I have often seen described in proposals as the 'target' audience or community — are unaware of the change that this music or theatre project is supposed to have on them. Good intentions cannot change the nature of such manipulative processes.

The answer is not to withhold the developmental possibilities of art. In French law, it is an offence not to come to the assistance of a person in danger. Though that applies in extreme circumstances, the obligation arises from a principle of social solidarity that could equally apply to people experiencing social exclusion, including those involved in PARTIS projects. The only solution in these morally and politically dangerous territories is to acknowledge and understand their importance and to co-create resolutions that can be accepted by everyone involved. It is for this reason that I insist that working with ethics is integral to participatory and community art. To deny that, in my view, is to oppose everything this work stands for.

It was such questions that led me, 25 years ago, to publish some basic ethical principles to underpin artistic interventions with a social purpose.
They were:

>   Projects intended to produce social benefits
>   should address stated needs or aspirations.
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>   —
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>   It is unethical to seek to produce change without
>   the informed consent of those involved.
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>   —
>
>   The needs and aspirations of individuals or communities
>   are best identified by them, often in partnership with others,
>   such as local authorities, public agencies and arts bodies.
>
>   —
>
>   Partnership requires the agreement of common
>   objectives and commitments (though not all goals need
>   be shared by all partners).
>
>   —
>
>   Those who have identified a goal are best placed
>   to ascertain when it has been met.
>
>   —
>
>   An arts project may not be the most appropriate means
>   of achieving a given goal[2].

Today, although these statements strike me as limited and, in at least one respect, naïve, I stand by the core principles they seek to defend. They seem very applicable to a programme such as PARTIS. They might be a foundation on which to build the more detailed ideas set out by Arlene Goldbard's thinking in the third part of this pamphlet.

There are few easy answers to these questions, which are inseparable from the context of specific situations. Law, culture and social values, economics, education and resources, personal beliefs and values — all have something to contribute to navigating the ethical dilemmas of participatory art. But what some might see as tiresome and irrelevant, like undergrowth to be cleared before crops can be planted, I consider integral to participatory art. It is in identifying these tensions between interests and values, groups and individuals, that we, together, grow in understanding of ourselves and of each other. It is how we learn not to strip and burn for industrial farming but to live responsibly with and from our environment with respect for all those who share it with us. Ethical dilemmas are the inevitable consequence when professional artists make art with non-professionals. They are often difficult, sometimes frustrating and can even be dangerous — but that is true of life itself, and it is ethics that make participatory art such a creative and living practice.

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Ethical Principles

Arlene Goldbard and François Matarasso

(IN DIALOGUE)

2.1

Our approach to ethics

ARLENE We've both been working for decades in this field — community arts, participatory arts, there are many names for the work that artists do in collaboration with communities. It's fair to say that experience has given us a good sense of the key ethical challenges that often arise in this work, so we've been able to help others learn how to understand and navigate them. And to distinguish ethical challenges from the many other challenges that arise in practice.

FRANÇOIS This work brings together professional artists with non-professionals, and as soon as that happens, there is an inequality of power. It's the inequality of power that produces all kinds of ethical dilemmas, so you can't take ethics out of this work.

The artists leading a project are probably the only ones who know all the stakeholders, all the plans, all the expectations, and that gives them power. We do this work because there are problems in the world, there are things that we hope to contribute to improving, so it's really important not to pretend that the imbalances of power aren't there. Nor should we be afraid to talk about them. They are what the project exists to try to reduce or to solve. The heart of participatory art and particularly community art — the work that is closest to my heart — is a process which is empowering.

Empowerment doesn't mean *giving* power to someone. Empowerment cannot be given. We gain power through building our skills, our confidence, our knowledge, our networks. And because we have earned it, it can't be taken away from us.

Acknowledging and dealing with ethical challenges is part of that. Take a situation in an art project where some people feel that they're not being treated correctly, or there are dilemmas about who gets to make the decisions about what's going to happen. Then it's in dealing with those problems that we also help people to become empowered, not least because they learn that the ethical problems *can* be resolved. They are not terminal. The only thing

that's ever terminal in a participatory art project is *not* dealing with the ethical problems. If we handle the ethical problems well, even when people don't agree with the solution, they can agree that the solution was arrived at fairly.

My point here is to understand and accept ethical challenges as integral to the work. Don't make the mistake of thinking that ethical problems, political tensions, the conflicts in your project, are things that you can resolve in order to then get on with the work. *Resolving those problems is the work.* It is how we do the work; it is how we help others and ourselves to learn and become empowered.

ARLENE   Yes, ethical challenges always arise when you're dealing with human beings who are creatures of multiplicity and complexity and don't see the world in precisely the same way. The characteristic ethical challenges here in the United States are quite likely to be different from those in Portugal or Spain or elsewhere. For example, probably the most common challenge in the U.S. is freedom of expression. A project is funded to create a participatory mural about a community's history on a wall in a neighborhood, and the mural depicts something that makes the funder or building owner uncomfortable, such as a reference to the history of past conflict, or a depiction of people in a certain way. But I don't think this is the most common challenge in Europe.

Whatever the specific ethical challenge, a main task will be negotiating between multiple accountabilities. It's often necessary to try to negotiate what I would call *the legal contract* — the contract you have with the funder, we'll provide these resources for you to do this project — and *the moral contract*, your contract with the people with whom you're working. It may be necessary to clarify your primary accountability: if it comes down to a conflict between the legal contract and the moral one, whom do you go with? Whom do you feel responsible to? Who are you serving?

Being able to do this depends on one of the most important and foundational steps needed to deal with ethical issues: knowing who you are. Knowing your own values. Knowing to whom you are accountable, knowing how you decide what to do if things really seem intractable. Because of that, it's necessary to bring some awareness about ourselves as individual human beings into the process.

It's human to have an immediate reaction about who you like and whose side you're instinctively on in a conflict. But the challenge of doing this work is to be able to say, 'Well, that was my knee-jerk reaction. And now let's explore together what's actually going on here in a very full way so that we're able to see it from all sides, including the sides we don't agree with. And try to hold all those stories simultaneously.'

In America, one obstacle I see is a terror of making mistakes. When ethical challenges arise, they can feel like mistakes.

For example, artists working with a community may find themselves thinking, 'Oh-oh, something is not right here. Maybe if I ignore it, it will go away all by itself, and we won't have a problem at all.' That's why I always recommend that people pay attention to their stomachs when they're doing community arts work. Because that feeling you may mistake for indigestion is likely to be a very helpful anxiety guide that tells you something's happening here that we need to pay attention to. We need to engage people. We need to bring it out. Everyone's stomach isn't the same, of course, so noticing an oh-oh feeling doesn't always mean there's a problem, just a reason to check with people.

The practice is moving from fear to embrace, from 'Oh-oh, I hope that's not happening' to 'of course this is happening and let's embrace the challenge, and deal with it together.'

There are just a few key things to remember. Be aware that ethical challenges will happen. Cultivate alertness for when a challenge begins to arise so you're able to address it before it blows up. Practice trusting your body to give you information about what's going on. And keep questioning your own values, beliefs, assumptions, loyalties, and accountability, so you don't fall into automatically taking a side.

FRANÇOIS   Be cautious, though. I always remember the instruction to walkers in the mountains: if you're lost in the fog, take small steps. Take small steps and check with people: are they okay with where we've got to before we take another step? I think artistically, you can make big leaps. But in the process, in how you're working with people, I'm more comfortable with the smaller steps.

2.2
Bringing different community groups together

ARLENE   Many community artists are working in situations that involve different groups of people, often strangers to each other. A common framework would be working with new immigrants and longer-term residents of a community, people who speak different languages, have different cultures and histories — may have negative ideas about each other based on stereotypes — but must now work together. The question arises when and how you try to bring them into contact and even collaboration. And the answer may in part be shaped by the expectations of the school or organization or agency supporting the project.

FRANÇOIS Of course, there are always judgments about when and how to take such risks in community art. There can't be a fixed answer to that. Only the people working in a project can decide when it's the right time to take what kind of risk. When you feel it — in your stomach, as Arlene puts it — that's probably the right moment. But you have an advantage in the flexibility of community arts, where it's possible to try things out, to take tentative steps.

One of art's strengths is its deniability, by which I mean you can say something in art and deny that you said it, or rather deny that it meant what it seems to have meant. That makes it a very safe place because people can express opinions creatively that allow them to test what reaction they might get. So, I would encourage community artists not to think that there is a moment when you have to go from black to white. There may be a lot of moments where you do little things, you just put a foot in the other side, and then you take it back. You test what it's like to bring groups together, and adjust in consequence of what you discover, like a tightrope walker correcting their balance with each step. It's a process of transition which can go backwards and forwards.

The other advantage of community arts work is that if you make your project about art, then people can participate because they're interested in art, and they can say things in art that they're frightened to say otherwise. I've worked in post-conflict situations, where agencies try to develop cross-community work. One of the difficulties with calling it a cross-community project is that it attracts people who are already willing to cross that boundary. But sometimes in those situations, artistic projects that don't have any label —that don't say we're about bringing these two groups together — become a space that everyone can enter, because they are not seeing themselves, and they don't think they're being seen by others, as taking a step which is risky.

A few years ago, I saw a beautiful project called 'Home' by Banlieues Bleues[3] near Paris in which women with migrant backgrounds recorded lullabies that were then integrated into a performance they attended. They weren't confident about being on stage with everyone else, but they were part of the show. Lullabies are something that all cultures have, so people can talk to each other through such songs. You're not talking literally but you are talking in a deeper level and beginning to see the other person: 'I might have something in common with this person, because we share this experience of singing to our children to get them to go to sleep.' That's part of what I mean about how doing things with art can create safer spaces where people feel 'Yes, it's okay, I can be brave enough to go there, even if I'm not brave enough yet to talk directly to this other person.'

ARLENE Scale is important too. Often, a good bridge project to bring two groups together is something that pairs people up one-to-one. Imagine having the kids from other countries be asked to video interview a kid of approximately the same age,

gender, and so on from the local group in a school, and vice versa. Pick topics that are not necessarily so volatile, for example, what is your favourite thing to eat, and what do you like about it? And how does it make you feel? Or do you know the story of your grandmother? Where was that person born? What was that time and place like?

Fear of immigrants is founded on ideological assertions: they're stealing our jobs; they're destroying our language, etc. But people one-to-one are still very capable of having a meaningful relationship, because those fears aren't actually about encountering another living human being is all his or her fullness. Face-to-face, people aren't living stereotypes. If the project is about food, then maybe the collective event that culminates it is asking kids to bring something of their heritage food from home and you have a lunch together one day, you watch the clips of the videos and celebrate together. This kind of work has a low threshold: it's fun and meaningful at the same time.

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2.3

Paying participants

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FRANÇOIS The question of compensating project participants is a relatively recent one, in my experience, perhaps as the work expands and more people with different ideas become involved. It presents different questions in everyday situations than for, say, people seeking asylum or living in highly restricted environments such as prisons. Even a token or symbolic payment can have a significant effect on people and on the project. It's an ethically ambiguous, even risky issue, from my point of view.

ARLENE Context matters. It's important to ask questions, to understand the context before responding. How does the remuneration of particular participants sit within the way money is dealt with in the project as a whole? For example, are the artists being paid? Is there a budget for the project as a whole? Are the participants aware of those financial arrangements? Where does the decision-making power and the power to discuss this question rest? Is it with the community artists, the organizers of the project, the institution that hosts the project, or is it a collective decision involving everyone?

If it is possible to bring the question up to project participants, that's what I would tend to do. My approach would be to answer anything that they need to know about the economics of the project to help them make the best possible decisions. Discussing a real-world issue that involves their own livelihood as well as yours and the project itself is such a perfect exercise of self-determination and democracy. To me, if it's possible to have that discussion, it's better than the artists or sponsors trying to make the decision for everyone without their participation.

FRANÇOIS   Personally, I've never paid anyone to participate in anything I've done. It doesn't mean that it is never a right thing to do. It depends on circumstances. I want to suggest a couple of ideas that might help with trying to find the way forward. Yanis Varoufakis, is the former Greek Minister of Finance. He wrote a book for his daughter about economics in which he tells an interesting story.

He and his daughter are sitting at a taverna on a Greek island one summer evening and Captain Kostas comes to ask, would she dive into the water and help untangle the rope of his anchor, because he has arthritis and it's difficult for him to do it? And she gets up from her meal and goes in the water and untangles it with pleasure and without a moment's hesitation. Varoufakis reminds his daughter how happy offering this service made her, and how differently she would have felt if the captain had offered her a few euros in exchange. He talks about goods 'which fill life with a deeply satisfying happiness' and commodities that are traded for money.[4]

He's talking here about experiential value. A great deal of what we value most in life, like a hug or the opportunity to help someone, are not commodities. Because we live in a society which is so much driven by markets, we find it difficult to remember how important are the things that we don't put a price on. Varoufakis is saying his daughter was pleased to help Captain Kostas. If he'd offered 10 euros, probably she wouldn't have wanted to do it, because the money wouldn't compensate her for getting her clothes wet and leaving her dinner. It was a gift that she could make.

So the essential question is how do we imagine what's happening in a participatory art project? Do we see it as a job, or as an experience, something closer to the things we freely give each other because they reward us in non-financial ways?

Artists should be very careful about paying anyone. We need to understand the power that's being wielded when payments are made. For instance, I know theatre projects in Italy who were paying migrants to take part. But what is done with good intentions here is actually another exercise of power. If the person you're giving money to doesn't have any money, then how can they refuse? Because the money that isn't very important to you is very important to them, and that changes their ability to act on their own choices in the project. Now they're being paid to do it, so, if they don't like you anymore, or they don't want you to use their story in this project, how do they pull out? They can't because you've created a contract and a dependency. It could even be a kind of abuse of power, though the intentions were good. But in reality, the inequality of power comes from the fact that I, as the professional, have a lot of money. I have a budget, I've been financed to do this. I can use this money to make other people do things that they might not do otherwise. The ethical problems there should be easy to see.

ARLENE   This is a tricky question. There's a famous Talmudic question with respect to charity. Is it better to give one coin with a full heart and pure intentions, or ten coins grudgingly? Many people who I know would answer that it was better to give the one coin with a full heart and pure intention. But the Talmudic answer is that charity is for the benefit of the recipient, not the giver. Your spiritual condition at the point where you give them money is not really the critical thing. It's that the recipient gets 10 times more money to buy the necessities of life. So I would put on the other side of that the question of what does compensation mean to the participants — whether it's money or something else — what are the forms of acknowledgment, recognition, or reward that would be meaningful to them, and in what ways would it be meaningful to them? I'm not 100% comfortable with the situation in which I'm being paid, but I'm giving other people a nudge in the direction of being generous. It's complicated.

2.4

Ethics of knowledge production

ARLENE   We talk to participatory arts practitioners who are being encouraged — and who want to — share knowledge emerging from their projects. The ethics of that, especially the roles played by participants, can be complex.

The first question that comes up for me is what forms of knowledge are socially validated and socially valued? It's essential to look at the distinction between credentialed expertise, *credentialed knowledge* — 'I have degrees, I have the titles after my name, I'm authorized to share knowledge' — and *lived knowledge*, which often offers much more profound information and wisdom about experience because it emanates from the people who are closest to the ground, who have their hands most directly on the work that's being done.

This is one of those ethical questions that should be explored in the largest possible context. What are the social and political values that are being expressed by a particular form of written communication? What is being said? Who is the audience? How is it implying that the knowledge should be interacting with that audience? Who is perceived as being authorized to write about the work and how does that contrast with our self-authorizing human right to say our own words in our own voices about the work that we're doing?

Sometimes academic writing is preferred precisely because the authors are credentialed. And they may have extremely positive reasons for wanting to document and discuss the work and share it with the wider academic audience. But if it's not framed correctly, the accidental effect is to see the people who actually made the work as unqualified to tell their own stories, which is damaging. So my question is, who is it for, who is the knowledge for?

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How is it intended to be used? And also, whether there are multiple ways to convey the knowledge, so that form follows function, so that the values of the written piece or the documentation are strongly congruent, braided with the values of the work itself.

FRANÇOIS   I think there's an even more primary question: who decides what knowledge is wanted?

The starting point for me is to involve the people I'm working with in deciding what we want to know — not just how we want to know it — and how do we want to tell the story afterwards. A fundamental question is why does some knowledge matter and other knowledge not matter?

I started as a community art worker. I gradually moved into doing research because I wanted to understand better the work that I was involved in, but I didn't have qualifications or training to do that work. I aspired for many years to meet an ideal of academic research and I think my work got better as I learned more. But I also saw that I lost touch with the work's purpose because I was writing in a way that most people *wouldn't* read. That was one paradox.

The other paradox was my fundamental belief that art is a way of knowledge. And yet the paradox is most of us who work in the arts use the languages and methods of social science or management to document and evaluate what we do.

So I changed direction and over several years worked on a series of creative research projects under the collective title, 'Regular Marvels'.[5] My intention was that, if you were willing to make the effort of reading a few thousand words there would be no language, no concepts, that would artificially exclude you. At the same time I started using the methods of art and literature, rather than those of academic writing, to research and report what I found. In each of those projects I worked with a visual artist as part of that process, and I've begun working with participants — non-professionals — as co-researchers. I'm hoping that in a community opera project I'm now working on, some of the participants will interview each other, because they will say things to one another that they would not say to anyone who'd been involved professionally in the project.[6] I think we're at the beginning of understanding how we can open up all of those systems of knowledge creation. The independent researcher, Helen Kara, has written interestingly on these subjects.[7]

2.5
The unity of ethics and aesthetics

FRANÇOIS   I think the core of both ethics and aesthetics is integrity, by which I mean that you do what's true to you, because if you don't start there, you can't ever get to a good place. I've always believed that the ethics of the work — the values, if you like — are visible in its aesthetics. In other words, you can see that the work was not made by professional artists: it has a different aesthetic character because it's been opened to people who have a different sensibility and a different training and a different range of references and skills and experiences. I've seen lots of work that I admire over the years but that I would never do myself. But I would like people, when they experience something I have been involved in to feel that it speaks of how it was made, and the ethics of the people that made that together.

ARLENE   Of course, aesthetics are political. What the powers-that-be find beautiful may not be what you or I find beautiful. We always have to engage the question: whose aesthetics, who's making that judgment? And for me, the authenticating answer is always coming from the people who are making the work. The aesthetics that they choose are in my opinion the aesthetics that should inform the work. And this is an ethical question, because if the work is to be judged by an external aesthetic — an idea of what's beautiful, what's meaningful, that does not emanate from the participants and their communities — then participants are not being treated as self-authorizing, they are not being given the same right of self-determination as you would want for yourself, and that is an ethical violation.

I get in this conversation all the time with people in the States who are giving money for projects or who are from red-carpet prestige arts institutions. They say, 'A lot of this work isn't very good is it?' And I say, 'Gee, I went to the museum last week and a lot of the stuff hanging on the wall there isn't very good, is it?' They reserve to themselves the right to dictate what true aesthetics are, but part of our mission in the work we do is to deconstruct that arrogant assumption, so that we see that there are many beauties, many meanings and many possibilities.'

FRANÇOIS   In the U.K., there is a rhetoric about organizations being 'world-class,' about excellence and doing extraordinary work. And I often find myself, pricking that particular bubble by saying that by definition most art is average, because that's what average means. It's where most of it is. It's very rare in participatory work to do something extraordinary. But the corollary of that is good enough *is* good enough. That's what the words mean. And if my work can be good enough, then I'm satisfied. Sometimes I'll be lucky and do something that's better than good enough. But good enough is what I'm working for.

2.6
Pandemic challenges

FRANÇOIS Many ethical questions have arisen in the pandemic, which has forced great changes in our work. Community art is based on coming together, learning together, making together. But now people fear too much closeness. We have digital ways of meeting, but not everyone has access. People worry about perpetuating social barriers, about neglecting those most in need of connection. There's a feeling of urgency about the work, and often a feeling of not doing enough or not doing it right. And of course, these are the questions everyone is trying to deal with, not just our field.

The first thing is to accept reality. It's never helpful to feel guilty about things you can't change, because it gets in the way of dealing with things that you can change. So we have to accept the situation, we can't break the rules and put other people at risk. Maybe that is the first ethical principle: you don't put other people at risk.

We are discovering that digital access has good things and bad things. For some people it prevents access because they don't have the technology or they don't have the knowledge or the competence, but for other people it is enabling access. There are the projects where actually it's been easier for vulnerable people to take part because they have not needed to travel or they've not needed to bring a carer with them to take part. So it's changing the dynamics, but it isn't in itself a bad thing.

The field is turning attention to creative ways to work under these circumstances. There is a useful open source document on a 'Non-Digital Isolation Engagement' created by Take A Part in the U.K. listing many ideas and examples of ways to engage other than online.[8] Everyone is invited to add their ideas to the document as well.

ARLENE I loved discovering the cognitive bias called the 'Nirvana fallacy,' in which actually existing things are compared with ideal versions that can never be duplicated in real life. For example, the idealized version here would be a perfectly permeable transparent project where everybody regardless of age, state of mind, job status, political views, abilities, can participate equally and have an equal feeling of satisfaction and engagement and an equal desire to continue doing the work. But of course, no such thing exists.

The internalized judge gives us what they call performance anxiety, which makes it impossible for what we have to offer to flow freely, because there's a second channel in the brain that's running a critique of what I'm doing while I'm doing it. While all work is subject to criticism — we can all say sometimes that we've put our foot wrong — the reality is we're mostly trying to do our very best.

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And we're not usually helped in doing our best by having criticism run through our heads while we're undertaking the work.

For me, the ethical question is, can you commit to the present, whatever conditions it offers you? Can you fully commit to showing up with everything that you have in that moment, given the highly imperfect circumstances under which you are working? And if the answer is yes, if you can make that commitment, and you can support yourself in that commitment and guide yourself to maintain that commitment, show up fully in all dimensions — physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual — for the work, then you can do your best about the digital divide under these incredible circumstances, and the work is going to be powerful for people.

A helpful concept for these times is doing *hybrid* work, part digital and part not. For instance, a project with a core group that meets online, with each person in the core group assigned to contact several other participants by phone to engage them in the project. This multiplies the level of participation in the project, the meaningful ways in which as many people as possible can actually have their own words, their own thoughts and feelings, inform the work you're doing and feel some stake in it. Then you find a way to give what the project generates back to those people. Reciprocity is the ethical principle here, so that all the folks who had the phone conversations can feel as fully collectively responsible and as good about what the project generates as the ones who were able to come to the Zoom. I'm always looking for this hybridity: a way that people can write, can take a photograph of themselves, can do something that's less than full digital participation, but that is folded with integrity back into what's generated digitally, and is given the same value.

FRANÇOIS   Given the challenges of the times, some of the work I've seen has not produced any significant artwork. What it has been focusing on is contact — keeping contact with vulnerable people, sometimes by letters, sometimes by phone. There are a lot of organizations who have spent a huge amount of effort and energy during the lockdown just staying in touch with people. When we're in a situation like this sometimes our expectations of what we can do should change. It may be that the most important thing we can do for people at the moment is to be kind and to be present. And we'll get back to making theatre later.

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Values and Ethics of Participatory Arts Practice

Arlene Goldbard

Values and ethics aren't carved in stone. Like so many things worth having — excellence, love and democracy, for instance — they emerge from collaboration and negotiation, from real-life experience. That's why the values and ethics shaping our work depend on who we are and what we are trying to do: what's right for one set of people and circumstances may be quite wrong for another.

The key is being able to size up each situation and respond with skill and flexibility. That skill comes with practice. Thinking and talking about values and ethics strengthen our self-knowledge, giving us ethical 'muscles' to handle future challenges. Engaging with these questions, we become more present, skillful, and creative. Then, when ethical challenges arise — as they inevitably will — by knowing ourselves, by together exploring meaning and value in the situation at hand and achieving common understanding of what's at stake, we can find mutually acceptable resolutions and move on.

3.1

Five things to remember about ethical challenges

This workshop is structured around five principles:

1

The most important ethical self-knowledge artists working in community need is to know their own values and commitments, to whom they are accountable, why, and how.

2

The most important ethical capacity artists working in community need is awareness, the ability to sense an ethical challenge before it erupts into full-scale conflict.

3

The most important ethical aim artists working in community must master is bringing out the full complexity of a situation, including all of its contradictions and ambiguities.

4

The most important ethical skill artists working in community need is the ability to engage everyone in an ethical challenge in a way that is enlighteningto all, that uplifts the moment into true learning and creates maximum possibility.

5

The highest form of resolution is one that redefines issues so that everyone feels heard, respected and included in the outcome. We tend to think of resolutions as 'you win, I lose' or vice versa. Some conflicts have to be settled that way, but much of the time, there's a resolution that allows all to feel respected.

3.2

Self-knowledge: who are you and what do you want?

Whether you see your own work as education or as art-making, as community organizing or even as spiritual practice, how you approach it will depend on why you are doing it:

Have you chosen this work to make a living, to develop and express your own gifts, to help others, to change the world, to gain power, to share power, or for other reasons?

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Do you see your work as awakening awareness, healing injury, creating capacity, making meaning, making beauty, getting a job done, or something else?

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Do you see your working relationships as peer partnerships, as student-teacher (or teacher-student), as selfless service, as serving your personal aims, or something else?

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Are you most like a griot, a magician, a gardener, a rabbi, a coach, a role-model, a tutor, a parent, a clerk, or someone else?

There's no need to settle on a single answer. But each person's unique constellation of answers makes a huge difference in how that individual feels and connects with others.

Have you had the experience of performing the same action for two very different reasons, completely transforming the way you feel about it? Compare peeling potatoes for minimum wage in a cafeteria kitchen with making dinner for the person you love most in the world. Compare the drudgery of folding, stuffing and stamping a mailing you care nothing about with the fun and excitement of sending out invitations to your loved one's birthday or graduation. Even ordinarily tedious acts are lifted up when they are undertaken with higher intention. What are your highest intentions?

Just so, 'working with communities' can have very different meanings. Often, there's a default assumption: 'the community,' 'the artist' and 'the educator' are assumed to be known quantities. The artist 'plugs into' the community the way a power source plugs into a wall-socket. We develop protocols for plugging in: for instance, adopting a community assessment process involving meetings and petitions to ensure that a mural doesn't go up on a wall where it is not wanted, that images people find offensive are not imposed on those who will look at them every day.

These same processes can be carried out as an odious duty or as an embodiment of higher love. When you know yourself and know your own motives and intentions, you have more power to ensure that your actions embody the intentions you value most. There's lots of room for variation in both identity and in practice. But there is one absolute: every person you work with deserves to benefit from your full presence and highest intentions. No matter what a phenomenal artist you are, if you can't 'work with the community' as an expression of love and respect, you should find a different place to invest your talents.

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3.3

What are your values and commitments?

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Do you know your own values and purposes? It's easy to think so, but look deeper: do you have a vague notion, or real clarity? To be effective, artists working in community need to know exactly where we stand. Certain core values are typical of this work, and it's easy for these to bump up against countervailing dominant attitudes. For instance, here are some value statements that can lead to values conflicts or ethical challenges (these are discussed in my book *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development*, in the chapter on 'Theory from Practice):

> **Critical examination of cultural values can reveal how oppressive messages have been internalized by members of marginalized communities.** People come to know themselves through participation in community arts work, and sometimes that knowing makes them want to stand up and speak out' Some listeners won't like hearing what they say.

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Live, active social experience strengthens our ability to participate in democratic discourse and community life, whereas an excess of passive, isolated experience disempowers. Community arts work can be a rehearsal for other forms of social action and democratic participation, so it can be perceived as a kind of social agitation.

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Society will always be improved by the expansion of dialogue and by the active participation of all communities and groups in exploring and resolving social issues. Not everyone wants all of us to take part in setting society's direction. When community arts work helps to raise marginalized voices, those who believe that a good citizen is a silent, compliant citizen may object.

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Self-determination is essential to the dignity and social participation of all communities. When members of marginalized communities use community arts work to assert their own rights and aspirations, the powers-that-be may feel anxious.

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A goal of community cultural development work is to expand liberty for all, so long as no community's definition of 'liberty' impinges on the basic human rights of others. In a culturally diverse society, conflict can arise over competing values: traditionalists may say that men and women should sit separately at an event, preserving each gender's decorum; but egalitarians may object, countering that separation impinges on their rights of association.

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A goal of community cultural development work is to promote equality of opportunity among groups and communities, helping to redress inequalities wherever they appear. Injustice is often a strong motivator, but some resource-providers may not like drawing attention to problems or pressing for redress. They may want all messages to be positive, skipping over what's wrong.

What do these principles mean to you? Do you agree with these statements, or do some seem wrong? What are the core values that drive your work? Use some quiet time to make notes, returning to them from time to time to see if your feelings have changed.

3.4
Spotting ethical challenges

While all of us are connected, everyone is unique. We see the world through individual lenses shaped by experience, capacity, and belief. Therefore, human beings in community present almost unlimited potential to generate ethical challenges' When a conflict or challenge arises, it isn't a mistake or failure; it's an inevitability. Expect it; embrace it; learn from it. But don't feel you have failed when it happens.

A common pitfall of collaborative work is to carry a fear of making mistakes into a realm that thrives on trial-and-error, which can lead to dismissing signs that shouldn't be ignored. Often, our bodies are more reliable guides than our brains. If you pay attention to your own responses, when you perceive an 'oh-oh' feeling in the pit of your stomach, you will welcome it as an early alert rather than telling yourself it's nothing. The earlier your awareness is engaged in an evolving ethical challenge, the less likely it will escalate into a full-scale drama.

Here are a few common types of ethical challenge that come up in the context of community cultural development practice:

Freedom of expression. Probably the most common challenge, this typically arises when an artifact or performance includes content that makes someone uncomfortable. The discomfort can worsen when that someone has significant power to affect a project's fate — a funder, an organization's executive staff or board members, a politician, a media personality, or an advocacy group. How do you balance the legal contract you have with a funder or employer with the unwritten moral contract you have with community members? This is a key question for anyone working in community: to whom are you accountable and how?

Personal boundaries. Intimate material often surfaces in community cultural development work. Participants may be asked to share their life stories or their deepest feelings about the way a problem affects them, their families, their communities. The artist who works in community is responsible for ensuring that no one is coerced into a premature or unprotected intimacy, while simultaneously helping to create a respectful climate and caring container for anything that people do choose to share. How do you balance openness and confidentiality? Protection and expression?

Identity. Even the nicest people may be surprised to find undigested bits of prejudice clinging to their speech. What happens when one group's vocabulary includes names others find objectionable? What happens when the members of one group adopt a moral code that another perceives as harmful, as when young people brought up to abhor same-sex relationships are involved in a project with

gay or lesbian kids? What happens when the members of one group have ideas about how women or children should behave that seem too restrictive to other community members?

Cultural appropriation. Appropriation is part of many artforms: hip hop artists sample other musicians' work in their own music; Marcel Duchamp called some of his works 'readymades,' exhibiting a urinal in a gallery as a sculpture, calling it 'Fountain'. The heightened meaning appropriation has taken on is cultural theft. The accusation is frequently made against artists — but also entrepreneurs and corporations — who adopt and profit by something emblematic of a culture not their own' Contemporary cultures all borrow and exchange from the past and each other: imagine if only people of African descent were allowed to play jazz, opera was reserved for Italians, and only Jews could bake bagels. But there's a difference between exchange and exploitation, between sharing stories and seizing another's story for profit; the difference is heightened when the culture being exploited has been otherwise marginalized and oppressed. Who has the right to tell your story and how?

Artist's role. Where is the line between your own right to creative expression and the imposition on others of your personal ideas or aesthetics? Some artists try to be invisible facilitators, assisting participants without making their subjective influence felt; others see their own training and skill as paramount in shaping a project; still others see the main point as reciprocity, an equality of exchange and sharing. How do you balance these considerations?

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3.5

Practicing ethics

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The next time you learn of an ethical dilemma or challenge in working with a community, take some time to explore it fully. Singly or in a small group, focus in turn on each of these questions, stopping only when you feel satisfied that you understand the issue in a very full way and feel equipped to work with others on it:

1

What is the issue? Who are the parties in conflict? Describe the issue even-handedly from the perspective of each party, without spinning or favoring any position. Try to describe it such that every person will feel fairly represented (rather than caricatured) by your account of their perspective. What is primary for each party, and what does each party see as secondary or irrelevant?

2

How does the issue look through the lens of your own values and commitments? Do your own feelings lead you to a prefer a particular way of seeing the issue? Is there anything you might be missing because it conflicts with one of your own pet theories or core beliefs?

3

List any and all observations you can make about the issue, going above and beyond whatever has been said by the parties in conflict. Imagine yourself as a visitor from another planet: how does the issue look to your newbie eyes? Does it resemble any other type of situation? What might the people involved be missing? What are their blind spots or biases? Include everything you can think of, even if some of your observations are directly contradictory' Can you see a way to reframe or redefine the issue so it's less polarized?

4

List all possible resolutions to the situation, whether you like them or not. Consider the implications of each: how each might affect the community, how each might be perceived by the interested parties, how each feels to you when you try it on for size.

5

Finally, spend some time devising ways to share all of this information with the people involved. How can you help ensure that the issues are explored to the fullest in the fairest possible way? This might call on your creative skills: Can you storyboard it? Create a Forum Theatre around it? Create a web dialogue? Call on respected people to represent certain elements of the controversy in a public meeting? Turn it into a spoken-word slam? How can the issue become an opportunity for everyone to learn more, understand each other better, and create the best possible outcome?

Good luck! May you always know who you are, choose your actions with compassion and care, and inspire others to do the same.

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Biographies

ARLENE GOLDBARD

Arlene Goldbard is a New Mexico-based writer, speaker, consultant, cultural activist, and visual artist whose focus is the intersection of culture, politics and spirituality. Her books include *The Wave, The Culture of Possibility: Art, Artists & The Future*; *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development, Community, Culture and Globalization, Crossroads: Reflections on the Politics of Culture*, and *Clarity*. Her essays have been widely published. She has addressed academic and community audiences in the U.S. and Europe and provided advice to community-based organizations, independent media groups, institutions of higher education, and public and private funders and policymakers. From 2012 to 2019, she served as Chief Policy Wonk of the USDAC. From 2008-2019, she served as President of the Board of Directors of The Shalom Center. www.arlenegoldbard.com

FRANCOIS MATARASSO

Francois Matarasso (b. 1958) is a community artist whose work embraces creative projects, research and writing. His previous books on participatory art include *Regular Marvels* (1994), *Use or Ornament?* (1997), *Where We Dream Dream* (2012) and *A Restless Art* (2019) published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in English and Portuguese editions. He lives in France nowadays and has experience of work in many European countries. www.parliamentofdreams.com

Francois and Arlene have never met in person, but they have long been familiar with each other's work and began working together online in 2019, hosting dialogues and creating publications on the ethics of participatory arts practice, the potential for public service employment such as the 1930s WPA in the United States, and other subjects related to community arts and cultural democracy. They began producing their podcast, "A Culture of Possibility," in January 2021. Listen at miaaw.net or on iTunes.

ART AND COMMUNITY
NOTEBOOKS

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's main purpose is to contribute to the creation of a cohesive society that offers equal opportunities and promotes the well-being and quality of life of vulnerable groups. In order to do so, the Foundation has been working for over a decade to demonstrate the importance of art — setting up co-creation processes that encourage an active participation by everyone — as a privileged channel to foster change and social transformation.

In 2013, with the launch of the PARTIS initiative, this plan gained a broader visibility, which was in turn increased in 2020 with the launch of the PARTIS & Art for Change initiative, a joint collaboration with "la Caixa" Foundation, which boosted the work both foundations have been undertaking in this field for many years when it comes to supporting artistic projects with a social impact.

By launching these initiatives, the Foundation aims to highlight the civic role arts and culture play in Portugal. Democratizing access and opening up participation to everyone are key elements to building more sustainable, cohesive and just communities.

The *Art and Community Notebooks* intend to share considerations and learnings stemming from the PARTIS and PARTIS & Art for Change initiatives with everyone committed to broadening the horizon of art, renewing hope in the future we have in common.

NOTE BOOKS

ART AND COMMU NITY

GULBENKIAN.PT