

In addition to acting as co-facilitator for the study day, Louise Lachapelle had the task of producing a critical text—in accordance with the conditions of the Canada Council grant. In writing the text that follows, Louise worked with her own critical questions and reflections related to ethics and art, as well as those that were raised by others during the study day on ethics. The text includes a summary of Ethics? Norms? Questioning Community Art Practices, which was based on the final grant report, written by Devora Neumark.

Analysis of the *Ethics? Norms? Questioning Community Art Practices Study Day*

Community Art or Finding the Way Back Home?

Louise Lachapelle

In the context of community art, ethical issues and related questions often arise only when circumstances challenge established, traditional, conventional and familiar ways of doing (art?) or ways of being (in relation with?). This irruption/eruption of ethics in community art practices certainly reveals issues that also challenge the conditions making many of our contemporary artistic and cultural practices possible. A situation, project or action suddenly makes a way of being or thinking, that up to that time seemed self-evident, lose its “obviousness.” A vision of what art is (or can do) suddenly appears opaque when confronted with another definition of art. The artist’s self-proclaimed social function differs from the role the community may envisage. A value considered “eternal and universal” becomes a mere historical category based on compromise when it turns out that not “everyone” supports it.

*Theorizing is one thing,
but what do we do concretely*



Each person participating in the study day *Ethics? Norms? Questioning Community Art Practices* received this lapel button designed by the artist Philomène Longpré.



Devora Neumark, Louise Lachapelle, Pam Hall, Kim Anderson and Joanne Gormley.



It is clearly important to recognize a sometimes fundamental dimension of the approach of artists who choose to explore the diverse forms of what are known as relational practices, that is, the area of criticism this approach (which is in the process of becoming institutionalized) entails with respect to certain (established) forms of contemporary art. We may wonder about the extent to which these *relational* practices and, more specifically, the community art practices discussed here, also represent a last attempt to consolidate a theory of art (i.e., to preserve a cultural practice as well as some sort of “refuge value”) at a time when “the place of art [has become] uncertain.”⁶ Uncertain, like the place of human beings, one might add. Could it not be that an *uncertain place* creates the conditions of possibility for an ethical disposition?



Questioning the inscription of the ethical motive in contemporary art practice, asking if the ethical demand today acts on the conditions and forms of artistic activity, does not mean seeking to stabilize a definition of art, but rather, from the very place of this instability, opening up the question of art practice as ethical gesture. The encounter with ethics is a turning point in creative activity, whatever its aims (aesthetic, therapeutic, communal or other). When the ethical requirement “irrupts/erupts” in the space of creative activity, this movement opens up the possibility of hearing a demand that is not strictly individual or based on identity in the process of development of a work, a project or an act. *Irruption/eruption* here evokes a movement similar to what Levinas describes in *Ethics and Infinity* as an “explosion of the human in being,” “a breakthrough that occurs in being and *puts into question* the proud independence of beings in their identity which it subjects to the *other*.”⁷ Is the relationship to what is other, trauma? Not in the clinical sense, but like a shock that changes the subject in his or her relationship with self and the Other.

Ethics has not always been included in the concept of art, and it is by no means *obvious* that the conditions and forms of artistic activities today are disrupted by ethical tensions. Is art exempt from ethical questions because these questions are an intrinsic part of art (art as ethics), even though the history of art would deny such a concept, or do art’s concerns simply lie elsewhere? After a movement towards autonomy that led art to a breaking point with some of its traditional and cultural foundations (particularly in relation to its cult-like foundations), if not to the loss of its necessity, are community (-based) art practices engaged (not without a certain nostalgia) in the search to *finding the way back home*? Or are these practices exposing themselves to the risk of being currently brought *out of the realm* of art?⁸

*Nous avons réfléchi à l'éthique, nous nous sommes débattues avec des questions d'ordre moral...
Sauf que nous ne l'avons pas fait dans le contexte de notre pratique artistique individuelle,
de nos préoccupations avec la construction de nos propres voix comme artistes.*

*Nous, les artistes, avons tendance à vivre un peu surprotégées
dans l'espace restreint et l'isolement de notre culture
(un peu comme les médecins dans la leur?).*

— Pam Hall

Ethics? Norms? Questioning Community Art Practices aimed from the outset to avoid an oversimplified view of ethics as a code of conduct or a set of deontological rules intended to regularize or legitimize a practice. The organizers (Devora Neumark and Myriam Berthelet¹⁰ of Engrenage Noir / LEVIER, in collaboration with me) hoped to foster critical thinking about the values and motivations influencing and guiding artists working with and in community settings. We therefore favoured an approach in which ethics would differ from morality as an open system differs from a closed one, a disposition welcoming the return of the question “*What to do?*” a question continually renewed by an open relation with the living process.

“*What to do?*”, in the face of living, how to respond? How to relate to ourselves, to the Other, to materials, to a culture, to values and to the world? And in the face of such questions, how can we even think to respond *once and for all* or *once and for everyone* (as if anything could ever suffice *once and for all* and *for everyone*)? Therefore ethics is not only an attitude of questioning, a disposition and an intention, but also a project—a fallible and perishable project—that exists in tension with (and therefore bound to) a setting, history, tradition and language.¹¹ Could we imagine, then, that rules or guidelines, which are necessary for forming healthy relationships in the practice of community art, could effectively be generated through ethical reflection so that they support particular decision-making processes without taking the place of or evading the ethical requirement?

During this day of critical reflection, the speakers and facilitators encouraged and supported participants in their efforts to consider how their personal values are related to their intentions, behaviours, decisions and choices at each stage of their creative process. Participants were also asked to consider ways of approaching ethical questions (both theoretically and practically) in terms of their practices as artists and in relation to the context of community art.

The pedagogical objectives of this entire process, as well as many of the lines of questioning that defined it, emerge from the community art practices themselves. For one thing, participants contributed to identifying various expressions of ethical issues based on their own concrete experiences. At the invitation of Engrenage Noir / LEVIER, some of them proposed questions, problems and situations that during the preparatory stages became the case studies used in the planning of the day's activities. Among the themes identified in this way were the challenges created by pluralism and diversity (cultural, ethical, economic, religious and so on), the management and distribution of power and decision-making authority, the various choices that come into play when developing a project or activity, the division of responsibility and the varying definitions of a project's success or failure. In short, the issues raised pertain to one basic concern: how can we personally and collectively create the conditions that make collaboration and co-creative relationships possible in a community art context?

The theme of this day of critical reflection also belongs to the history of community art as artists now begin turning upon themselves the mirror they originally held up to certain communities. The context and conditions in which community art is practiced can on the one hand provoke a loss of naivety, or *reality shock*, for some artists. On the other hand, they can sometimes provide artists with opportunities to gain awareness of their own power (and the power of art), of their responsibilities, of the fact that certain problems exceed their ability or that certain consequences of their actions can be difficult to bear. Consequently, a reflective approach focused on ethical issues also invites one to develop a critical relationship with (community) art. The ethical motive is also a critical motive.

Since the second half of the 20th century, it has become difficult to deny not only the amazing destructive potential of culture, but its limits as a force for integration, its limits as a cohesion principle and its limits as a relation to the Other: *the bond of humanity* is not a given, is not reciprocal, and can never be taken for granted. In the context of community art, where creative activity is intended as a catalyst for individual and social transformation, how can we assume that art is not an ethical practice in itself and that existence is not necessarily made more human by the forms its culture takes?

*Et en effet, si [les personnes qui créent du sens] ont un tel pouvoir... d'habiliter,
de vivifier, de ré-enchanter, de réveiller, d'inspirer, de provoquer...
alors, manifestement, nous avons assez de pouvoir pour faire le BIEN ou pour
NUIRE. Nous n'avons sans doute jamais l'intention de mal représenter,
d'exploiter, de rouvrir de vieilles blessures ou d'en infliger de nouvelles... de promouvoir
la haine, de provoquer le suicide ou la dépression, d'inciter à la violence...
et pourtant, toutes ces choses sont possibles dans le domaine de la création artistique...
et toutes sont présentes dans son histoire.*

—Pam Hall

Art as Ethical Gesture?

The artist works alone in the studio and works with others in the “community;” community art is intrinsically social, and *autonomous* art is an asocial form; the artist is *outside* or *without* community: these models are too simple and too polarized to address the reality of community art practices and the question of how ethics presents itself to the artist. The question of whether or not ethics is an issue for art can be addressed today because over the course of its history art has claimed to have a transformative effect on the world. This desire to change the world (shared by many modernist cultural movements) found the conditions of its artistic expression within the movement of autonomization before it was reformulated as a reaction to this very autonomization, a reaction that soon became identified as engagement. The motivations for autonomy and engagement in a way represent the limitations within which many reflections on the ethical experience of artists are confined. Autonomy becomes the legitimizing principle upheld by artistic modernity, as engagement becomes an exclusion principle, or at least a principle of imposed hierarchy. This gives rise to two commonplace ideas that are still prevalent today: engaged art is less legitimate artistically than autonomous art, which is less “moral.”

The practices of community art remain dependent on this artistic culture that aims to change the world. Sometimes they are naively governed by it, such as when they reproduce the prophetic or heroic modes of a modernism that still influences the contemporary artistic paradigm. At other times, they tend to free themselves from it, to take actions that are more modest in scope or work in an area of influence other than that of art. All these practices nevertheless complexify the exclusive opposition of the postures of autonomy and engagement to meet the need for a problematization of art that reflects the tensions characteristic of contemporary ethics.

Dans la poursuite de leurs pratiques, les artistes ne sont pas dispensées d'une réflexion personnelle sur la justice, l'équité, et la prise de décision éthique, qu'elles travaillent seules ou en collaboration avec d'autres artistes, ou avec des communautés non constituées d'artistes.

Que l'on travaille en solitaire ou en communautaire, à partir du personnel ou du politique, vers le processus ou le produit, nous sommes entourées de questions d'éthique et mises au défi par les conséquences de CE QUE nous faisons et COMMENT nous le faisons.

— Pam Hall

When the need arises for ethical reflection by artists or for training “in ethics” adapted to community art, what are the challenges or the problems that occur? When a situation calls into question the guidelines, values or means that have until then permitted us to make decisions and choices in *good faith*, in *good conscience*, what is it that is suddenly missing or lacking? In other words, when the uncomfortable question *What to do?* arises, what are we looking for? There is an individual and social reflex to seek help by appealing to “Ethics.” From “ethical” mutual funds to fashionable “ethical” sneakers, the current trend is to seek refuge by turning to “ethics” or claim “ethics” like some value-added label. This ethical flare-up, however, reflects a need for rules, a somewhat subterranean desire to be told what to do, to have our choices confirmed (*whom or what do we obey?*), to “effectively” resolve a conflict or to obtain some kind of legal protection. Sometimes, the process stops there. It will have reasserted an authority, substituted new rules for old ones (in the broad sense of codes, standards, laws and other imperatives), and allowed the avoidance of the sometimes painful or otherwise paralyzing effects of the critical requirements of ethics.

Even though we may acknowledge the loss of certain benchmarks or guidelines that sometimes reveal their limits or their inadequacies, we don't easily abandon the somewhat comforting model of morality (good/bad) in order to work with the complex propositions of reality. Whether we are referring to a morally invested art or a communal ideal — “come and share in the good life which is good, because it has to be good, because it contains the best”¹² — to question our own ethical conditioning and the underlying system of values can sometimes create the troubling impression that our very foundations will be jeopardized.

Nevertheless, questioning the posture we adopt with respect to the rules we have received or those we define for ourselves, questioning our ethical conditioning and the system of values underlying it, is the essence of this invitation to think about ethics in the context of the practices of community art. It is an invitation to explore a posture of tension. Opposition is a familiar posture among artists, and it is common in the history of community groups, who have sometimes constructed their legitimacy by *being against*. Opposition is of the same order as substitution: against the law, for a different law. How to be in relation rather than in rupture?

Il ne s'agit de rien d'autre que de relations et de responsabilités.

De quelles sortes de relations venez-vous, et quelles sortes de relations développez-vous dans le travail que vous faites? Quelles sont vos responsabilités? Ceci présume que nous n'opérons jamais en tant qu'individus, mais bien à l'intérieur d'une ou de plusieurs communautés. Nous portons des responsabilités dans toutes nos relations, humaines et autres. Comment notre travail d'artiste entre-t-il en jeu dans tout cela?

— Kim Anderson

Ethics has not always been included in the concept of art, and it is by no means obvious that the conditions and forms of artistic activities today are disrupted by ethical tensions

Résumé de la journée¹³

Le fait de présenter ce programme dans les deux langues officielles, par le biais de l'interprétation simultanée professionnelle, fut apprécié par plusieurs personnes qui y ont participé, et a servi à mettre en évidence une des zones de questionnement majeures quand il s'agit d'établir des rapports éthiques — soit celle de l'accès par la communication.

En préparant cet événement, nous cherchions à créer la possibilité d'un dialogue où celles et ceux qui y prenaient part puissent apprécier le continuum des pratiques et des approches menant à la collaboration et la créativité communautaires. Grâce à la diversité de l'équipe d'animation, les participantes et participants furent encouragés à s'interroger sur leurs propres pratiques et à se situer sur ce continuum, inscrits dans une histoire qui est en flux, qui se crée avec — et parfois sans — effort critique de la part d'artistes et de communautés. Il était donc particulièrement significatif de constater comment participantes et participants ont pris une part active au dialogue, amenant à la discussion les questionnements particuliers qui ressortaient de leurs propres expériences. En même temps, demeurant ouverts à réfléchir et à communiquer à ce qui élargissait leur interrogation et leur compréhension du rapport entre l'art communautaire, l'esthétique et l'éthique, prenant parfois des risques considérables dans la révélation de vérités au sujet de leurs croyances et de leurs pratiques créatrices. Ce degré de confiance était rendu possible par la confiance établie entre les animatrices et animateurs, et la quantité de risques personnels encourus par chaque personne en présentant son matériel de manière transparente, autoréflexive et sincèrement mûrie. Ensemble nous avons exploré de quelle façon l'art communautaire est un engagement envers nous-mêmes et nos valeurs personnelles, tout en étant une négociation de celles-ci avec les autres.

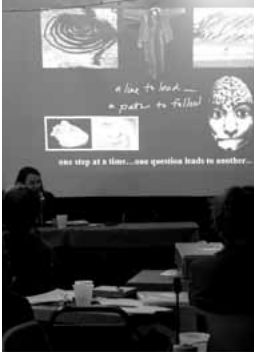
Joanne Gormley s'est présentée comme professeure de yoga kripalu certifiée ayant de l'expérience en théâtre communautaire et en arts visuels. Elle est codirectrice du studio montréalais Yoga on the Park. Pendant qu'elle dirigeait les exercices de centration corps/esprit, Joanne nous a demandé de considérer le sens de « prendre soin de soi », surtout en rapport avec le travail que nous effectuons auprès des autres. Vu que nos pratiques de cocréation et de collaboration requièrent notre entière présence, on pourrait percevoir ce que Joanne a partagé avec nous comme relevant de questions d'éthique incarnée.

Kim Anderson s'est présentée comme femme crie / métisse, écrivaine, éditrice, chercheuse et éducatrice dont les genres littéraires incluent la fiction, la poésie et des ouvrages savants traitant de questions relatives à la société, la santé et les enjeux d'importance chez les femmes autochtones. En avant-midi, lors de sa présentation *Establishing Ethics in the Practice of Community Art* [Établir une éthique pour la pratique de l'art communautaire], Kim nous a dit qu'il y a des enjeux éthiques présents dans tout ce qu'elle fait. « Une bonne partie de mon travail consiste à documenter les vies et les situations de gens marginalisés (la pauvreté des enfants et des familles, la parentalité adolescente). Je travaille aussi dans ce qu'on peut appeler le mouvement autochtone de guérison — j'anime des ateliers pour femmes sur l'identité et le développement communautaire. Et parce que tout mon travail se fait sur et dans la communauté autochtone, il se fait donc à l'intérieur d'un contexte colonial de gens qui ont été bâillonnés, réduits au silence. Alors, que je sois en train d'écrire un rapport, un communiqué, un livre ou un poème, je dois tenir compte de l'histoire et du contexte dans lesquels je travaille, afin de produire quelque chose d'éthique. Ceci est, bien sûr, en rapport avec notre histoire et l'oppression toujours actuelle des peuples autochtones. » Après avoir parlé du silence imposé, de la représentation trompeuse et de l'appropriation culturelle, Kim a présenté l'ensemble des principes de base qui lui servent de guide, tels qu'ils lui ont été enseignés par Marlene Brant Castellano, une universitaire mohawk. En lisant des passages de son propre ouvrage, *A Recognition of Being* [Une reconnaissance de l'être¹⁴] à travers la lentille du savoir autochtone, elle a repris les six qualités que cite Castellano : le personnel, l'oral, l'expérientiel, le relationnel, le collectif et le spirituel. Elle est également l'auteure, avec Bonita Lawrence, de *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival* [Récits de femmes fortes : vision autochtone et survie communautaire¹⁵].

Pam Hall s'est présentée comme cinéaste et artiste ayant une double pratique de production et d'enseignement, et qui apporte un ensemble de traditions mixtes aux questions éthiques soulevées à l'intersection de la pratique artistique (atelier) et du travail communautaire. Elle vit à Terre-Neuve et travaille partout où elle se trouve au Canada et aux États-Unis; elle enseigne au Collège Goddard (Vermont, É.-U.) et poursuit des études en doctorat à l'université Memorial (Terre-Neuve). Alors que Kim s'est consacrée à la mise en place de relations éthiques, Pam a travaillé avec l'œuvre *Framework for Ethical Decision-Making* [Cadre de travail pour des prises de décision éthiques¹⁶] du professeur Michael McDonald, du Centre for Applied Ethics de l'Université de Colombie Britannique, et en après-midi, pendant sa présentation intitulée *Transposing Models for Community Art Practices* [Transposer des modèles aux pratiques d'art communautaire], elle a parlé des structures nécessaires pour faciliter une prise de décision éthique. « Les notions fondatrices de la bienfaisance, de la non-malfaisance, et surtout du "consentement éclairé", ainsi que les contextes bien développés entourant la recherche sur les sujets humains, semblaient avoir des échos importants dans les pratiques artistiques qui "utilisaient" ou engageaient les autres, autre que l'artiste, dans le processus artistique. [...] la prise de décision éthique autoexaminée est enchâssée de manière utile dans la pratique artistique, que l'on travaille en solitaire ou avec d'autres, et peu importe le sujet ou les



Yoga with Joanne Gormley.



Pam Hall's presentation.



Kim Anderson and Louise Lachapelle.

préoccupations quant au contenu de notre travail. » En prenant pour exemple sa propre pratique d'art visuel en atelier, son travail en cinéma, sa collaboration créatrice avec la communauté médicale¹⁷, et puis ensuite pendant les réunions en petits groupes, lors desquelles on a demandé aux participantes et participants de considérer les dilemmes d'ordre éthique dans des exemples d'art communautaire fictifs prescrits, Pam a suggéré que ce cadre de prise de décision comprenne l'évaluation de l'information disponible (ou sa non-disponibilité), la considération du contexte et la création d'un espace sécuritaire où partager, atteindre de la clarté et de la rigueur dans l'explication de l'intention, des principes de base et des valeurs, de même que dans la transcription, tenant compte de l'impact de toute décision / action donnée, faisant des compromis, vivant avec les conséquences et apprenant de chaque expérience.

Tout au long de cet événement, Louise Lachapelle a façonné son rôle en coanimant (avec Devora Neumark) les discussions qui suivaient les présentations et avec sa propre recherche et pratique d'écriture au sujet de l'éthique, la culture, l'art et le don. Alliant l'écriture, la photo et le travail sur le terrain, elle s'intéresse principalement aux problématiques relatives au don dans le processus créateur et l'art comme geste éthique¹⁸. Professeure et chercheuse au Collège de Maisonneuve, elle y enseigne la création multidisciplinaire, la littérature et la culture contemporaines. Elle fait partie de l'Équipe de recherche sur l'imaginaire contemporain, Centre *Figura* de l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Ses travaux actuels portent sur la maison comme expression des inquiétudes et des tensions qui caractérisent aujourd'hui nos relations au monde. Ses travaux sur l'imaginaire contemporain soutiennent donc un travail sur l'habitat, sur l'environnement bâti, de même que le développement d'une approche interculturelle et collaborative de l'habiter. La collaboration de Louise a débuté en amont de l'événement, grâce à l'attention qu'elle a accordée à la communication avec les présentatrices en préparation de *Éthique? Normes? Quelques approches dans les pratiques d'art communautaire*. L'influence de ce processus s'est avéré pendant l'événement, puisqu'il a contribué à la cohérence des présentations et de la synthèse, et à la rigueur de cette enquête sur les questions éthiques et les dilemmes qui confrontent (et trop souvent, confondent) les artistes qui travaillent en collaboration dans la communauté.

To Give Ourselves a Language?

*Travailler au-delà la relation traditionnelle aux « autres »,
où la « communauté » était construite comme « public »
pour recevoir l'expression créatrice de l'artiste. Comme public,
la communauté était le « spectateur » — l'artiste était le « faiseur », —
l'Art « parlait » — le public « écoutait ».*

*[...] En effet, comment une visiteuse, une « étrangère », une « venue d'ailleurs »,
fait-elle pour pénétrer un territoire qui n'est pas le sien avec l'intention de « parler » ?
Ce fut le début de mon éducation « éthique ».*

*[...] J'ai appris que je devais être soucieuse des conséquences,
en éveil constant quant aux « droits » des autres,
et qu'il existait des lieux où je ne pouvais pas aller.*

— Pam Hall

Community art: art in community settings? Collective creative practice? Art as a community practice? Art as a practice of community? From a theoretical point of view, community art practices oblige us to explore the interpretive categories we use to conceptualize art. They also invite us in a very tangible way to explore the categories we use to communicate and the words with which we think the Other and ourselves. Would the first collaborative project not simply be to create the conditions for some form of communication, to give us a language, and to *mutually* establish ourselves as autonomous subjects? That is, free to accept or refuse to collaborate, free to assess, criticize, decide and create together the conditions for the emergence of a joint project (is it relevant whether or not it is art?).

Artists and community groups do not necessarily share the same theory of art or definition of what is a work of art, nor a similar definition (or experience) of what a community can be. Very often, they do not have a shared language to talk about art, or even about how communities are constituted or their potential collaboration. How do artists think about the Other in their practice, in their language, in their work with form? How do people connected with community groups think about the other in their practice, in their language, in the form of their actions? In community art projects, are the people in the community group considered in their diversity and granted the power to freely consent or refuse? Are they subjects acting on

the decision-making process *and* on the creative process, and not only objects represented, witnesses or recipients of the artist's actions? These considerations can be decisive with regard to how a co-creative project is defined and carried out. Tackling these questions, making our presuppositions, projections and a priori the object of our reflections, agreeing to work with the tensions and conflicts that may arise from the artists' lack of familiarity with "the meaning of community" or the lack of familiarity on the part of the members of community groups with "the meaning of art" depends on a willingness to put to critical and creative use what could otherwise become an obstacle to the process of collaboration.

What is a community for an artist? Is it an audience for an art without a public and for practices without an addressee? Are community settings just one more kind of working "material?" A place to work outside the studio? A space of influence, like a new extension of the territory of art, where artists remain able to exercise their prophetic or heroic power and thereby bring about "art as the real value" or save these "poor marginalized people?" Is community art sometimes synonymous with a kind of artistic proselytizing? From the point of view of the community groups' members, is art or the creative project a new kind of entertainment? Just another way of making work for themselves? An opportunity for some kind of self-enhancement by mimicking the attitudes of the artist or taking up an activity that society has invested with value and moral prestige? The discovery of one's own creative potential? What roles do art, artists and creative practice play in and for a community? What roles do the community setting, the groups and collaborative practice play for artists? And why turn to creative practice to *do this together*?

In other words, what brings the artist to community settings, what is s/he looking for, and what brings community groups and their participants to art or creative activity? Must these motivations necessarily be the same? When the goals of the artists clash with those of the group's members, how can the conflict be approached as a *creative conflict*? Amidst their sometimes divergent motivations and intentions, will the collaborators try to find intersections, meeting places that can also be tension points opening to an anxious space, an uncertain place where one can "be beside."

What Do We Seek to Offer?

*On ne prend jamais quelque chose sans d'abord faire une offrande.
D'habitude c'est du tabac, mais ça peut être d'autres sortes de cadeaux.*

— Kim Anderson

*Les enseignantes autochtones commencent souvent par se présenter elles-mêmes [...]
Nous avons réfléchi sur le fait que, dans nos communautés,
la pratique de l'enseignement commence souvent par une révélation
offerte par l'enseignante à propos d'elle.
Dans bien des cas, le récit de l'enseignante constitue en lui-même l'enseignement.*

— Kim Anderson (with Bonita Lawrence) with *A Recognition of Being*

In their desire to realize an artistic project in a community setting, to what extent do artists take into consideration the fact that art is primarily (and, in certain contexts, essentially) a necessity and a value for the artist, who, by definition, needs it? To what extent do artists ask themselves if the community group to which their path leads them shares this need for art or this need for creative collaboration, and to what extent do they ask themselves what takes them *personally* (and not only *professionally*) towards the "community" and towards *this* community in particular? Why, for example, in the history of community art, have artists so often chosen to work with "marginalized" individuals or groups? What do we seek to offer them?

Becoming involved in a collective creative process can help put into perspective the familiar desire to "change the world" that always creates a conflict between the real and the ideal; it is an ambition that has often proved disastrous. The private nature of certain gestures can also raise the question of the meaning and the effectiveness attributed to art. Can the effects of our actions be modest in scope; can they have a limited radius of influence, without losing their (artistic) legitimacy?

The practices of community art imply working *at* the boundaries, the boundaries of languages, traditions and practices (to mention only a few), as well as *on* the boundaries, that is, on what delimits, separates and connects. The gift does not resist boundaries well: a gift will "lose its value when it moves beyond the boundary of the community."¹⁹ For example, in what cultural context other than her own would Kim's tobacco actually be received as a gift? Why, then, should we imagine that

things would be different *because* art is involved? Outside the circle of art, that is, outside the shared reality of a particular view of art, isn't art *unacceptable* as a gift, or as a value? Circulation beyond certain boundaries therefore has its risks: loss of value, loss of identity, and loss of status. But how can the artistic gesture meet the demands of the present if not by being open to these risks? And doesn't giving essentially mean giving of *oneself*?

The realization of a collaborative project therefore requires creating the conditions that make such a project possible. Once again, this is a creative project in itself: what to do? How to be together in relation to what? To whom? All these ethical questions can be given circumstantial and varied answers, answers based on values and beliefs that have direct repercussions on how decisions are made. But what is a value? And how is it related to everyday decision-making in collective creative projects?²⁰ This question, which was raised by several participants, clearly belongs to a sociohistorical context in which values are being redefined, but it also points to a fundamental ethical issue in community art: to create the conditions where community art becomes possible demands that the necessity for such art be clear both for the artists and the community groups, although this necessity may be different in each case.

How do We Dance on Fragile Ground? (Pam Hall)

*Pour chaque voix que nous choisissons d'écouter,
il y en a d'autres que nous laissons de côté... Pour chaque inclusion, il y a des dizaines d'exclusions,
pour chaque autonomisation, il y a des pertes d'autonomie.
Et bien que je sois consciente de l'impossibilité de l'autonomie,
de la justice et de l'équité pour TOUTES...
je sais aussi qu'il surviendra toujours des questions autour de ces principes
lorsqu'on travaille avec les autres, lorsqu'on s'implique dans une communauté...
[...] J'ai aussi découvert — et mes découvertes continuent — que de telles questions ne disparaissent
pas lorsqu'on retourne à la pratique solitaire d'un processus en atelier.*

— Pam Hall

Artists and community groups that undertake an artistic collaborative project embark on a process whose rhythms in terms of time will be very variable. The conditions that make it possible to carry out the project will emerge in the first phase of their collaboration, during which the nature of the project will also be defined. *Dancing partners on fragile ground*. If we consider that a community art project is co-directed by the artist (or artists) and the community group, we can understand the importance of paying special attention to the way decisions are made. This means both the artists and community groups need to reflect upon their own decision-making processes and the values that guide their choices from an ethical perspective. In a A based on developing collaborative relationships and values aiming to be inclusive, the need to decide can be uncomfortable—the etymology of the word reminds us that deciding means *cutting off*. At this point, it can be tempting to give up thinking and choosing for oneself and to refuse to expose oneself to certain conflicts, certain renunciations, certain compromises, in other words, to remove oneself from the ethical demands by evoking a (hopeless) situation, (unavoidable) rule or (unassailable) value.

However, the importance of rigorously approaching the relationship between fundamental ethical questions and the emerging demands of concrete situations becomes clear as soon as we consider the respective expectations of artists and community groups with regard to the collaborative project and the aims of community art as defined, for example, by Engrenage Noir / LEVIER: "This co-creation is aimed at encouraging active participation, responsibility and self-esteem" through the implementation of a project that should contribute "meaningful responses to social and political inequalities."²¹ Who encourages the participation of whom in this adventure? Who contributes and defines the responses? Responses that are meaningful to whom? What social and political inequalities are we talking about? And who is experiencing them? This is another whole set of questions that arise at the specific place where ethical reflection exists in tension with the immediate need for a concrete gesture.

During the day of critical thinking, we chose to explore this space of tension. The event *Ethics? Norms? Questioning Community Art Practices* attempted to bring out the fact that ethics can be articulated with the decision-making processes, choices and gestures involved in community art practices. Connecting ethical questions and community art practices can help in sustaining the demanding nature of the fundamental issues that arise from reality, and can assuage the dizzying or paralyzing effects these issues sometimes cause. In turn, the changing realities that call on us to take action and make choices complexify the ethical issues.

In conclusion, I will briefly review the themes covered, which reflect some current concerns related to the practices of community art. These subjects have also been examined with the assistance of the participants in LEVIER's *Community Art Training and Exchange Program (2004)*. The description of these themes was formulated in collaboration with Devora Neumark.

the sharing of leadership and responsibilities

An artist who wants to become more directly involved in the public sphere and who moves from solitary practice in the studio to collective co-creation in a community setting often feels resistance to giving up the part of his/her culture that is based on a mythical concept of the role of the artist. This resistance may be expressed in a desire to preserve a substantial proportion of artistic control and autonomy in the course of the project, in accordance with the modernist canon that gives the artist the right to make decisions supposedly based solely on formal or aesthetic considerations. This resistance can also be expressed in the simple transposition of personal artistic practice to a new context, that of the community, despite the fact that the approach of community art originates in a willingness to open oneself to new ways of doing and being.

In the decision-making processes, both the artists and the community groups may remain in a familiar posture and persist in their respective ways of functioning. Their collaboration can also potentially lead to the combining of practices and experiences that would, for example, highlight the degree of creative work that is present in the gestures and practices of community groups and bring out the ethical dimension of certain aesthetic processes. How can the sharing of leadership and responsibilities express the diversity of experiences, situations and contributions of the different partners as well as the mutual recognition of subjectivities and skills?

*Je fais beaucoup de recherches auprès de personnes pauvres et marginalisées,
et je dois m'assurer que le produit final ne devienne pas
plus important que la manière dont j'y suis arrivée.
Si les personnes se sentent exploitées, exposées ou pas écoutées
— alors il n'y a pas de sens à faire ce travail —
peu importe les apparentes qualités du rapport final.
Les types de relations que je développe avec les gens lors de mes recherches
sont donc d'une importance capitale. La responsabilité entre en jeu
lorsque nous reconnaissons que nous devons toujours honorer ces personnes
qui nous ont accordé leur confiance en nous permettant de travailler avec leur matériau.*

— Kim Anderson



Kim Anderson.

the question of authorizations

Certain factors hinder or encourage collaboration, sharing and dissemination. During the documentation and dissemination of any process of creation and, in particular, those that are collaborative in nature, the complex and essential question of authorizations arises. But what does the expression "informed consent" really mean, under what conditions is it given, by whom and to meet what needs: these are issues that need to be taken into consideration and negotiated among the various parties involved. Could we also envisage "informed consent" as not being reserved for the question of permission to publish, but as being called for at other times in relation to the various steps of the process of collaboration and the development of a community art project?

personal problematics and respect for one's own limits

There is a certain level of risk inherent in the creative process, since it implies the possibility that personal problems may be unpredictably set off (personal triggers). Community art is affected all the more by this question, since it is based on the development of relationships that themselves involve their share of risk, situations of vulnerability, surfacing of certain fears, but also trust, responsibility and autonomy. This relationship between the creative process as aesthetic project and as catalyst for change (individual or social) therefore implies the negotiation of the space reserved for the requirements of the collective creative project in a way that also respects demands related to the expression of personal issues triggered among the participants (individual or group).

It is not always immediately possible to achieve the distance that would allow us to apply the effects of these mechanisms to the creative process, even for artists or for community organizers, who are not exempt from such risks (aren't they all, in various ways, participants?) and who also have to define and respect their own limits. How then to provide space for interventions involving statements of personal feelings and to respect the individual problems triggered by a process of collective creation, but also how to contain these problems or limit them so that they do not interfere with the creative project and so that they respect the other? What are the conditions necessary for everyone to be receptive? What are the healthy, flexible boundaries to be protected in order to remain open to oneself and to the other as well as to the demands of collective creation? How do we think about the consequences of what we open up, and how can we offer, and also seek out, appropriate support for others or ourselves before our own resources prove inadequate in a particular situation?

*J'ai été vraiment touchée quand vous m'avez dit :
« Nous devons créer des possibilités, pas seulement de l'exclusion. »*

— Kim Anderson to Bonita Lawrence, in *A Recognition of Being*

NOTES

1. See the account of that workshop, entitled *Aesthetics and Ethics in Community Art Projects* written by Myriom Berthelet, p. 43.
2. See her presentation in this section, p. 57. See her participation in the *Community Art Training and Exchange Program (2004)*, pp. 66–70, in the *Community Art Video Documentary Training and Exchange Program*, p. 100–107, and in the training and exchange program *Community Art: Imagination, Collaboration and Ethics*, pp. 121–122. Louise acted as collaborating editor for this book and, in this capacity, she signed the Postscript entitled *La brûlure avant la voix or Could this be a love letter?*, pp. 353–365.
3. See her presentation in this section, p. 56. She led a similar workshop in 2004, during the *Community Art Training and Exchange Program* (see p. 66), and in 2006, during the *Community Art Video Documentary Training and Exchange Program* (see p. 102). See the reference to this activity in the critical summary by Rachel Heap-Lalonde, *Between the Means and the Ends*, p. 72.
4. See her presentation in this section, p. 56. She has taken part in the development of LEVIER since the *First Orientation Meeting in 2001* (see pp. 22–24); see also her theoretical text, *Community Based Arts and Research Practices: What's Ethics Got To Do With It?*, p. 299–302; see also her participation in the *Community Art Training and Exchange Program (2004)*, p. 67, and the reference to this activity in the critical summary by Rachel Heap-Lalonde, *And If We Were to Tell the Story... Thoughts on Our Journey*, pp. 79 and 80–81.
5. See her presentation in this section, p. 56.
6. T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004 [1970]), p. 1.
7. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, translated by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 121 and 116.
8. This reflection is part of an ongoing research project entitled *This Should be Housing / Le temps de la maison est passé*, which focuses on the house as an expression of concerns and tensions characterizing our current relationship to / in the world: how to inhabit the contemporary together? This work is supported by the Collège de Maisonneuve and the Fonds de recherche sur la société et la culture within the framework of the Équipe de recherche sur l'imaginaire contemporain, Centre Figura, Université du Québec à Montréal. A forthcoming essay entitled *Le Coin Rouge: l'angle de beauté* will present this research, which nevertheless has already resulted in several publications, conference presentations, workshops and roundtable discussions. See for example: "Ground Zero : la domestication des restes ou le pouvoir de disposer" (with original photographs by the author) in *ESSE arts + opinions*, "Dossier Déchets," 64 (September 2008), p. 10–15; and "L'intérieur est l'asile où l'art se réfugie," *Voix plurielles*, special issue "La maison et le livre," (May 2008). Note that this latter article is also available on-line, www.brocku.ca/cfra/volumes/voix_plurielles_5_1/voix_plurielles_5_1.html.
9. As per my request, the excerpts from the guest speakers' presentations appear in French. See the English versions in the French text, p. 55–62.
10. See her other accounts of *Is Community Art Therapy? Is it Healing?*, pp. 41–43, *Aesthetics and Ethics in Community Art Projects*, p. 43, *Presentation of an Experience with Young Adults*, p. 44, and *Workshops on Conflict Resolution*, pp. 48–50. See also the description of the humanist activist project *Podval*, which she created with Anne-Élisabeth Côté, pp. 251–252.
11. A good introduction to this approach to ethics is Paul Ricœur's "Avant la loi morale: l'éthique," in the *Encyclopédie Universalis*, under "Enjeux" (Paris: Encyclopædia universalis, 1985), pp. 42–45.
12. Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 132.
13. This section of the text includes many elements from Devora Neumark's final report for the Canada Council for the Arts. As per my request, the French version is integrated in the English text. For the English version, see the French text, pp. 57–58.
14. Toronto: Sumach Press, 2000.
15. Toronto: Sumach Press, 2003.
16. This document is available on-line at www.ethics.ubc.ca/?p=document.
17. From 1997 to 1999, Pam Hall was the first artist-in-residence at the Faculty of Medicine at Memorial University in Newfoundland. This project was critical to enable it to expand the faculty to work on the female body while deepening its commitment to ethics and representation, and was one of the pilot projects supported by the Arts Council of Canada. See also www.pamhall.ca/work_with_others/.
18. See also the other texts I have published on this topic, among them: "Les cassures du vivant," in *As If All Were Well* (eds. Anne Bertrand, Hervé Roelants, Stephen Wright), a publication linking the 2006–2007 programming and the 20th anniversary of the Centre des arts actuels Skol, (Montréal and Strasbourg: Skol and Rhinoceros, April 2008, pp. 160–172); *L'art et la communauté: réflexions sur la médiation culturelle dans une perspective éthique* preliminary notes that were used to support my statement submitted as opening remarks during the *Rencontres sur la médiation culturelle* organized by the Direction du développement culturel de la Ville de Montréal on June 15, 2007 (text available on-line at: ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/culture_fr/media/documents/lachapelle_notes_mediation_culturelle.pdf).
19. Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 77.
20. In Paul Ricœur's article cited above, we also find inspiring ideas about the concept of values. Ricœur highlights the mixed nature of values, emphasizing that they are "related to preferences, to evaluations by individuals and ultimately to a history of mores." A value is thus "a concept of compromise between the desire for freedom of unique consciousnesses in their movement of mutual recognition, and situations."
21. Promotional material from the *Engrenage Noir / LEVIER Community Art Training and Exchange Program (2004)*.