ROUTLEDGE

Socially Engaged Art and Ethics

Power, Politics and Participation

Edited by Anthony Schrag

SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART AND ETHICS

Power, Politics and Participation

Bringing together artists, curators, activists, academics, managers, and educators from around the world, this unique anthology examines the notion of ethics within socially engaged art.

The volume aims to deepen conversations around what 'good' or 'right' activities could be in this developing and expanding practice, and readers are invited to consider the contextual nature of socially engaged art – its politics, infrastructures, and values. Supported by case studies from the United Kingdom, the United States, China, Cuba, South Africa, and Norway, as well as discussions relating to education, cultural policy, and activism, this volume provides a much-needed critical analysis in the making, curating, commissioning, and managing of socially engaged art.

This collection is an ideal text for interdisciplinary courses that place visual arts (including design or performance) within social and political contexts but also for students and scholars of art, art history, and visual studies more generally.

Anthony Schrag is an artist and researcher based in Scotland, and a Reader in Cultural Policy and Arts Management at Queen Margaret University (Edinburgh). The central focus of his work is to explore the role of art in participatory and public contexts, with a specific focus on social conflict, agonism, and ethics. He has exhibited widely, with numerous publications as well as an extensive history of undertaking social practice projects both nationally and internationally. www.anthonyschrag.com

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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations *viii*
List of Contributors *xi*
Acknowledgements *xvii*

Introduction 1
Anthony Schrag

Prologue: Typology of Participatory Practices 9
Anthony Schrag

SECTION I
Insiders and Outsiders **15**

1 I Live Here! Reflections on Being a Socially Engaged Artist in a Small Community 17
Roxane Permar

2 Making Sense of Participation as a Practitioner Through a Nodal Governance Lens 32
Vaughn Sadie

3 Inside or Outside? Morten Traavik as a Director of Scenes of Dissensus: An Autoethnographic Approach 55
Lisbet Skregelid

SECTION II
Infrastructures **73**

4 The Walter Process: An Alternative to the Standard (American) Artworld System 75
Harrell Fletcher and Anthony Schrag

5 Doing the Right Thing? Managerial Ethics in Social Engaged Arts 95
Ali FitzGibbon and Shirley-Ann Hazlett

6 Ethical Consciousness in Collections Management 112
Bailea Jackson

7 Aesthetics as Ethics: The Politics of Arts-led Rural Reconstruction in Contemporary China 128
Meiqin Wang

SECTION III
Roles and Responsibilities **145**

8 Telaplico: The 'Replica' in Detotalising Relations of Exchange 147
Celia Irina González Álvarez

9 The Ethics of the Future: Cultural Emergence 167
Viviana Checchia

10 The Urgency of Community Engagement: Perspectives from the USA 185
Kremena Todorova and Kurt Gohde

SECTION IV
Careful Ethics **197**

11 Critical Ethics and the Pedagogy of Care 199
Cameron Cartiere

12 Ethical Tensions Surrounding Care in Community Arts Organisations 215
Kyla Tully

13 Structural Distress: LGBTQ+ Communities in 'Creative Health' and the Limits of Care 229
Frances Williams and Yasmin Jiang

14 The Careful Turn: The Problem of Care Within Socially Engaged Art 245
Anthony Schrag

Epilogue: The Only Way Is Ethics *261*
Sophie Hope

References *267*
Index *291*

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

0.1 Diagram of the intersections of the domains of participatory art practices. Copyright: Anthony Schrag, 2023 11
1.1 *The Croft Cosy Project*, (1994). R-type photograph. Copyright: Wilma Johnson and Roxane Permar 21
1.2 *Projectile,* (2021). One of 14 light projections created for Home and Belonging, an arts-based project with care experienced young people, #SHETLANDCREW, Who Cares? Scotland, and the Centre for Island Creativity, UHI Shetland. Copyright: #SHETLANDCREW and Home and Belonging. 23
1.3 *Recount,* (2013). Gwen Jamieson, formerly Chief Officer for the Royal Observer Post at Walls, Shetland. Copyright: Cold War Projects, Roxane Permar and Susan Timmins 28
2.1 Drawing of the housing typology of Cosmo City developed by the author (2015). Copyright: Vaughn Sadie 38
2.2 The Revolution Room Project structure developed by the author, (2015). Copyright: Vaughn Sadie 42
3.1 Digital screenshot of Messanger Chat between author and M. Travaik (2023). Copyright: Lisbet Skregelid 56
3.2 Digital photograph of Laila B. tote bag in the back of a taxi (2023). Copyright: Lisbet Skregelid. 57
3.3 Digital photograph of the author with Laila B. tote bag. Credit: Inger Margrethe Stoveland. Copyright: Lisbet Skregelid 65
4.1 Participants in the Autobiographical writing and publishing workshop at Columbia River Correctional Institution. From Left to right Arron, Juliano, DL, and Terry (2023). Digital photograph. Copyright: Harrell Fletcher 77

4.2 Front and back cover of handmade book featuring a double exposure photograph of Walter at Lexington Elementary School (1991). Digital photograph. Copyright Harrell Fletcher 84
4.3 Selection of handmade books by Walter (1991). Digital photograph. Copyright: Harrell Fletcher 85
4.4 Front cover of *Smile Now, Cry Later* by Terry James, with cover art by Chris Johanson, published by Some People Press (2024). Digital photograph. Copyright: Harrell Fletcher 92
7.1 Street views of Caijiapo in July (2023). Top left: standardised front yard landscaping; top right: tourists wandering around the street in a late afternoon; bottom left: an installation artwork made of family photos, pots and pans, and other old tools and objects in the front yard of a resident; bottom right: outdoor exhibition along the main road in the village. Copyright: Meiqin Wang 131
7.2 Murals that adorn walls of a shed and houses in Caijiapo (2023). Digital photographs. Copyright: Meiqin Wang 135
7.3 Top left: the well-known guest house Grandpa Niu's Yard, owned and operated by the local Niu family; top right: the exhibition 'Archaeologies of the Rural Present: Xiuwu's Scenery, Crops, Crafts, and Demeanor' in Dananpo Art Center; bottom left: picture books by local children are featured in Fang Sou Commune Bookstore; bottom right: children's favorite public installation Cabbage Caterpillar, which was designed by Z+T Studio as a playground, (2023) Digital photographs. Copyright Meiqin Wang 140
8.1 Artist wearing the mask with Luis Manuel Otero's face during the exhibition *Telaplico* (2021). Digital photograph. Copyright: Anonymous 154
8.2 Artist wearing the mask with Luis Manuel Otero's face during the exhibition *Telaplico* (2021). Digital photograph. Copyright: Anonymous 159
8.3 Artist wearing the mask with Luis Manuel Otero's face during the exhibition *Telaplico* (2021). Digital photograph. Copyright: Anonymous 160
8.4 Documentation of the performance by a noise band during the exhibition *Telaplico* – the artists are wearing the mask with the face of Luis Manuel Otero (2021). Digital photograph. Copyright: Anonymous 164
9.1 Documentation of 'Coaching with Dorian' event (2024). Digital photograph. Copyright: Viviana Checchia 180

9.2 Documentation of Social Permacultural Training with Alfred (2024). Digital photograph. Copyright: Viviana Checchia 181

9.3 Documentation of exhibition by Stephane Verlet Bottero at Void Art Centre: *Composting for the Future* 033 (2024). Digital photograph. Credit: Stephane Verlet Bottero/Void Art Centre. Copyright: Viviana Checchia 182

10.1 Photograph of the building in which the authors taught in 2010, when they taught the third year of CETA in the largely vacant building (2010). Digital Photograph. Copyright: Kurt Gohde and Kremena Todorova 189

10.2 Photograph of the building in which the authors taught in 2023, after 13 years of gentrification when the building houses a bicycle shop, a coffee shop, and an advertising/branding agency (2023). Digital Photograph. Copyright: Kurt Gohde and Kremena Todorova 190

10.3 Photograph of Lexington drag performer Jenna Jive performing on the stage at Transylvania University surrounded by some of the lanterns created as part of CETA, (2023). Digital Photograph. Copyright: Kurt Gohde and Kremena Todorova 194

13.1 Photograph artwork made by young people titled 'Queertopia' (2024). Digital photograph. Copyright: Frances Williams 230

13.2 Photograph of artwork made by young people, who have taken inspiration from the 'Design District' (2024). Digital Photograph. Copyright: Frances Williams 235

14.1 Photographic documentation of performance *Privilege is a Prison (Free from Care)*, Johannesburg (2014). Digital photograph. Copyright: Anthony Schrag 257

14.2 Photographic documentation of performance *Privilege is a Prison (Free from Care)*, Johannesburg (2014). Digital photograph. Copyright: Anthony Schrag 258

14.3 Documentation of performance *Privilege is a Prison (Free from Care)*, Johannesburg (2014). Digital video still. Copyright: Anthony Schrag 259

14.4 Documentation of performance *Privilege is a Prison (Free from Care)*, Johannesburg (2014). Digital video still. Copyright: Anthony Schrag 259

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Kurt Gohde and Kremena Todorova's collaborative works often examine socio-political issues and questions of identity and place. Kurt and Kremena travelled to six cities in the United States to photograph the people who live near the couches and easy chairs found on the cities' curbs. The resulting collection of images is part of DISCARDED: USA. With the Lexington Tattoo Project – a public artwork that placed the words of a poem, as permanent tattoos, on the bodies of 253 Lexingtonians – Kurt and Kremena started a global movement, uniting people one tattoo at a time. They developed the same project in four more cities and created an additional global version with tattoos in multiple languages, spread across numerous countries. The pair exhibited their Unlearn Fear + Hate multi-year cycle of artworks nationally and internationally. They are currently working on a portrait project to honour women of Palestinian descent who call Lexington, Kentucky home. https://kurtandkremena.com/

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Anthony Schrag is a practicing artist and researcher, and Reader at Queen Margaret's University (Edinburgh). The central focus of his work examines the role of art in participatory and public contexts, with a specific focus on social conflict, agonism, and ethics. He has published widely, including journal articles, monographs, and recently the collected anthology *The Failures of Public Art and Participation* (co-edited with Cameron Cartiere) (Routledge, 2022). He has exhibited and worked nationally and internationally, including residencies in Iceland, United States, Canada, Pakistan, Finland, The Netherlands, and South Africa, among others. He leads MA Participatory Arts and and is interim co-lead for the Culture in Society Research Centre as well as leading the Practice Research Cluster: Finding and Using Creative Knowledge. He has received grants from AHRC, Royal Society of Edinburgh, and Creative Scotland and was recently selected as one of the 50 Young Academics of Scotland (RSE). The artist Nathalie De Brie once referred to his practice as 'Fearless'. The writer Marjorie Celona once said: 'Anthony, you have a lot of ideas. Not all of them are good.'

Kyla Tully recently completed her PhD, funded via the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities 'Applied Research Collaborative Studentship' programme with Edinburgh's Queen Margaret University and the University of Glasgow. Her research utilises creative practice within ethnography centred on the relationship between personal and professional roles within a developing rural arts organisation. This work draws upon theories of cultural management and professionalisation in order to explore the incorporation of

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INTRODUCTION

Anthony Schrag

This publication developed out of a module that I created in 2018, which was delivered as a part of a socially engaged arts master's programme that I teach at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh Scotland. The module was titled 'The Only Ways is Ethics: Art, power and representation' and took its name from a 'scripted reality' TV programme that was popular for many years in the UK: *The Only Way is Essex*. I will admit that part of my impetus for this title came from an urge to attract students with a bit of levity and popular culture. My main reason for creating the module is that I was keen to create a space to interrogate the variety of ethical complications that can – and do – emerge when making art within the public domain. I felt this interrogation was necessary as there seemed to be a few opportunities within formal higher education (specifically art schools) that allowed students to examine the good – or 'right' behaviour – of working with the publics and this was a growing concern as more and more artists seemed to be choosing to work in this way. The art sector itself also seemed to be more accepting of this practice, as evidenced by all the 2021 Turner Prize nominees, each of whom operated in some sort of socially engaged manner. It was clear to me that this way of working was no longer considered just a fringe activity done by earnest social activists and community-minded creatives, but rather an accepted creative practice. For all its acceptability, however, there seemed to be little interrogation of its *ethics,* despite this work often being situated alongside the most vulnerable members of society.

This is further complicated by the fact that there are no longer just artists wishing to work with communities, but also increased pressures from governmental remits that stipulated 'public good' as a necessary criterion for artistic activities receiving public funding. Additionally, there are national cultural policies that position this type of art practice as a way to enhance

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public health. (See, for example, the Scottish Government's *National Partnership for Culture*'s attention to well-being (2022) or the Welsh Government's report "Exploring the relationship between culture and well-being" (Browne Gott, 2020).) Such policies identify culture as a functional tool which can/should be used to intervene in crime and anti-social behaviour, for example, or to extend educational attainment, or to develop community and social cohesion. Across the spectrum, then, it is clear that such practices are situated to 'do good' and make the world a better place…But is it the purpose of art to make the world 'better'? Should art 'do good'? Can it *actually* do good? Or *actually* make it better? And, if so, whose definition of 'better' and 'goodness' is used?

There is therefore an imperative to examine these assumptions of 'better' or 'goodness' and how this manifests within artworks that engage the public. This publication sets out to provide examples, in-depth case-studies, personal stories, and contextual insights that can complicate and deepen understandings about this type of work. However, it does not aim to present universal truths or diktats, and – as described within the 'typology' section that immediately follows this Introduction – it hopes to acknowledge the complexity of this topic without reducing it to singular ethical frameworks. In other words, we have attempted to provide a very rough map without fixing the landscape. Indeed, this map can perhaps identify some boggy marshes or erupting volcanoes, but can also recognise that marshes and volcanoes are important ecological features that can be as generative as they can be dangerous.

Nor does this publication make any rigid demarcations of what 'is' and what 'is not' socially engaged: I have tried to keep this open and included provocations that can expand the way we think about this type of work. For example, might museums be considered a sort of socially engaged practice in that they speak of communities and their identities? Or might curating be thought of as a participatory practice in that it is fundamentally relational? The publication also seeks to support decolonial perspectives and includes many reflections from the Global Majority that offer very different solutions to very different problems in a way that problematises Western habits.

All the authors in this publication wrestle with this topic from their individual contexts, providing insightful considerations, and offering provocations. For example, Skregelid (Chapter 3) dives deeply into the assumptions that such art should be grounded in notions of 'consensus' and instead examines artworks that are involved in dissensus and conflict. Looking into the 'hypertheatre' of Morten Traavik, she takes an autoethnographic approach that draws parallels between her research and the theoretical lens of Rancière's notion of 'dissensus' in a way that surfaces a 'questioning and uncertainty,' which also seem to be the core focus of Traavik's work. Through this methodology, she not only draws attention to traditional epistemological habits of academics and critics (and the problems such 'objective' research

demands) but also makes a case for knowledge that 'blurs the private and the academic, and demands that researchers put themselves into the situation, rather than placing themselves outside.' For socially engaged art – a practice that aims to centre affective and relational processes – this attention to the epistemic is not only vital, but can also provide key insights into complexities. And Traavik's works are certainly complex, operating in a 'blurred distinction between art, activism and social issues' which centres 'doubt, paradoxes, self-contradictions, inner tensions and polyphony of message(s).' By intentionally placing herself 'within' Traavik's hypertheatre, Skregelid gives us an insider's view of these complexities and thus adds much needed layers of complexity and nuance to the discussion about ethics and art.

My chapter (Chapter 14) similarly examines dissensus, but from the perspective of a practitioner, specifically looking at notions of infrastructure and *care*. I draw on a seminal text by Belfiore (2022) that many authors also reference and examine how care is being situated both as a mechanism of engagement and as problematically lacking within management of such activities. Tully's text (Chapter 12) expands this attention to the managerial pragmatics of *care* – both in how an organisation cares for their community, but also in the professional, mundane mechanisms of management. She presents the concept of a 'spreadsheet of care' that can support staff and artists which, in turn, can impact a community. Her work is grounded in her doctoral research into a rural community-arts organisation and pushes us to see management as a way to centralise particular values or good/right behaviour that are important to particular contexts. In this way, managerial or professional practices can be considered not inherently 'unethical' but instead as tools that can be wielded to help attain specific outcomes that align with specific values.

In a similar vein, FitzGibbon and Hazlett (Chapter 5) also wrestle with management, asking where – and how – responsibility for ethical decisions is taken. As such, they focus on understanding socially engaged arts managers' ethical concerns and influences on their decision-making. They ask: 'Who is responsible then for deciding what is 'good' or the right thing in the management of arts practice or even if the pursuit of good is relevant?' As with everything within this anthology: this is a complex terrain, and in negotiating it, they remind us that 'managerial and business ethics shape arts practice' so there is a clear need to ensure that both the 'art' and the 'management' are aligned. Their interviews with arts managers present a rich seam of insight about a raft of pragmatic and conceptual concerns, including values, funding, support, and decision-making processes – to name just a few – that are all mitigated, formed, and framed through notions of management. As with other texts, they also remind us that socially engaged artists/managers/organisations do not work in silos: they are part of a rich and plural ecology of intertwined personal and organisational values which complicate a universal 'management ethics' of this practice.

Sadie (Chapter 2) similarly looks to the ethical complexities that emerge from managerial processes, and to unpick some of these complexities, he presents a project that occurred in the context of South Africa. Here, he explores the requirements to place significant attention on both social and relational power in the development of equitable relations and provides a particularly useful case study that highlights the tensions between traditional, rational management structures and those that are more organic, tacit, and social. Importantly, his text draws attention to the significant work that is required to ensure these ways of working can enmesh. As he says, 'working in communities is messy' and this particular project can act as both a productive model for such work and also a warning as to the intense relational activity required to develop true citizen control within a participatory arts project. Indeed, in order for management and governance structures to be ethical to the context, they 'necessarily had to be fluid, constantly shifting based on perceptions of agency and the ability to influence or change the project.' This is problematised by governance systems that are rational or rigid and thus calls into question how such ethical management and governance *could* possibly occur, if at all, and 'asks managers to ensure a comprehensive and deep understanding of the power dynamics inherent in any context.'

The relationship between governance and people is a similar concern for Williams and Jiang (Chapter 13) who provide an insight into problematic notions of 'creative health' as framed by successive Conservative governments within the UK, and the limits of 'care' that emerge from these governmental policies. Specifically looking at *queer* health, their text draws attention to top-down policy paradigms that were intended to mitigate the negative effects of social inequality but in fact reinforce the very unequal systems they proport to challenge. The concern about the role of 'creativity' within the healthcare system challenges the way systems of health depersonalise 'care' and add to the visceral political debates that are centred on current LGBTQi+ existence and identities.

The attention to the relationship between people and civic structures is also explored by Jackson (Chapter 6), who explores the current activity around decolonisation within museums.

The chapter positions 'museum work as an 'expanded' socially engaged practice' and draws attention to the way in which any system can engage with communities. In this way, she shows that engaging with decoloniality and the 'extractive' nature of museums/art can provide important food for thought for all practitioners – regardless if one is a museum or undertaking a community-based arts practice. Indeed, it is striking how mirrored the responses of her museum worker interviewees can be to those working within socially engaged arts: discussions about the emotional toll of their work, or 'the institutional bad habits,' or how governance and policy frame the potential for 'good' or 'right' activity, or how we need to go forward in thinking and learning about such work.

How we learn about socially engaged art – and examine its purposes – is a consistent through-line with both Cartiere (Chapter 11) and Todorova and Gohde (Chapter 10) reflecting on the intersection of 'education' and 'engagement.' With Cartiere's chapter, she examines the structures of art-school education that give space to this work, specifically in the context of a very socio-economically complex area in Vancouver (the Downtown East Side – DTES). Interrogating the ways in which such institutions (and the resources they can leverage) can operate with such communities provides critical reflection on how to establish infrastructures of care and equitable engagement. Indeed, her text pushes readers to ask themselves if educational establishments should be spaces for *thinking* about ethics or for actually *implementing* 'right' and 'good' action? As the programme leader of a socially engaged master's degree myself, I personally wrestle with such complexities and find Cartiere's arguments soothing. She writes: 'I would argue that as instructors in formal programs, training future artists working in the public realm, we have a duty of care to bring the ethical considerations of biases, privileges, and power into our curriculum.'

Similarly, Todorova and Gohde's text also examines the role academic institutions have in both reproducing systems of power, but also how they might be put in service of challenging those same systems. Working within a university in the USA, their chapter explores how teaching a class that focused on socially engaged art within a socioeconomically challenging neighbourhood came with both radical acts which problematised hegemonic structures of race and class and also an unintended complicity in broader gentrification activities. As they say, 'education, art, and society seemed to be entangled in a new way' and thus interrogating the 'responsible' behaviour of these educational contexts is complex: how and what *should* we be teaching students about this way of working? Operating at the intersection of 'artist' and 'educator' requires significant levels of reflection.

Artist-educator Harrell Fletcher similarly engages with the ethics of institutions, and in a dialogue with myself, we looked at institutions of the artworld, specifically the infrastructural habits of the North American gallery-based system. Like Jackson's text mentioned above, this may not immediately align with a book on the ethics of socially engaged art, but we explore the way that the system predicates specific ethics, or expectations of the 'right' sort of creative activities. In this case, the art-world of the USA requires a kind of 'making' that is guided by the overarching demands of commerce and capitalism, and how socially engaged arts can (sometimes) act as a foil to counteract capitalist logics. The chapter is bookended with a reflection of how socially engaged work can be a way to challenge the impacts of another major American (economic) institution – prisons – and gives a stark reminder of the imperative of finding ways to work differently in the face of such systems.

Permar (Chapter 1) similarly explores working in 'different' systems, and she describes her practice as a 'convoluted zigzag of perseverance' in which the negotiation and respect of relationships within her island community challenge a tool-kit type approach that is often suggested for new-comers to this practice. The tensions of how things 'should' be done – as defined by urban based experts – is complicated when one is a resident on a small island (one of the Shetland Islands, off of Scotland's north coast) where one is both an artist, a friend, and a member of a small community. She illustrates her complexities through tangible examples of her practice and her text is a reminder that the lives of real, living humans are always entwinned in this work, and thus socially engaged practices must always be contextual and negotiated, rather than follow externally decided structures.

On another island, far from Scotland, Celia González Álvarez's text (Chapter 8) is a reminder of the stakes in ensuring practitioners 'get it right' and the potential ramifications of 'getting it wrong.' Reflecting on the profound and complicated relationship between the individual and the state within Cuba, she explains that the implications of the 'wrong' kind of cultural activity can lead to imprisonment, police brutality, or worse. Therefore, there is an imperative to carefully consider what, how – and who – is involved in participatory arts which might be critical of the totalising power of the state. She follows the case of Cuban artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, who was censured for his creative activities, and how a series of (anonymous) artists in Nicaragua collaboratively worked together to replicate his works in an act of solidarity. This 'replicated state critique' challenges a state's hegemonic powers, providing fascinating reflections on the political role of the 'replica.' Additionally, in exploring her own socially engaged curatorial practice, she provides a nuanced reflection of this work in the context of oppressive regimes, and shows how such work becomes vital to undertake in order to address social conflict and political dissent.

Curatorial practices are a similar concern for Checchia (Chapter 9) and she discusses her role as Director of the Void Art Centre in Derry/Londonderry, referencing Hernández-Navarro to frame ethical behaviour as a 'constant questioning and reconsideration of duty, commitment, and responsibility' that draws attention to normative frameworks. In this way, she complicates how and why to curate socially engaged art, and draws on notions of 'permaculture' to draw attention (like many authors above) to the infrastructures that surround such work: that of time, of contextuality, and of sited-ness, but can also draw in questions of food, of ecology, of relationships, and of commerce. It is a concept that 'looks to natural environments to model co-existence and co-creation' and in this way frames ethical activity through the contextual nature of this practice. Readers will find it is an elegant response to a world that – due to global capitalism – is constantly being depersonalised, depoliticised, and de-situated.

Wang's text (Chapter 7) also looks at 'situated activity' and discusses arts-led social engagement within rural reconstruction in contemporary China. Often, Western perspectives can argue for 'easy' solutions to situations that may be based on different sorts of politics and cultural assumptions, and Wang's text provides comprehensive insight on how grassroots empowerment converges with government policy, and highlights the role of strategic collaboration in an authoritarian political system where confrontation is often avoided. It's a timely reminder that we all look at the world through our own ethical/political lenses, and it is helpful to have an insider's perspective to understand the very real ongoing tensions that exist between artistic autonomy, political alignment, and the economic realities of rural development. There are no simple fixes to these tensions, and her text traces pragmatic, creative, and important realities that complicate ethical frameworks.

Taken collectively, these works provide a deepening of a conversation about the good or right actions that exist within socially engaged art. As discussed above, the aim is not to provide universal truths or dictates of what this work *should* do. The hope is that they challenge readers, practitioners, or thinkers to understand the contextual nature of such engagements.

I have arranged this anthology in a way that collates some of this thinking into very broad themes: Section one – Insiders and Outsiders – focuses on different ethical problematics that emerge when operating within delimited community contexts; Section two – Infrastructures – interrogates the systems in place around artistic projects; Section three – Roles and Responsibilities – reflects on some of the pressures that emerge from the different roles within this field; and Section four – Careful Ethics – draws together further attention on the growing interest in notions of 'care' within socially engaged arts. However, these sections are relatively arbitrary and are perhaps more administrative than conceptual: indeed, all the chapters engage with all of these concerns to some extent and to varying degrees.

If there *is* a common theme, it is that all the authors draw attention to the structures *around* socially engaged artwork – be they managerial, aesthetic, economic, or governmental – and remind the reader that such structures contain embedded values and assumptions. It is these structures that then frame and limit ethical activity: they are the landscape on which socially engaged artworks occur. As editor, I would argue that such structures are not necessarily evil, or wrong, or even bad, but they do definitely steer the socially engaged art in particular (ethical) directions. Consider that our understandings of 'management' are often seen as an extension of a particular kind of value – corporate, capitalist, or extractive – and whilst management certainly *can* be a handmaiden to such practices, management in itself is not evil, but – like in Tully's text – can be turned to guide the ethical values of care, support, and solidarity.

Returning to – and reflecting on the title of my class 'The Only Way is Ethics' – I personally find comfort in the ethical pluralities explored in this anthology. It reminds me that such systems are not universal: they are malleable. They are human-made, and so can – with enough resources – be changed by humans to align with our own particular set of values or ethical frameworks.

I recognise how simplistic it is to make such a statement, but hope is always simplistic.

Unlike ethics.

Anthony Schrag
January 2023

PROLOGUE

Typology of Participatory Practices

Anthony Schrag

In a 2007 seminar exploring the emergence of a ‘new’ type of participatory art practice at the arts venue The Tramway (Glasgow, Scotland), the artist Anne-Marie Copstake was asked with whom she engaged. The question, I believe, was posed to interrogate the *sorts* of people involved in such work. Was it young people? Was it the unemployed? Was it refugees? Or activists? With which *type* of people did she make art? Copstake reflected, glanced upwards, composed herself and confidently responded: ‘I work with people who are not me.’

I have frequently returned to her response over the course of my examinations of participatory art because I feel it reveals a central (and often misunderstood) truth about such work: when artists engage with the public, they do so with *others* – others who hold different perspectives, have different passions, and follow different politics.

As a result, the public with whom such artists work cannot be considered homogenous. The ‘public’ is not a collective, coherent group, but rather an intersecting, shifting, and slippery mass. In *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002) Warner suggests that there are always multiple public*s* at play in any social context, and that these cannot be organised by an external force, such as the state, an institution, or even an artist. Publics are “self-creating and self-organised, and herein lies [their] power, as well as [their] elusive strangeness” (2002, p. 414). Even when publics are self-organising – for example, around a shared politic, passion or issue – there will inevitably be differences of gender, race, class, age, identity, or any marker of difference that underpins the reality that other people ‘are not me.’ Fundamentally, any collection of people (a ‘community’) will contain conflicting interests, with individuals having access to different resources that constrict or enhance their ability to act. The social domain is always one of an interplay of power.

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It is therefore ironic that all participatory art practices (despite a diversity of forms and outputs) appear to have a central tenet of 'social benefit.' Consider artists such as HomeBaked, whose work aims to address issues of inadequate housing in the face of gentrification in Anfield, Liverpool; or Jeremy Deller's work that draws attention to problematic Conservative policies; or the Gentle/Radical Collective that aims to create social change in Wales from "spaces of equity and solidarity" (Gentle/Radical Collective, n.d.). Across the spectrum, it is clear that art within the public domain aims to 'do good' and make the world a better place.

But can art make the world 'better'? And – perhaps more critically – who decides upon the criteria for 'better' within a pluralistic, social domain? My grandmother's idea of a 'better' society is different from mine, but should my utopian dream overwrite hers? The unerasable truth of a public's political multiplicity raises questions about art that sets out to 'do good.' Is it actually being used as a form of manipulation? Does it just recapitulate the artist's own political values and ideals? In the case of public funding, is it being positioned as a cheaper (and lesser) form of social work which aims to construct a citizen "amenable to the state"? (Vickery, 2007). Or – if such work is being funded by private monies – are rich individuals or corporations using art to steer and control the public? What artistic acts in the public domain are the 'right actions?' If the public democratic realm – as Bishop paraphrased Laclau and Mouffe – "is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased" (Bishop, 2005, p. 33) and "conflict, division, and instability, then, do not ruin the democratic public sphere; they are conditions of its existence" (Deutsche, 1996, p. 295). How do artists working with communities ensure that works are reflective of this 'conflict, division, and instability' that is a hallmark of 'publicness,' as Warner suggests? This confluence of social interactions, power, and politics demands that we pay close attention to our ethical duties and responsibilities when making art in the public domain.

This anthology does not attempt to provide a 'correct' answer to this. After all, ethics are context dependent: Donald Trump and Greta Thunberg will both have an answer in regard to whether something is 'ethical' or not, but it probably won't be the same answer (Figure 0.1).

As such, this book does not aim to suggest 'right' actions; nor is it an expert philosophical text about ethics and art – philosophical authors like Theodor Adorno, or contemporary academics such Berys Gaut and Karen Gover are better placed to cover these subjects. Rather, this book aims to use the concerns of 'ethics' as a way to "think through" (Sullivan, 2013) the issues of power and publics at play when art occurs in social contexts.

In order to examine the discourse, it is useful to consider a typology of participatory practices. As above, this is not proposed as the 'correct' or only way to do this practice, but as a helpful way to consider how this practice might occur, and therefore to illustrate some of the ethical complexities which might arise. I have explored this in depth elsewhere – for a more comprehensive framing, see *The Failure of Participation: The Demos is in the*

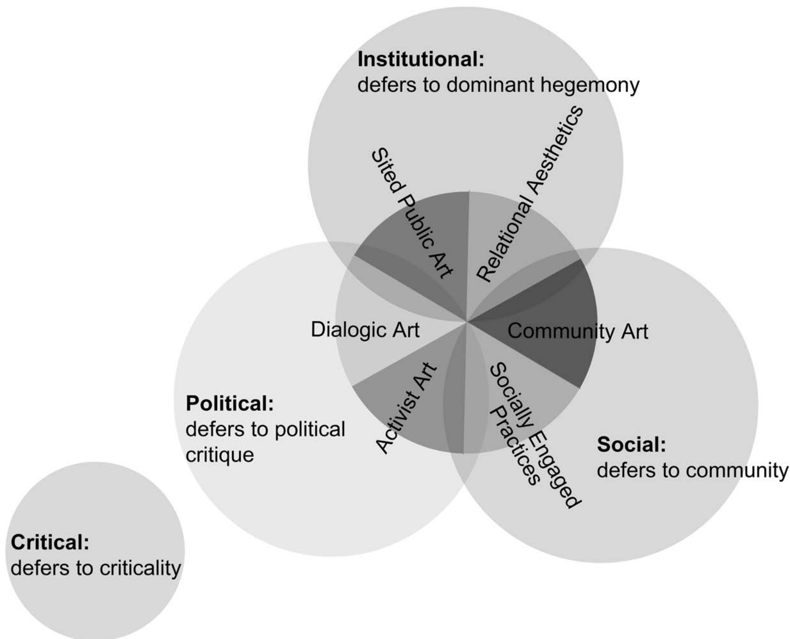

FIGURE 0.1 Diagram of the intersections of the domains of participatory art practices. Copyright: Anthony Schrag, 2023

Detail (Schrag, 2023b). Broadly paraphrasing this text, I suggest there are seven types of participatory art organised into three main domains.

First, there is the 'Social' domain where the primary attention of the work is focused on the improvement of social groups and communities. It includes practices that have been named:

1. Community Arts (CA): an approach where artists work with communities perceived as being in a disadvantaged condition (poverty, refugee status, etc.), and seek "to empower though participatory creative practice" (Bishop, 2012, p. 177). The work usually results in community-constructed objects – i.e., murals or mosaics. In this work, the community itself is the focus, and the quality of the art produced is secondary to the expressive and political nature of the process: the artist is the facilitator to the community's creative output.
2. Socially Engaged Practice (SEP): similarly concerned with 'social betterment' of a community, but appears less concerned with direct community engagement or overt political action. Instead, this work is committed to social change via consciousness-raising activities where the 'art' becomes a mechanism to reflect on political and social processes. The authorship of the artist over the project is accepted, and the community is framed as a collaborator.

Second, there is the 'Institutional' domain, where existing institutional structures (such as a gallery or the state) give authority to the works. Such works have been referred to as:

3 Relational Aesthetics (RA): coined by Nicholas Bourriaud (2006), this work is situated within conceptual and physical structures of the institutional art world. Like Dialogic Art (DA) below, this work seeks new, more social ways of engaging with publics, but unlike DA they are almost always within institutional frameworks – i.e. within galleries, museums, or biennials – and squarely authored by the artist, with the community framed as participant-audiences. In other words, the work invites people into the art world, as opposed to seeking out a demos on their own terrain.
4 Sited Public Art (SPA): These are works that are funded or approved by larger institutions such as the state or corporations and sited in publicly accessible zones. They have varying degrees of dialogue with the communities in which they are sited and authorship is always the artist's, but could not occur without support of a governing body, who provide permission.[1]

Third, there is the 'Political' domain, which is concerned with challenging political structures, and often features work called:

5 Activist Art (AA): Strongly aligned with leftist politics and dedicated to the emancipation of participants and the liberation of the society via a critique of oppressive (Capitalist and Neoliberal) regimes. The 'art' is involved in direct social change and regime critique, and serves that purpose, above all else. Its primary concern appears to be focused on direct intervention into power structures via events, creative protests, posters, graffiti, publications, etc.
6 Dialogic Art (DA): Conceptualised by Grant Kester, this work prioritises conversation and exchange, and configures the public not as an 'audience' but rather as an egalitarian co-author. The 'art' is in service of dialogue and discussion on topics that are important to their lives, including community politics. It is distinct from SEP in that it blurs authorial roles between the artist and participant and is distinct from CAM in that it does not ideologically reject the artworld. Indeed, Dialogical Artist "operates 'between' discourses (art and activism, for example) and between institutions (the gallery and the community centre or the housing block)" (Kester, 2000).

Lastly, an approach that aims to problematise the very function of participatory arts itself, and could occur in any of the three domains, or utilise any of the approaches above:

7 Critical Approaches (CA): These works promote a 'pro-social conflict'[2] within a demo and aim to unravel the obscured power structures of the

social and political domain. Artistic authorship is paramount, and this work sustains tensions and discomfort rather than seeking to ameliorate, educate, or declare political intentions.

Considering the above structures, concerns around ethics naturally emerge. Is it correct that specific political ideologies are being thrust into communities within Activist Art approaches? Should a state or gallery decide 'what is right' for their communities under the Institutional domain? Is it permissible for an artist to interject or enhance social conflict via a Critical Approach? Fundamentally, these are questions of 'applied' or normative ethics, where questions about what agents acting within participatory practices are obligated or permitted to do (or not permitted to do) within a specific domain. And, importantly, what gives the active agent such a right? In other words: what are the ethical results of artistic action when working with communities?

We might similarly be able to identify frameworks that justify certain acts: for example, within the 'social' domain, utilitarianism could be said to describe the work, in that the aim is to ensure the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number of people. Within the 'political' domain, one might see a Common Good ethical approach that views the actions of the artist as contributing to an 'ethical communal life,' emphasising respect and compassion. Or, equally taking a Feminist approach, which aims to emphasise the experiences of women and other marginalised groups when considering artistic actions. Conversely, many works within the Critical Approaches might at first appear to adopt an Egoist approach that centralises self-interest and proposes that a good society is one in which we all are singularly and individually content. Indeed, there are a multitude of lenses through which we could view and examine the ethical actions in the above works – environmental ethics, virtue ethics, duty-based ethics, capitalist ethics, or even nihilistic ethics, are all ways in which we might justify actions as well as assess or determine a moral course of action.

Again, it is not the goal of the following chapters to provide the correct response: the aim is rather to present case studies and contexts that can interrogate the complexities when an individual artist, or a collective, acts within a socially plural context. What are the ethical choices artists are making, and do they align with the groups of people with whom they work? Do such choices require consensus? Does participatory art allow dissent? Do artists think about their ethical approaches? Does it matter?

Notes

1 A more comprehensive definition is available in Cartiere, Shirley and Willis (2008).

2 A term coined in 2013 by South London Gallery's Francis Williams and Jack James in reference to my own work.