Fostering Honesty, Disruption and Exploration: Starting points

Jasmina Ibrahimovic and Carole Kane
April 2021

The memo is a written conversation between Jasmina Ibrahimovic and Carole Kane who work in different ways within the context of community art. They each begin by introducing themselves and the context of their work.

Carole (C): I live and work with communities and contexts in Northern Ireland (NI) where there are many social, historical and cultural challenges. I come to this work as an Expressive Arts (EXA) facilitator and peacebuilder and have a specific interest in using the arts in situations of conflict transformation. Although originally trained as a weaver, in the early days of my practice, I intuitively used community arts facilitation approaches to help bring calm to a traumatised community following the worst single atrocity of the "Troubles". I later discovered that these approaches existed within the theories of EXA. In some ways, this experience continues to influence my practice and EXA now allows me to use a range of modalities within group contexts to consider themes such as identity, dealing with the past, or how to imagine a future.

Some of the challenges relate to a contentious and traumatic past while others reflect changes associated with Brexit, conversations around the potential of a border poll, that NI is no longer part of Europe while the South of Ireland is and there is fragility within the union of the United Kingdom. This is certainly a time for creative interventions to re/shape identity and build peace.

J: The hypothesis of this memo is that in community arts processes and products, a unique (aesthetic?) space is facilitated by the artist in which honesty, disruption and exploration are fostered. We will share our initial thoughts about the relationship between honesty, disruption, exploration, the role of the artist/facilitator and the aesthetic space for their practice. But first I will explain a bit about the perspective that I derive from.
What is community arts in my understanding? Community arts differs from autonomous art because of the reciprocal and intensive relationship between the artist and the community with which and within which he / she works. An (often) professionally trained artist works with people who normally do not practice art. The work often starts from their needs and from their personal stories to arrive at an artistic form together, along with the artist. The participants involved often come from marginalised communities and / or consist of people who have opposite ideologies or opinions. Community arts is a worldwide movement of artists and organisations who work with diverse communities in different contexts, driven by different (political or social) reasons, and from different (cultural) traditions. Reciprocal and equal relationships between all those involved are central to this. Given the diversity of community arts practices and traditions, it is necessary - when talking about community arts or wanting to analyse it - to clarify the perspective from which one starts. When it comes to analysing the relationship between art and its place in society I (consciously and unconsciously) depart from European art history, philosophy and criticism. Within this tradition art and honesty, exploration and disruption have a very long history together (from Plato's mimesis to Rancière's aesthetic regime (Rancière, 2013) and Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002)). Art in European society has always been a way to make sense of the world but also to 'reveal' a truth or communicate a pure or honest message, or to disrupt the status quo and free people from living an untruthful life (Avant Garde and neo Avant Garde). A central question that creates a division in perspectives within this discourse is the question of the role of the artist within this relationship between art and society. Is the artist the individual 'genius' and producer of art and is the society

merely a consumer of it? Or is the artist the facilitator of an aesthetic process, creating a context in which others can explore, create, imagine and discover? In community arts the role of the artist is the latter, and his or her genius is not in producing an art object but in creating an aesthetic space, asking an aesthetic question, building trust and relationships with and amongst communities.

C: I share your understanding of community arts. Not least, that these diverse contexts offer a breadth of different approaches and therefore a necessary flexible frame for groups of people in different contexts as they make art.

A reoccurring question in my work considers the role of the facilitating artist, their alongsidedness with others in the community art space and how the artmaking process can lead to transformation. This seems relevant in this context and we are likely to touch on this in our conversation.

Francois Matarasso, (2019) is a key influencer of community arts in the United Kingdom and Europe. He defines community art as,

> …the creation of art as a human right, by professional and non-professional artists, co-operating as equals, for purposes and to standards that set together, and whose processes, products and outcomes cannot be known in advance (p.63).

Although community arts were pioneered in the 1960's and 1970's by a group of young artists, internal and external pressures on community art in the 1980s, enabled the characteristics of participatory art to emerge. There have been changes in the practice of community art since then, but Matarasso describes this practice as *theoretically coherent, artistically innovative, and socially powerful. It can be a joy to do, and art thrives when it gives pleasure*.

Matarasso (2019) states that a key difference between community and participatory art is that community art has *sharper, more demanding ambitions, based on ideas about art, society and human rights* (p. 65). There is intension of creating actual, authentic artmaking based on the grounds and aspirations determined by those involved in the making process. This is essential to community art and this also sets it apart from alternative examples of social action such as community development and education. He also states that community art engages professional and non-professional artists, and we look at this later in the memo.

Another perspective is presented by Paolo Knill, one of the founders of the EXA theory that strongly influences my practice and contribution to this memo. He refers to community arts as a strange concept because *art cannot be thought of without communities* (2011, p.54), This engagement around the art practice is core to EXA, where exploration, witnessing or "call and response" are fundamental in the artmaking practice.

Referring to community art in relation to conflict transformation or rehabilitation after catastrophic events, Knill, (2011) says: *this kind of community art has as its objective to strengthen the resilience of the community to establish and regain well-being* (p.54).

Similarly, these core values open many opportunities for individuals and communities to share story, make sense of their cultures and lived experiences. To do this effectively, we extend to include imagination and play, bringing a sense of ease which makes space for honesty to exist.

J: I think the aspect of creating *space* is an important one to keep in mind throughout the memo. Is *fostering something* is a synonym for *creating space*? The aesthetic space that the community artists facilitate has a typical set of codes and agreements that allow honesty, exploration and even disruption to happen. What are those codes and agreements? And why are they typical for an aesthetic space or community arts?

C: Aspects of these definitions are worthy of further enquiry, but before we do that, let's consider the core elements of the memo- *honesty, disruption, and exploration* within this context of community arts. This memo serves as an entry point to these concepts based on our narrow

perspectives which are far from conclusive, so we can also keep in mind points for further consideration.

1. The relationship between honesty, disruption and exploration

J: For some time, I struggled with the combination of honesty, disruption and exploration in this memo. What do these three have to do with each other and especially does combining these three words into the same memo already contain an implicit assumption about what we understand by art and by the role of the artist? I therefore thought it necessary to make this assumption explicit. The words take on a meaning of their own when we consider them within the European avant garde discourse in which art since the 20th century has assumed an increasingly political position in society and set itself the task of disrupting and shocking society and its people to 'wake up' from a 'lie' they lived in. Appreciating art because it 'disrupts' something or someone or questions the status quo in particular is a neo-Avant-garde perspective on the role of art. The question is whether disruption is always seen as a quality within the worldwide community arts. Disruption is a loaded concept also because within the neo-avant-garde tradition it places the artist *above* the community as the objective "genius". It implies the artist's role as an objective outsider; a person that stands above the community. It is precisely this 'higher' role of the artists and arts that is questioned in community arts, which is all about relationships and interdependence between the artists and community and in which the artists always need to be aware of his/her own position and role. In fact, the work of James Thompson et al., (2009) performance of war, among others, show how dangerous it can be if the artist is insufficiently aware of his or her role in a conflict. In practice I also see this in the work of, among others, Russian community artists, or within the Israel-Palestine context in which it is not desirable to create "disruption", but rather a softer invitation to empathy or honesty.

C: This is an interesting theoretical perspective of disruption within community arts. There are a couple of main points that I'd like to respond to.

Let's look at your struggle with the title, and your question about whether the disruption is always seen as a quality with the worldwide community arts?

In conversation about this memo, James Thompson made a couple of important points. First, he invited us to flip the words to the opposite meanings. Rather then *honesty, disruption and exploration*, consider *dishonesty, comfort and settling*.

Picking up on your point about the Avant-garde understanding of disruption within the arts, where there is, for example, disruption or an anger created between actors and the audience. Thompson suggests that the context that we are referring to, that of community arts in peacebuilding and war zones, needs a counter-approach because there already is enough of unhealthy disruption. This perspective supports a different approach: one that leaves behind contention and conflict and seeks to bring comfort through the practice.

This lies closely to the EXA principles of not replicating or working against disruption but rather de-center or escape from it, to use our imaginations and make arts. The artist, or art itself doesn't need to be a disruptive role. The context may be disruptive but what matters is that we find a process to engage and build on that. We create clear structures for people to feel safe and play and from here, they experience transformation and find comfort and as I quoted Knill, (2011)above, *strengthen the resilience of the community to establish and regain well-being* (p.54).

Thompson also referred to "exploring and settling". Stepping aside from the colonisation metaphor that may be linked to these terms, he explained that in it's most simplistic, when we explore, we leave something behind in order to discover something new. A disruptive context may bring discomfort, however it may also create opportunities. Again, this is another key aspect within my practice: using the arts within the rites of passage that assist changes to take place and lead into a new sense of safety.

I'll explain some more about this. The core of the EXA theory and practice is to bring ease to dis-ease through artmaking processes. If those involved, or their context has been disrupted, chaotic, out of control or unpredictable, then the energy of the circumstance can be "circled round" into the artmaking. Speaking in a recent on-line Poiesis Symposium V conversation (by the European Graduate School) about finding ways beyond the upheaval of Covid-19, Stephen Levine described EXA as *a place to start…to find beauty, tap into resources, capacities and dreams as we transcend difficulties and find new ways of being.*

The work always starts with the individual or group. As a facilitator, I help them explore potential goals through artmaking, and we work in a solution orientated manner. Considering this exploration, I quote Paolo Knill again who said, *not only does the work affect us emotionally, it also has the capacity to change our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.* The exploration in the artmaking helps to make sense of the situation and it becomes a personal or collective resource. The work is not drawn back by the past, rather it pulls into the future.

J: John Paul Lederach in conversation with Cynthia:
aesthetic forms and processes engage us emotionally, spiritually and through our senses, as well as cognitively. It is partly because of this embodiment, a defining feature of the engagement with the arts, that the feelings, beliefs, sensibilities and truths (?) that are under the surface can be 'unveiled', reached and worked with. Truth is inseparable from perspective.

C: In another conversation, John Paul also defined "aesthetic".
From the Greek origins, means to be sharp in the senses, decisiveness pricking up so that all senses come alive- powerful in deep harm/woundedness.
In the artmaking process, "aesthetics" is key to approaching honesty, disruption, and exploration. Other key concepts linked to aesthetics that the facilitating artists need to be aware of are presence and aesthetic responsibility. Presence or attention links with alongsidedness and attention to what is happening or emerging in the artmaking process. Levine describes aesthetic responsibility in relation to the role of the facilitator,
    …is to hold aesthetic responsibility for the session, intervening when necessary in order to augment the client's effective reality and helping the client to understand his or her experience through an aesthetic analysis of both the process and the work. (Knill et al., 2005,p.12)

So, for example, in an initial phase of a creative response to the bomb in Omagh in 1998, I worked with 150+ children and adults and we made paper from the flowers that were left in the streets by the compassionate community. An important part of this process involved making pieces of hand-made paper. The "awakening" or sharpening of the senses, stirred an internal resonance, and reconnected people with a sense of experience that had been frozen due to the shock, grief and coming to terms with the horrific event. My role as facilitating artist was to stand alongside the community, lead them into the exploration of their artmaking process that allowed space for emergent artwork that could still hold possibility for beauty. Anticipating an element of awakening or connection to take place, it was also my aesthetic responsibility to welcome or point it out when it happened - the invitation to empathy and honesty. This enlivened the artist/practitioners and they left the workshop spaces saying that they "could feel again". They re-connected with self and each

other. This community arts/ EXA interaction became a very necessary rehumanising, life-giving experience. They created beauty, participated in a constructive act in the face of severe destruction (Kane, 1999). **Appendix 1**

The last point here, is that EXA facilitators work alongside and at eye-level with participants. This calls for transparency and as you say, "a softer invitation to empathy or honesty". From here, trust is built, and by working together, the participant(s) and EXA facilitator co-operate within the process leading to find possibilities of what to do next. These new resources, allow participants to gain confidence, tap into their capabilities and find ways beyond their disturbances.

J: I very much like how you describe the aesthetics of this process. The senses being awakened by the act of creating something with your hands. Honesty within community arts is not only telling the truth, but also being given the opportunity to create an honest art product with your senses. I think we tend to overlook the honesty of the senses that community arts is also fostering. I myself tend to look for honesty only in words or attitude. But there are so many other ways of being honest or dishonest. How I enter the room? Do I feel safe enough to relax and be myself, whatever that may be. I think honestly being engaged with the project, the people and the situation is a key aspect of community arts. Grant Kester, (2013), in his book *Conversation Pieces,* has given a lot of examples of community arts projects in which participants are invited to 'take off their daily coat', meaning the role that they have in their daily lives and society and enter the space as 'naked' as possible (as a matter of speech).

C: It is interesting that Grant Kester uses the phrase "take off their daily coat". In describing people arriving at the workshop/creative space", I often say "it is as if people hang up their questions with their coats". They set aside queries or barriers like garments, step into a (workshop) space and risk the vulnerability of being present in what can be an unusual environment. This seems a significant part of the process, especially if we are inviting them into a journey of exploration or as Knill describes, *alternative worlding.* I relate to what Kester says. This is also not dissimilar to how it must feel when we ask people into a peacebuilding context.

2. The relationship between honesty, truth and art.

J: As I mentioned above, since Plato there has been a relationship between European art philosophy and truth. From Plato's imitation (mimicking reality as closely as possible) through Aritotle's representation to Kant's aesthetics, Ranciere's aesthetic regime (Rancière, 2013) and Bourriaud's relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002). In whatever period of history, European art has always been appreciated for its veracity. However, the search for that truth was first in imitating reality as closely as possible, and since the avant garde in wanting to reveal invisible systems in our society and question the status quo. Even when we make a community theater performance nowadays, every maker is looking for some form of honesty. In community arts, the search for truth has taken a different turn as it recognises that "the truth" does not exist but rather a multitude of perspectives, but also that representing someone's truth or 'the truth' is very precarious and should not be done without considering who is presenting what and who and to whom.

Often when thinking about "honesty" I confused the words honesty and truth. There is an important difference between the two. I wondered exactly what that was and how the two are related in community arts. Honesty is a personal thing, while truth is often associated with facts, but also with being right. The urge to be right or to win an argument, is often tempered in community arts. It is about the multitude of voices, about giving space to personal truths. I believe that that encourages honesty. After all, in art something else is addressed than just reason; an intuitive, sensitive form of listening, of empathy.

C: I agree and on the reverse of that, often see occasions where honesty can get in the way of truth. This can be seen in the context of honesty, truth and peacebuilding.

The concept of truth can narrow towards finding a specific result particularly in the context of finding closure, therefore ruling out the options of unexpected insights or a wider truth that might link to honesty. If the truth is outside of us, it involves a different kind of energy to pursue it. If honesty is primarily personal, then its exploration is more intimate and can take bravery to confront.

Absence of truth moves us into a liminal space, a kind of "stop frame" in the live(s) of the pursuer. This leads to dis-ease. Community arts can release us within this place, to awaken life, even without truth.

I agree that truth can be considered from different perspectives. In preparing this memo, I found two examples of narratives which speak to this and explain truth through roleplay. One, by Jack Saul and the other by John Paul Lederach,

In a case study called: "Theatre of Witness: Constructing Meaning After Tragedy", Jack Saul (2014) describes a narrative told by a man called Earnest Castillo. Here, he describes, *And The Truth was beautiful and strong and everyone loved The Truth* (Saul, 2014, p.134).

John Paul Lederach (2014) shares a dialogue between Truth, Mercy, Justice and Peace (from Psalm 85). Here, Truth describes herself,

> *I am like light that is cast so all may see. In times of conflict, I want to bring forward what really happened, putting it out in the open. Not the watered-down version. Not a trial recounting. My handmaidens are transparency, honesty, and clarity. I am set apart from my three colleagues here (p.134).*

John Paul continues in this dialogue with Truth. He explains his curiosity- in his experience of conflict, voices from a range of perspectives, each say that Truth is with them. Yet in centre of pain, Truth *seems to come and go*. Later in the dialogue, Mercy points out Truth as perfect- *She knows that her light can bring clarity, but too often it blinds and burns* (Lederach, 2014, p.87) Justice describes her as the one who sheds her light to expose the paths of wrongdoing, while Peace helps to clear the space for Truth to be heard. The dialogue concludes as Truth, Mercy, Justice and Peace all circle together in a place called "Reconciliation".

Finding meaning or honesty happens through an aesthetic and creative process of making and moulding: "Poesis" is a Greek word that is core within the EXA practice. It means moulding and reshaping. *Poiesis is the act of responding to what is given, imagining its possibilities and reshaping it in accordance with what is emerging* (Knill et al., 2005, p.71) This process allows people to find life within this liminal space (also described by Victor Turner (n.d.). Engaging the senses and cognitive resources helps us to be honest, temporarily lay down the challenging questions and come to terms with the truth. If truth relates to finding answers, I suggest that honesty is closely linked to transformation.
See Appendix 2
Considering Matarasso's comment above of how art is joy, I am curious about the possibilities of the artmaking process revealing truth or fiction and is there a perception that if a process is more enjoyable or fun, that it is less important or inconsequential?

J: I think that 'fun' or 'joy' is something typical for community arts and that there is indeed a perception that critical art can't be celebratory. Art and conflict or theatre and conflict seem very depended on each other. In community arts processes art can go without conflict or sometimes it even wants to avoid conflict. A colleague practitioner and scholar from Australia, Tania Canas, has written about the factor of 'joy' within the context of our international community arts festival: "Joy. Happiness. Suspicious words, or so I came to think, especially in community arts practice. Celebratory creative practices and moments were to be mistrusted. It might sound counterintuitive and counterproductive to some practitioners, however one quickly learns that a big warning sign of unethical processes imposed upon subjugated communities are those that pathologically seek the construction of the 'happy factor'. This often leads to work that is depoliticised, individualised and consumable. […] ICAF turned out to be an urgent reminder of what I'd forgotten: that joy can be found within politicised moments; a compelling reminder that joy did not have to be at the expense of critical, intellectual and theoretical work. ICAF was a space in which joy was not only relevant, but necessary within practice. Furthermore, there was an unexpected lightness that came from a joy driven by a collective sense of social responsibility and reciprocity.[…] I refuse to ever forget again, that there is joy in politicised struggle, happiness does not deter from the core, and celebration can be revolutionary (ICAF, 2018).

When we play and use our imaginations, we are relaxed, open to what might come up for us, might arrive, explore alternative possibilities. We are more likely to be honest with ourselves and others.

3. The relationship between 'artist' and 'participant' or 'Community'

J: Who is the artist in community arts?
"The community artist has the task of creating the right context within which an aesthetic dialogue can arise," writes Grant H. Kester in his book Conversation Pieces. "While autonomy in avant-garde art is essential for the aesthetic experience, in dialogical art the artist is more of a "context provider" than a "content provider", says Kester (Kester, 2013).
The dialogical artists define their artistry by their ability to create understanding between different people and mediate exchange, and by their talent to maintain a continuous process of empathetic insight and critical analysis. In summary, it can therefore be said that the most important task of the dialogical artist is; creating a creative space in which aesthetic dialogue can take place, and listening to the participants, whereby the artist is just as open to their ideas and experiences as the other way around. It is not only the artist who has something to teach the participants, but vice versa. Within that space there is equality between speakers, one can take off his or her daily coat of responsibilities and at that moment be who he / she wants to be, and not a representative of a particular party or group. By telling your own story to someone else, you are forced to systematically shape the story and empathise with the listener, which can lead to self-reflection. At the same time, the listener takes into account the background and history of the speaker and is open to new insights that he gains as a result of listening. Because we listen to each other, we see that identity is not universal, but that everyone's identity is subject to certain experiences, context and knowledge. As Nancy puts it; we feel a connection with each other because of our lack of fixed identity. When we come to that realisation, we will be more open to other people's thinking and identity and we will be more critical of ourselves and more open to the world. Poesies
C: This concept of a shared experience between the professional/facilitating/community artist and participant/"artist" echoes what you said in the introduction. Also, Francois Matarasso explains that *anyone creating art is an artist in that act, whether or not they do it professionally...* He later says that

the professional and non-professional artist must be co-operating as equals. They *negotiate, agree and share what will happen* as they *work for purposes and standards that they set together*.

While I agree that the dialogue is shared between professional and untrained "artists", in EXA this dialogue includes what happens in the actual artmaking process as a third critical voice. Knill (2012) explains what is to be noticed in the art process: *"…there are two things: there is the thing as it reveals itself and the thing as I respond to the revealing of itself"* (p.16). What is the artwork telling us as it comes into being? How does the facilitating artist and "artist" listen, respond, and help the artwork into being?

The process is resource orientated- the resources being the people involved as well as the art technique and the materials. For example, in music, dance and poetry, we find rhythm and structure in which to move and respond. Similarly, for other skills such as painting, pottery, the materials or mix of colours can determine the outcome of the work. The repetitive "practice" of these skills, together with extending the play range, and the use of imagination, helps as the professional artist work alongside the group. When they move or disrupt the frame for a further participation, this makes space for further curiosity.

The facilitator helps them step back from the artwork for an aesthetic analysis. This opens space for surprise, the "Ah-ha", excitement or as we said earlier, enjoyment and fun. The facilitator and artists avoid interpreting the work in this approach but ask questions to enable the "artist" to consider the process, how it felt and what can be learnt from this phenomenological experience. This can be an empowering discovery for both the professional artist and the "artist" as it reveals resources which can help enhance resilience and confidence.

J: Kester speaks about "dialogical aesthetics" in his book Conversation Pieces. Dialogical aesthetics means that the aesthetic experience is localised in the communication that takes place while viewing or making the (art) work and not in the art object itself. In order to do that, according to Kester, two shifts in thinking must take place: First, we need a more nuanced understanding of "a communicative experience", and second, the art object must be separated from the aesthetic experience. That is to say, aesthetic experience is not tied to an object or a form.

C: Throughout this process, the "artists" work in *low skill/ high sensitivity* (Knill et al., 2005, p.98) while the professional facilitating artists work in *high skill/ high sensitivity.* They have an aesthetic responsibility as they anticipate what goes on in the artmaking process and help the "artists" to bring the work forward.

The shared experience of creative dialogue through exploration, and witnessing the new piece of artwork emerge, form the dynamic of community art engagement. By honouring the making process, the quality of the artmaking is not hampered and still leads to quality outcomes.

J: In addition, it is important to critically question the role of the artist as a facilitator of the aesthetic space. Sheila Preston, (2016) writes in her book Facilitation about the role of the facilitator and calls for a critical or conscious approach:

> *Animating a group process can be about encouraging groups to have courage; to be bold; to be safe; and to give spirit to a process. This is not an argument for facilitators needing a big ego or having a high-status personality, rather the focus is on how the personal and inter-personal attributes of a facilitator have an important bearing on the group environment. There are plenty of examples of charismatic figures who over-perform high status leadership of groups but who can miss the point entirely because the motive for facilitation is not the leader but the needs of the group. The role of the facilitator is derived from a conscious social performance that in some ways amplifies and accentuates certain personal traits. There are skills and techniques that add to these qualities, but what often shines through is a facilitator's willingness to bring their own identity into the process, not just a professional 'facilitator' identity, but one that is reflective of their own approach, style and humanity. The emphasis in this chapter is on the how rather*

than the what. The potential of 'good' facilitation resides in two domains of interpersonal practice: the ability for a facilitator to draw on a social and aesthetic instinct within the practice.

The social instinct of the facilitator incorporates different aspects of social engagement and awareness. An experienced facilitator, it could be argued, is someone who can pick up, identify and work with all the various complexities that exist in a group in a way that is respectful, flexible and structured. For example, being able to set up contracts with a group, ensuring all group members feel involved in the process, managing the space, moderating exercises to suit the size of the group, active listening, building trust and being able to ally fears and anxieties, taking risks, establishing rapport and empathy, sorting out logistics, and negotiating group norms etc. The aesthetic instinct is related to the ability to identify and introduce appropriate creative and imaginative propositions into a group process. Aesthetic work might include role-plays, multi-arts, process drama, forum theatre, clowning, devising theatre based on real life stories, comedy, poetry, puppetry, or mask work (or countless other forms and styles).

*What makes applied theatre work so fascinating is the way it can incorporate the full scope of drama practices and ideas, adapting them to suit the needs and interests of a participant group. Intrinsic to applied theatre is the tenet of active participation and ownership in cultural production. The aesthetic instinct in a facilitator is about fostering the imagination of participants, not just in encouraging wild fictions but drawing on existing experiences and combining these with new perspectives or different ways of expression. (*Preston, 2016, pp.2-3)

C: The "aesthetic instinct" is key to successful facilitation. Every group is different to the last, so there needs to be fresh orientation for the facilitator to create the right environment where they and the "artists" feel safe in an aesthetic space. This is similar to what John Paul Lederach (2005) describes in the context of peacebuilding as "web-watching" (p.106). Building trust within a group enables honesty, exploration, risk and even if there is some disruption through a creative process, the safety holds the frame and can harness a focus to find some level of stability again. There should always be the intension to work in the context of "do no harm" and this is particularly important when working with groups who are sharing life stories that are witnessed by others. Just as the facilitator opens the sessions, they need to safely close them too. This is important as further disruption extends discomfort, confusion and a longer sense of ambiguity which unhelpful. All of this is within the facilitator's responsibility.

Just before I close this theme, I'd like to make another brief point. Co-creating art with a community group is not the same as making art about the community, or for them. No matter how skilled or well-meaning the professional artist is. This is not the same as community art.

J: I totally agree and think that it is necessary to point out that the art of community arts lies mostly in the process of creating art together with a community. Therefore, when evaluating and analysing community arts the definition of art must be examined and questioned.

Conclusion

This has been a rich conversation between Jasmina and me: so much so, that when we got together, we had to rein it in from running in multiple interesting directions. To conclude, I explain a few

intersections of key themes of honesty, exploration, and disruption in the context of community arts. I also end with some of the different directions of thought that could have been developed if there had been more time and resources.

Initially, we touched on the diversity and possible perceptions of community arts. We shared a common sense of what the facilitator artist is in the different contexts of our practices. The similarities and nuances of different practices made this a valuable and worthy conversation.

In the introduction, the relationship between honesty, disruption and exploration seemed like an unlikely triplet but as we continued, and with the inclusion of James Thompson's comments, we clarified that disruption, in the context of peacebuilding, needs a different frame than often used within the arts and that there is a role for the practice to settle, or bring ease rather than further upset.

We used the terms in the title to help explain the role of the facilitating artist and how the artmaking process can lead to transformation. The facilitator artist sets the scene by being transparent, empathetic, and honest in the earlier stages of this process. We felt that honesty touches everyone in the group on a personal level, so therefore, the aesthetics- the stirring of the senses, play a critical role to find resonance in this context and is a significant part of this memo.

If the community artist is in any sense a "genus", it is not in their abilities for art making. Their strength, however, should be evident in how they come alongside the group, hold a safe and appropriate space that incubates an aesthetic process for them to explore, question, shape and of course- create art. This requires *high skill and high sensitivity* from the facilitator. At the very least, the "artists" within a group discover more about themselves and their world and this makes the process very worthwhile.

The dynamic of community art engagement lies between the role of the facilitator/artist, "artists" from the community and what goes on in the artmaking. One influences the other. Terms like aesthetic instinct, aesthetic responsibility, poesies all point towards the aesthetic space created by the facilitator and the attention of the community. Do no harm is critical in this space particularly in the use of storytelling.

As stated, the conversation originally branched beyond these key themes and if time allowed, this could suggest further themes for consideration and exploration.

J: From what I see in community arts literature and practice worldwide, a quality such as "honesty" is valued in several traditions as a quality of art and community arts. If we had more time for this research, we would therefore argue to consider the aspect of "honesty" and perhaps exploration separately from disruption.

Truth sits alongside honesty and it's counterpart is lies. This is also relevant in the context of storytelling. Truth links with the context of the arts and peacebuilding: this would be interesting to explore further, possibly in connection with closure. The area between facts, testimony or fiction is quite different to imagination. How might this influence the wider discussion?

Participatory art could also be considered as bringing social change beyond that of community art. Further consideration could be given to consider what it means and how it could be implemented in this context.

We also have not considered the role of an audience in the context of community arts: not that they are the purpose of this process, but their dynamic in witnessing the artwork cannot be completely ignored.

We touched in community arts engaging with fun, enjoyment and play and this not belittling the work within a group. This could worth further consideration, as this kind of work may be of particular value for our world as we move beyond the pandemic and other desperate circumstances.

APPENDICIES:

Appendix 1: Petals of Hope (1999)

I initiated, facilitated a significant, community art creative response to the Real IRA bomb in Omagh in 1998 that killed 29 people and unborn twins. In total, interaction spanned 20years with key phases in 1998, 2014 & 2018. This was significant because it was the single worst atrocity of the Troubles, the local community impacted by the bomb made the artwork and it was the only longitudinal community art response that occurred in reaction to one incident during these decades of violent incidents.

Phase 1/ 1998: Cross-community engagement of 150+ people created *Petals of Hope*: a collection of pictures made from hand-made paper, from the flowers left in the streets by compassionate on-lookers in the immediate aftermath of the bomb. Over 150 children, young people and adults were involved in making the pictures which formed an exhibition. The pictures were eventually given to each of the bereaved families and to Omagh, Buncranna and Madrid- the three places that lost members of their community. The experience and images of the art pieces were presented in a publication/book of same name in 1999. This work features as a case study in the book: *The Moral Imagination- the Art & Soul of Peacebuilding* by John Paul Lederach.

Phase 2/ 2014: *Remembering: Petals of Hope.* Worked with 35+ people from original group. Developed a follow-up collection of written and digital narratives reflecting on the initial creative response. Publication and digital resources of conversations and interaction were also produced.

Phase 3/ 2018: *Seeds of Hope-Remembering Forward.* A final set of workshops with 150+ people, many were the second generation of the original group. They created artwork and Haiku's that were exhibited and distributed before and during a ceremony to mark the 20th anniversary.

Appendix 2: NIET TUCHTEN (DO NOT TURN), Rotterdam Community Theater

In our online youth performance Niet Tuchten and the discussions with young people about it, I see that we try to reward honesty, even if this is in contrast with our norms and values. In the performance we follow the story of 8 boys, which is told by 1 narrator. At the end of the performance, the main character / narrator decides to commit murder to regain respect for his mother who has been ridiculed by the person that he shot. For most people/adults, disrespecting someone's mother is far from a good reason to shoot someone. But for young people who find themselves in a masculine street culture in the poorer suburbs of Rotterdam, losing respect sometimes means death. This is a form of survival. "If you don't shoot, the other will shoot" we hear often. During follow-up discussions and workshops in response to this performance, we always try to allow openness to the reasoning of these young people who don't normally tell how they really feel in other places (like schools or work) because they know people will judge them for their opinions. Yet, in the streets they have to survive with different sets of values than the ones that are 'normal' in society. Often young people we speak to understand the murder that the character in the performance commits and say they would do the same in his situation. For us - and the teacher in question - it is important in such a case not to react negatively to the perspective of the young people (which they would otherwise never talk about in class), but we try to understand where it comes from, reflect with them on the choice and navigate to alternative responses. The fact that we do not want to change the young people at that time also gives openness to tell the story.

Practical example 2: Disturbing the Peace, Combatance for Peace
The Palestinian-Israeli collective Combatance for Peace (CfP) made a documentary about their work in which a number of people from their collective were followed by a camera crew. This resulted in a beautiful documentary called Disturbing the Peace (it's on Netflix). When a festival or organization wants to screen the documentary, CfP provides an extensive manual in which they explain that the documentary did not search for 'the truth', but for personal stories and perspectives, which are all in their own context true. Especially in a complex conflict such as that of Israel-Palestine, it is important for them to emphasize that this community arts project wants to start a peaceful dialogue mainly from respect for everyone's pain and perspective. The fact that their goal is not to tell "the truth", but rather to share "honesty" and personal perspective is unique to this project.

Practical example 3: Story Circles from Roadside Theater / Appalshop
Story circle method is a fairly simple method for listening to stories. Many community arts companies in the US (like Appalshop and Cornerstone Theater) work at the start of their creative process with story circles that allow them to hear the stories of the community in as open a way as possible and set the code for participants to listen to each other. Becca Finney of Appalshop told me that the story circle should be called a *listening* circle because it is mainly about hearing stories without there being a competitive element and without having to strive to find "the truth". Everyone's story is equally true. In the story circle, a group of people sit together in a circle. The facilitator first asks them "what is a story"? The group uses keywords to indicate what they mean by a "story". That then will be the starting point for the form of the stories in the circle. Then the facilitator asks the question: "tell a story about ..." The prompt can be anything and as broad or narrow as the facilitator wants. You can ask about someone's best day in the past month, or about a time when someone felt misunderstood. Then everyone tells their short story per person in a few minutes. The others don't respond to that. And if you don't have a story to tell, you can pass, and the turn goes to the person next to you. After some time, the facilitator starts a cross-conversation about stories, again without responding to a specific story of person, but by using key words to describe what elements of stories or words you remember or that have struck you. In its simplicity, this method is very effective for fostering honesty because everyone's perspective is heard and allowed to be there.

Author Biographies

Jasmina Ibrahimovic (1984) is a Bosnian-Dutch theater director, dramaturge and teacher in the field of community arts. At the age of ten she came to Holland as a war refugee from former Yugoslavia. In 2010 she obtained her Masters in Contemporary Theater and Dance Studies at Utrecht University. She previously worked as a practice researcher at Community Arts Lab XL (CAL-XL) and was involved in Domain for Art Criticism in the workgroup 'the quality of community arts'. She also worked as advisor theater, amateur art and community arts at the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts (AFK). She is currently the CEO of Rotterdams Wijktheater (Rotterdam Community Theatre) and programmer of the International Community Arts Festival (ICAF) in Rotterdam. She regularly gives lectures and workshops to art schools in the Netherlands. Since mid 2016 she has been a board member of the oldest community theatre group in the Netherlands; Stut Theater, and of one of the most renowned side specific theatre groups; PeerGroup. Jasmina is a member of IMPACT Leadership Circle.

Carole Kane is a textile and multi-disciplinary artist, expressive arts facilitator and peacebuilder who is particularly interested in using arts processes towards conflict transformation and away from dis-ease. She has worked extensively in community art and education, mostly in Northern Ireland, for 25+ years. This work has included all kinds of people such as women's/ men's groups, Travellers, ex-prisoners, youth/older people academics, in a wide range of environments across health, community and voluntary sector. An example of significant experience was a longitudinal creative response that took place over 20 years in Omagh, following the bomb in the town in 1998, which killed 29 people plus unborn twins and was the single worst atrocity of the Troubles. Carole initiated and facilitated a community art project to make hand-made paper pictures from the flowers left on the streets by the wider compassionate community. She returned for another two phases later in this period. In total, this process engaged hundreds of people and she has been recorded the process in two publications. In addition to her Degree in Constructed Textiles (Hons), Carole's qualifications include education, management practice and her Masters is in Expressive Arts in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding (cited Honours for practice) from the European Graduate School, Switzerland, 2017. Her thesis title, " In a traumatised community, does the art-making process and alongsidedness lead to transformation? If so, how?" Carole continues to seek opportunities for further work within these themes.

References

Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational aesthetics*. Les Presses du Réel.

ICAF. (2018). *Locating Risk in the Right Place: A Conversation with James Thompson*. ICAF.

Kane, C. (1999). *Petals of Hope* [Community art project].

Kester, G. H. (2013). *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (First Edition, Updated Edition with a New Preface). University of California Press.

Knill, P. J. (2011). Communal Art-making and Conflict Transformation. In E. G. Levine & S. K. Levine (Eds.), *Art in Action: Expressive Arts Therapy and Social Change* (1st edition). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Knill, P. J. (2012). 'Longing for Beauty and the Work. *Poiesis: A Journal of the Arts and Communication.*, *14*. https://doi.org/10.7939/R3GF0MW4Q

Knill, P. J., Levine, E. G., & Levine, S. K. (2005). *Principles and practice of expressive arts therapy: Toward a therapeutic aesthetics*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford University Press.

Lederach, J. P. (2014). *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians* (Revised ed. edition). Herald Press.

Matarasso, F. (2019). *A Restless Art: How participants won and why it matters*. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. https://cep.be.uw.edu/studentprojects/makes-art-honest/

Preston, S. (2016). *Applied Theatre: Facilitation: Pedagogies, Practices, Resilience* (1st edition). Methuen Drama.

Rancière, J. (2013). *The politics of aesthetics*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Saul, J. (2014). *Collective trauma, collective healing: Promoting community resilience in the aftermath of disaster* (1. ed). Routledge.

Thompson, J., Balfour, M., & Hughes, J. (2009). *Performance in place of war*. Seagull Books Pvt Ltd.

Turner, V. (n.d.). *Liminal to Liminoid, in Play Flow, and Ritual: An essay in Comparative Symbology*. Rice University.