Organizing for Arts-Based Social Action in the Helping Professions

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ABSTRACT

The authors identify three kinds of organizations for linking arts, social action, and the provision of helping to people who are marginalized or who experience oppression within dominant cultures. Those organizations involve the development of artists who often possess marginalized status, those that link the arts and social action, particularly for protest, and ones producing innovations in social arrangements, helping processes, and/or group support. What they hold in common is the incorporation of the arts to advance the human spirit in the face of societal oppression. For each kind of organization, the authors offer distinctive ways of viewing their cultures that integrate the arts and social action, especially through the production and communication of dissent at individual, group, and/or community levels. The authors highlight how the organizations can reflect counter movements within society in which the arts amplify voice and agency of organizational members who may work in concert to deploy the arts as a tool of social action. Through the incorporation of the arts to represent utopian or dystopian conditions, the organizations can challenge society with ways of embracing human differences, particularly by offering aesthetic visions of human vitality, demonstrating alternative cultures of social support, building prototypes of social innovation, and nurturing the human spirit of people whom mainstream society can degrade through neglect or even abuse.

There are several principal ways of organizing arts-based social action in the helping professions. These professions involve teaching, counseling, social work, and psychology, as well as professions more commonly aligned with health, such as nursing. Those practicing in the helping professions may see the arts as contributing to therapeutic intervention in which people coping with various issues–like mental health concerns–become involved in the arts for resolving those issues. For some helping professionals, the arts serve therapeutic ends. Through their work to identify relevant contexts joining the arts and the helping professions, the authors broaden arts-based helping in addressing how people experience social issues as well as the toll social issues can take on human development and human functioning.

This paper draws from the authors' experiences with organizations with which they have provided technical assistance, consultation, or within which they have undertaken evaluation or research. These include organizations 1) in which people develop themselves as artists, 2) that link arts and social action, and 3) that blend art and the design of helping interventions. The terms "helping" or "human service professional" can refer to a range of professions that facilitate psychological change (Gregoire, 2015), help clients in difficult life situations (Hladik, 2014), nurture growth, or address problems related to emotional, physical, psychological, cognitive, or spiritual well-being.

Gregoire (2015) proposed that the helping professions consider reflection and theory as indispensable to practice, and he explored how helping professionals transition from conceptual theoretical thinking to thinking in the present moment in interaction with individuals and groups. Artists, attentive to their process (Richardson & Walker, 2011), may foster such transitions from theory to practice in collaboration with helping professionals. Like helping, artmaking is a process of becoming (Sanders-Bustle, 2014). Artists and helping professionals working collaboratively can bring different groups together to interact in pursuit of creative action and foster qualities that are related to health: social relationships, adaptation, a sense of personal and social identity, human worth, communication, decision making, celebration, and responsibility (Lawton, 2010; Lowe, 2001; Newman, Curtis, & Stephens, 2003). That both artists and helping professions share such processes and ends makes them amenable to integration in which new synergies can promote creative action.

Helping people to bring about the support they need to understand the negative consequences of social issues can build their awareness of how those consequences affect their lives. Thus, within such professions, strategies of helping can be diverse, involving clinical intervention, group work to support people, and social action to address inequalities and inequities, which are common products of oppressive structures.

The arts can synergize with such strategies and result in different helping forms ranging from art therapy (Kaplan, 2007), studio practice in which participants engage in art making (Allen, 1995) – particularly in group contexts (Timm-Bottos, 2011) – and performance art that is geared to protest and dissent (O'Rourke, 2007). Echoing Congdon's (2011) introduction to a journal devoted to alternative art education in which she wrote, "what often makes out-of-school

education so powerful is the opportunity to invent, play, and bring together ideas in new and different ways" (p. 259), combining the arts and helping can foster new and different ideas. The authors invoke social innovation as a product of creative engagement in which participants originate new ways of offering mutual support to address how they experience social issues, particularly their negative consequences. The authors focus on social action since the literature on clinical and therapeutic approaches is well developed.

The Arts and the Helping Professions

Increasingly, the arts can contribute to social action in which people who bear the negative effects of social issues use the arts for creative expression of how they experience those issues. The practice of art making can foster personal development, an outcome that takes on importance when society closes other opportunities.

The creative process of art making may be itself transformative for people when social forces challenge coping, resulting in marginalization. This transformation can influence how people come to think of their lives, and thus create identities that strengthen their own sense of self agency. Such a creative process likely takes place in various settings organized to increase access to the arts that members of marginalized groups may not readily have, such as social programs, artist collectives, or studios nested within larger educational organizations or health and human service agencies. These entities, whether formal organizations or informal gatherings of artists and helping professionals, can involve developing artists, linking the arts and social action in which creative expression is used as a means of organizing to support dissent, and positioning the arts to advance the design of new ways of offering assistance and social support.

The arts and the instruction, education, and experience they offer can form novel structures, engaging people with considerable differences in self-expression, experience, and competency levels in opportunities for self-expression they would otherwise not have. That the arts are morphing in contemporary society so they can offer different ways of stimulating self-expression and representation is a testimony to their flexibility as a form of individual or group expression. Naïve, Brute, and Vernacular types of art reveal how the arts themselves can engage outsiders, individuals, and groups with particular experiences and diverse ways of representing such experience, as well as those with

different levels of preparation, whether through formal training in the arts or self-instruction.

The authors remain mindful of the greater social issues driving creative engagement and representation among the people who join collectively, especially in organizations, to engage in arts production. Addressing such issues through the arts can be reflexive in that members of such organizations may come to better define their social action, which is informed by the representations they offer. Perhaps the power of the arts resides in how particular expression can build a grand narrative supporting social action. Arts-informed narrative can be a powerful way of framing social action and championing perspectives on the resolution of the issues animating such action.

Synergies of the Arts and the Helping Professions for the Purposes of Social Innovation

Addressing social issues through the arts to bring about social innovation can empower both practitioners and those who seek help or provide it themselves as peers. Innovation itself can be a product of artful creativity that can stimulate reflection through creative processes and engagement. Organizing for social action can motivate collective action in which participants come together for the purposes of imagining, conceiving of, and framing novel or original ways of addressing human needs. Organizations themselves can serve as lenses to focus the efforts of multiple actors who collaborate on innovative ideas, shape those ideas, and demonstrate new ways of supporting people who are facing challenges emanating from social issues largely not of their own making.

This cognitive, emotional, and social focusing is influential since people who come together in group structures for the purposes of creative engagement begin the process of informing one another about possibilities for social change (Johnson, 2010). That group life is critical to social innovation is an observation emerging across technological forms in business, information science, education, and medical care (Bennis, 1997; Boggs, 2012). Human beings have evolved to live, perceive, and engage collectively (Dissanayake, 2000). Collective action implicates the importance of small scale social interaction to the realization of innovative forms, such as creating social support among people who experience isolation, fostering creative engagement to stimulate critical reflection, illuminating the lived experience of those who struggle with social issues, or engaging

in economic opportunity (Mlodinow, 2015).

Ultimately, innovation can serve as a pathway of dissent in which people with novel ideas come to criticize existing arrangements and even enact alternative ones (Brown, 2009). Dissenters likely loosen their bonds with prevailing conceptions held by the mainstream of a domain or society. By loosening their bonds with prevailing conceptions, dissenters are likely marginalized since those who innovate often occupy the edges of a community.

The arts reflect a way of loosening bonds with prevailing conceptions of what is right or normative within a given society. The arts implicate representation and interpretation and can allow the free play of the psyche in service to creative self-expression. The arts can serve as a creative resource in a given society, and creative individuals using the arts can come to question existing social arrangements. Novel and original thinking can emerge in such contexts, which can inform social research and development in service to advancing innovation in social arrangements.

Helping professionals have traditionally assisted individuals, while giving less attention to environments unsupportive of health and well-being. Because whole groups of people and communities— i.e., refugees, those who are different emotionally, cognitively or behaviorally, as well as others—likely experience a collective trauma of poverty, unemployment, crime, and pollution, collaborations between artists and professional helpers can nurture creative, collective action toward an imagined better future. This collective trauma can create very real personal consequences; people may experience a sense of betrayal by the greater society as they cope with the absence of the essential resources of daily existence, as well as the amenities people require to prosper. Such deprivation can result in poor housing or the absence of housing, social distress, unemployment, lack of income, and poor nutrition, each of which compromises health and well-being and reduces quality of life.

A synergy of the arts and helping can address two factors that often interact to reduce quality of life. The helping professions can assist people to deal with the deprivation they experience, evident in limited access to material resources, and the arts can assist people to express and communicate to others the inequalities and inequities they experience on individual and group levels. Such synergies can augment mutual support among people who experience social isolation, evoke emotions that inequality and inequity produce,

and strengthen group life from which social action can emerge. It is unsurprising, therefore, to find the arts synergizing with helping processes as central features of social movements and social action.

Organizations Integrating the Arts and Social Action

Three Types of Arts-Based Organizations that Incorporate Helping

The three types of arts-based organizations the authors offer in this paper are products of the authors' experiences with such organizations in which they have provided technical assistance, consultation, or within which they have undertaken evaluation or research. The term organization is used broadly to refer to 1) organizations in which people develop themselves as artists (e.g., an art-centered school and a prison), 2) organizations involving arts and social action (e.g., to promote understanding of social issues such as AIDS, homelessness, and other social issues expressed by graffiti and guerilla artists), and 3) organizations involving arts to design more human-centered or culturally informed products and helping innovations.

Through the collaborative engagement of artists and helping professionals, the authors have garnered insights into why these three entities exist, how helping and mutual support interact with the arts, and what distinctive contributions the arts can make to advance human development, particularly of those individuals and groups who may have limited opportunities to achieve well-being because of marginalization and deprivation. Artists and helping professionals working together in community contexts can consider these three kinds of organizations as they seek to form partnerships and collaborative arrangements between the arts and the helping professions. In all three, the consilience of the arts and the helping professions can be central in assisting people to address the consequences of the social issues they face in their daily lives and across the life course.

Organizations Devoted to the Development of Artists

What is salient in this kind of organization is its effort to bring the arts to populations that may not have access to the arts in their daily lives. One purpose of this kind of organization is to assist people in discovering themselves as artists. These are not efforts to provide art

therapy, although the engagement of people in the arts can produce positive cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or social benefits. What is distinctive about such organizations is how they create access to the resources people require to advance themselves as practicing artists, particularly as outsiders. In the helping professions, there is little literature on this kind of organization, although the forms reflecting it are readily observable in communities and in the home pages of arts organizations.

One such organization in Oklahoma assists girls to develop themselves as artists through the availability of arts education, access to practicing artists who work with the girls in studio settings, mentoring by practicing artists, education of girls in the business of the arts, and engagement in the arts as community service. The girls do not enter the organization for the purposes of either correcting their behavior or in addressing problematic situations, like poor academic performance. Initially they may not come primarily to become artists but they do practice as artists, thanks to the engaging faculty and exciting projects. The first author's experience captures this kind of organizational purpose:

> The girls come from many different backgrounds, but their families are coping with the issues one can observe today in the media: undocumented status of parents, incarceration of loved ones, their own cultural identities coming from the migrant experience, and their commitment to two nationalities often involving Mexican and American. They come to the school to work on creativity through structured opportunities to express themselves as well as free form self-expression. As I peruse the exhibit of their block prints, I become mindful of each girl as an artist even though they may not see it quite that way. What is interesting is that the school itself serves as a protective environment in which the girls can express themselves as they wish. In addition to the arts the school addresses other needs—affirmation, personal development, discipline, literacy, and socialization. The girls also benefit from the nutrition supplement the school offers often times disguised as snacks. (D. Moxley, field notes, January 30, 2016)

Although in this instance the girls this arts-based organization assists possess minority status, since many of the girls come from Spanish-

speaking households whose families live below the poverty line, they come to the school for four principal reasons. First, they enlist in the school because they want to enhance their education through their involvement in productive activity, principally the arts. Second, the girls become involved in this organization because they can learn about the world of the arts and, even at a relatively young age, they can develop themselves individually as practicing artists. They have opportunities for developing portfolios, critiquing the work of other students, and receiving critical evaluative feedback from art instructors, practicing artists, and their peers. Third, through such an organization, they can learn about the business of arts. Through preparation for exhibits, interactions with patrons, and preparation of their work for display and subsequent sale, they can gain considerable skill as arts entrepreneurs. And fourth, arts education and artist development can foster the girls' creative capacities transferable to other areas of their lives.

Indeed, people coping with degraded situations, social oppression, or societal neglect may already possess considerable capacity for creative engagement in their daily lives since creative competence can result from a person's coping with adversity. Involvement in supportive and developmental contexts can build on people's existing creative capacities. Furthermore, this organization addresses a growing social issue: the withdrawal of schools from active provision of art education in the curriculum. Given the importance of the arts in facilitating personal expression, fostering creativity, and stimulating productive activities, numerous efforts in the human services are emerging to facilitate the artistic development of people who reflect considerable diversity in physical, linguistic, emotional, or cognitive characteristics (Moxley, 2013).

The arts are also emerging in jails or prisons in which environmental deprivation and degradation are prevalent. They are also found relevant by people making life transitions, such as those leaving the military and entering civilian life. People in such situations likely possess particular perspectives that can fuel their creative development as artists who are working to create their own styles, methods of arts production, and stances on social issues through which they can express the issues they face. Here is one self-reflection by the first author:

> I am showing this piece by an unknown artist to a group of graduate students in social work. I marvel at how the artist assembled the materials he needed

to make art while in a jail cell. He pounded coffee grounds into useable paint. He had a pencil to sketch a design on a piece of board he was able to loosen from the wall of the jail cell. I heard that he went on to become an artist in an organization that supports the development of artists who do not have formal training. I prize the piece I have in my possession. A graduate student asks, "Is he an artist?" I think to myself—he is, a powerful example of an outsider artist. (D. Moxley, field notes, March, 10, 2017)

Arts organizations dedicated to developing artists can synergize with what the helping professions can offer. Human service professionals can help emerging artists address other issues in their lives, such as access to benefits, stable housing, access to mental or behavioral health care, and social interaction, particularly through group work. Involvement in the arts can help people build new identities; the alignment of the helping professions with such organizations may illuminate other forms of help necessary for quality of life. Such help can involve supporting participants in strengthening their vocational identities, fostering their involvement in other vocational development opportunities, and expanding their career or educational development. Another reflection by the first author:

The arts venue nested with an organization serving the homeless stands as a powerful example of how even modest opportunities can stimulate vocational development. Here is a man who has taken his own art work and developed it as a means of livelihood. He now has a home because his art work produces the income he needs to live modestly with a roof over his head. (D. Moxley, field notes, October 31, 2015)

Organizations Devoted to the Arts and Social Action

The principal purpose of arts devoted to social action is not therapeutic; the purpose is found in dissent. Dissent can produce vital information for a society that can counter negative stereotypes held by the majoritarian members of a society (Sunstein, 2003). This kind of organization is distinctive because participants use the arts to advance their own perspective about social issues and societal responses to their situations. This organizational type is described through a range of examples encompassing the art of people who live with AIDS, those who are homeless, and graffiti and guerilla artists

whose art may provoke the understanding of others.

The involvement of so-called outsiders in the process of making and producing art makes this organization distinctive not only in the art world, but also in the world of social action. The other may actually be an outsider—one who faces devaluation within the greater society. Societies often treat their outsiders as deviant—as people who are unworthy of inclusion in the greater society.

So, the idea of outsider art fits well into this kind of organizational form. The aesthetic of this kind of organization may counter the aesthetic found acceptable or even preferable within the greater society. The counter aesthetic may reveal other forms of beauty, or the aesthetic that artists who are social activists embrace can be a degraded one evident in artistic representations of abuse, neglect, torture, deprivation, denial, or exclusion. By joining the arts and social action, the forms populating this organization can engage (or confront, even remotely or tangentially) the representatives or officials of mainstream culture in coming to understand not only what it means to be the other, but also how societally enforced expectations can transform the other into an outsider. The outsider may be a soul in extremis—one deprived of the essential requirements of daily life (Moxley & Washington, 2016).

The arts can form such an aesthetic to challenge inequities (Moxley, 2014). The first author reflects on words as art in social action:

Who produced this photograph of graffiti declaring that the United States keep its "hands off Central America"? The graffiti is splattered across a weathered embankment of a freeway bridge hidden from commuters who are passing quickly on the road above. I understand that there is an organization supporting such artists but they encourage them to make portraits and not graffiti. I think about the artist and the organization. The latter does not flinch from encouraging its members to express themselves through the arts, which in this case is graffiti. I think this is a way to exercise one's free speech, something that is diminished these days, particularly given the criminalization of graffiti as vandalism. I would guess that the organization talks about the use of the arts as self-expression, voice, witness, and ultimately self-agency. Is this true? Mark this as a follow up. (D.

Moxley, field notes, May, 21, 2008)

The aesthetic of this organization may be jarring, eliciting intense negative emotions in observers or visitors. It can challenge accepted views of reality, and literally push interpretations and meanings that challenge the status quo. The artists populating this kind of organization may be angry and disrespectful, using art to communicate contempt for current arrangements that endorse privilege for some at the expense of others. The organization brings arts into action within the worlds of everyday life, or pushes alternative interpretations of the world of inequity into the worlds of the privileged. The arts become the vehicle for social action and can involve confrontation as an aim of artful engagement.

What sets this kind of organization apart from the previous category is that artists focus their artistic criticism on the greater society and its representatives. Unlike the girls' art school that seeks to prepare girls for elevated stations in society, this kind of organization may confront injustice directly through protest strategies, for example, mindful that such action can produce negative consequences for the organization and for the artists who are involved in such protest. The community (such as an affluent neighborhood) or an institution (such as a city hall) becomes a veritable stage. Performance is central to a group's communication of dissent. They move beyond mere education or awareness building to evoke discomfort among an audience or a potential audience. Perhaps the purpose of the arts here is to invoke this discomfort.

The art itself brings into question social arrangements, and may even indict those arrangements in the name of achieving a better or more just society.

> I [the first author] am viewing a piece of art produced by an artist dying of AIDS. His pieces are part of a solo exhibition in which the young artist had arranged photographs of his own decline into poor health and ultimately into death. But it is more than this. The ways the photographs are organized, their subtle content, and the subject matter reveal societal neglect of this issue and the people who experienced it. How someone can decline in the face of societal scorn shows the kind of pain healthy or disease free people would want to avoid. The photographs are not of the sacred but of the despoiled, something the

artist is conscious of. I find tears roiling up in my eyes. The presentation is disquieting. And, I am not alone. Others are coping with a personal upheaval because of the evocative nature of the art. What is gained here? Sympathetic regard. Empathy. A feeling of gratitude that the disease is not mine (D. Moxley, field notes, September 11, 1990).

In one project, the authors and their colleagues assisted formerly homeless women to create conceptual portraits of their movement into, though, and out of homelessness. The lyrics, art work, photographic images, narratives, and experiences the women shared with multiple audiences through exhibits stationed in public locations heightened despair among those visitors who were themselves vulnerable to the forces creating homelessness. Those who were privileged in their social status and resource availability came to see how society itself could create homelessness. How? The women's artistic portrayals revealed how social forces like marital disruption, loss of jobs, and lack of benefits preparing women of color for a decent retirement could conspire to push them into poverty and then into homelessness. Homelessness is a disease of poverty; the portraits each woman prepared showed in graphic ways the nature of such a social disease. Over three replications of the exhibit, most visitors could come to see how homelessness was a product of society and not the result of human failure or incompetence. The women's stories as embodied in multiple forms of artwork were the principal ways the artists sought to influence the critical awareness of those in attendance at the exhibits. (Moxley, Washington, & Feen-Calligan, 2008)

Clinically trained helping professionals may be uncomfortable with artistic creation for social action and the intentional production of conflict or infliction of negative emotion. Indeed, some art work may produce the experience of shame in viewers or of vulnerability to the very issue the artists interpret through their work. This infliction of intentional emotional harm, or the "jarring" of those who view art through the portrayal of a negative aesthetic, can create ethical concerns about the purpose of art and the purpose of representation a particular art work can embody. Such emotional arousal may indeed inflict discomfort in viewers, or even heighten emotional catharsis, such as tearful interactions of patrons or viewers, with those artists who have experienced considerable injustice. The consequences may, however, be quite positive: people leave an exhibit or an encounter with artists with new insight and new knowledge about how marginalization itself can serve as a form of injustice.

Helping professionals coming from community development traditions may see this kind of organization as a means for advancing an agenda of societal change. The art itself can be disruptive of the comfort of privileged groups and bring into question the legitimacy of societal structures. In this synergy of art and human service practice, artists are not clients nor even recipients. Nor are they objects of therapy or counseling. In partnership with artists, helping professionals are co-creators of dissent, and it is the production of dissent that can animate social change through the arts. The ultimate intent is the production of information for societies marginalizing others, especially through isolation. Art as information, the basis of dissent, can influence how others act on policy in society, producing new narratives that could potentially counter injustice.

Organizations Devoted to the Arts and the Design of Helping

This kind of organization brings together helping professionals, activists, and those who experience a serious social issue first hand to co-produce social technologies for addressing the causes and consequences of a given social issue. Often this kind of organization can be highly participatory, urging members of diverse stakeholder groups who share a common concern to address a social issue through innovation. This kind of organization incorporates the arts as a way of tapping into participants' creativity, experiences, or aspirations in forming a vision from the values they wish to realize through intervention design involving the creation of new forms of helping, perhaps even arts-based ones. The organization may convene people, practitioners, and activists who can bring multiple aesthetics to intervention design involving knowledge of what could be (i.e., a prescriptive aesthetic), an alternative aesthetic (i.e., the counter aesthetic), or the representation of the degraded (i.e., the negative aesthetic).

The participatory features of such an organization can facilitate the emergence of mutual understanding even in the face of diverse or even divisive ways of thinking about a social issue and the action needed to address it (Spaniol, 2005). This kind of organization offers the possibilities for the emergence of a new aesthetic capturing the critical narratives various participants offer (Berger, 1997). For helping professionals, such critical perspectives hold implications for translating narratives into an intervention aesthetic guiding the new helping or social action form (Moxley, 2014).

Such an organization embraces a particular kind of aesthetics Parsons and Carlson (2012) call functional beauty, what Saito (2007) calls every day aesthetics, or what the authors identify as intervention aesthetics. Achieving such an aesthetic in reality is challenging, but helping professionals do so when they coalesce approachability and access with the power of intervention to bring about those outcomes that counter the causes and consequences of the social issues people experience. Within industrial or craft traditions of design, the sublime the object provokes may be an integral part of its functionality as an ordinary object, something craftspeople often strive to achieve (Yanagi, 1972), and that can form a paradox when the sublime and the mundane are joined. Intervention design as a discipline prioritizes the achievement of functional beauty through the consilience of art and helping.

Likely underappreciated in human service practice research since Thomas (1984) proposed design and development as a viable pathway for intervention research, the authors have observed numerous human service organizations that partner with academic institutions and recipients and their advocates to advance their social intervention technologies. The authors have observed three forms within this category. *Intervention design labs*, steeped in participatory values, use various social methodologies like search conferences to discover ways of offering assistance, particularly in addressing social issues once seen as intractable, like homelessness.

The *design studio*, yet another form within this category, incorporates the arts as a way of appreciating the current state of affairs of helping within a domain. It fosters self-expression among participants, and offers artful ways of capturing aspirations that project participants can bring into new realms of the possible. Although the previous form capitalizes on the idea of the laboratory as a place of conceptualization and demonstration, the studio engages participants in creative expression through the arts, culminating with design incorporating functional beauty (Schon, 1986).

A third variant of this organization involves participants in harnessing the power of the arts to represent, portray, and interpret human experience. For many research projects, the arts can serve as a *vehicle of knowledge dissemination*. Artists can interpret research data through creative ways, amplifying technical features through creative expression and even personalizing research data by showing how social issues affect their lives as they experience a social issue directly. The use of displays, multi-media events, simulations, and exhibits or demonstrations can literally bring lessons learned,

research or evaluative findings, or new experiences alive to those who otherwise would not find attractive such traditional approaches to dissemination like lectures, training, publications, or formal reports.

All three variants emphasize creative engagement in problem domains that participants select because breakthrough thinking and related action are needed to bring about social betterment. These variants likely embrace or complement diverse approaches to the evaluation of the object, typically to achieve four intervention design objectives in which arts-based methods may prove strategic. Arts-based inquiry:

1. Can be useful in helping intervention designers to better understand context in which the envisioned design must perform;
2. Serves as a means to develop or otherwise shape what could be a novel intervention using trial use or testing as a way of refining the helping process;
3. Proves useful in assessing both the intended and/or unintended outcomes a design produces;
4. Influences the subsequent diffusion and adoption of what emerges from the design laboratory or studio as an innovation in helping or social action in a particular domain.

Conclusion

The arts support the involvement of people in externalizing the oppression they experience, portraying or documenting the causes or consequences of oppression they are facing. Artists use representation of social issues to communicate what they find disturbing or enlightening. The pursuit of meaning can move participants from representation of ideas or concepts to actual acts of prototyping involving the production of a microcosm of social or cultural support they see as relevant to addressing the oppression they or their peers face in the real world. Artists can shape prototypes using story boards, visual representation inherent in paintings, sculpture, or actual three dimensional models of helping processes captured in a form of architectural rendering.

Social action can be broadly based, reflect coalition building, and foster or support new ways of undertaking portrayals of what people face, including deprivation or oppression. Activists may incubate new forms of governance, group support, alternative institutions, and peer helping resources emanating from art forms that themselves may influence the prototyping of new cultural forms. In the history of human services, such activism has been so strong it has resulted in the formation of helping processes that mainstream professions co-opted for their own purposes.

Social research and development extends from ideas or concepts emerging from how people frame their existence and the challenges they face. Framing can influence prototyping, reflecting innovations in social action. Prototyping itself can take root in innovative organizations, and they can occur in studios or workshops harnessing the arts not only as a way of stirring self-expression, but also in supporting group formation in which the arts serve as a principal source of collective expression and interpersonal bonding. The design studio is especially relevant here since it fosters creative engagement of participants in addressing the social issues influencing their lives and in formulating potential creative designs to combat those issues. By creating alternative prototypes supporting novel options that could materially and substantively improve the quality of life people experience, the arts can bond with the aim of social betterment.

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