

Innovating Art Outreach

by Hannah Hull

In this essay I will propose the innovation of art outreach, based on my own practice-based research and the definitions of Argyris and Schön in *Theory in Practice*, and Spinoza, Flores and Drefus in *Disclosing New Worlds*.

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Introduction

Art Outreach can be seen as already innovative in terms of the coordination of practices found within the cross-appropriation model as defined in *Disclosing New Worlds*. Outreach appropriates art practice because it finds this practice useful in realising its own objectives:

“We call this bringing of practices into contexts that could not have generated them, but in which they are useful, cross-appropriation.”¹

However, I will show how the current art model used produces only a short-term manifestation of outreach aims, and how this cross-appropriation is poorly integrated, compromising both art and outreach values.

I will propose a recoordination of these practices that will make this cross-appropriation more innovative and extend outreach values. I will go on to suggest that this reordinated model effectively expands the capacity of art outreach by becoming a platform that produces new innovators.

I will then explain how outreach values are implicit to art, and demonstrate how a reprioritisation of art and outreach values within art outreach can unlock the full rehabilitative and socially inclusive aims of both art and outreach.

1- Page 4: *Disclosing New Worlds: Entrepreneurship, Democratic Action, and the Cultivation of Solidarity*, by Charles Spinoza, Fernando Flores and Hubert L. Drefus. (1997). USA: MIT Press.

My Background

The knowledge and experience that informs this essay stems from:

My own Art Outreach projects and practice-based research. These are informed by my training in public events, project management, marketing, workshops and fundraising, which I undertook at CIDA (Cultural Industries Development Agency), and by my experience running cultural cohesion and inclusion projects - such as festivals, events and workshops - for a number of third sector and creative organisations. Arts Outreach projects I have developed include:

- Open Gallery – A 10-week conceptual art programme for the Open Book, engaging vulnerable adults in Higher Education.
- ReFRAMED - A dialogue between self-taught artists from vulnerable adult backgrounds and trained artists practising within a contemporary critical framework, resulting in an exhibition of collaborative and new work.
- Stories from Hounslow – An experimental 12-week programme of art, sound and movement for 'at risk' 16-24 year-olds.
- ART vs REHAB - A seminar to explore and provoke new relationships between art and mental health, with a broad range of professionals working within arts outreach.
- Art Tutor for Escape Artists – Developing an accredited conceptual art programme for prisoners with mental health issues.
- ART vs OUTREACH Focus Group – Four conceptual artists who work in mental health were invited to explore the relationship between their personal and outreach art practices.
- My Trauma Training, body-psychotherapy training on managing the traumatised without discussing personal issues.

My dissertation entitled **Socially Engaged Practice: Towards a Shared Language**, which explores various sub-practices within art, design, social care, politics and architecture with comparable social aims, and the potential for enhancing the effect of these practices through uniting currently independent discourses.

My dissertation entitled **Lost in Translation: Percent for Art**, tracing Public Art Policy back to the Artist Placement Group, who instigated open brief projects that explored many roles for the artist in society, providing unpredictable but retrospectively analysable social benefit. The dissertation formed a proposal for maintaining artistic autonomy in the public realm.

My own art practice which is public, temporary, site-specific and socially-engaged, and BA in Fine Art (and Contemporary Critical Studies) from Goldsmiths, University of London. In addition, my training in traditional craft, via a BTEC and an apprenticeship, which provides me with an understanding of the value and meaning of engaging in traditional practices.

My experience as a collaborative researcher and consultant on a range of arts partnership projects, including:

- ReVisioning Utopia, an international charrette for artists and architects to revision the possibilities of regeneration processes. Held by Art Gene, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria.
- The Aspire Trust: Evaluation of Merseyside Youth Association's Gun and Knife Crime School Prevention Project, North Liverpool, with emphasis on the effective use of creative practice within the scheme.
- Change Schools Programme, Wade Deacon School, Merseyside. Working with a team of academics to research, analyse and streamline notions of creative practice encountered throughout the education system.
- The Bluecoat / Find Your Talent: Mapping the relationship between young people and the creative industries in Merseyside. Including Creative Partnerships, artist residencies in schools, artist-teacher schemes and the Diplomas. Concluding with recommendations on effective practice, further research and resource-sharing to ensure the future of partnership work in the area.

Contemporary Art Outreach

Arts outreach extends to music and drama, but I will be specifically talking about *art* outreach. Many points will be transferable to arts outreach in general, and representatives of the spectrum of rehabilitative arts projects have been present throughout my research. The term art outreach can be used fairly broadly, but here it is used to mean art making projects for adults undergoing rehabilitation.

The intention of art outreach is to provide some form of rehabilitation through art, for target groups including prisoners or ex-offenders, homeless or ex-homeless, recovering addicts, those with mental health issues, or those deemed at risk of becoming any of these. Generally accepted notions found within art outreach are: art is therapeutic for target groups; being part of an art workshop has a socialising effect; exhibiting art gives a sense of achievement; seeing art made by target groups promotes social inclusion; buying art made by this group is charitable and demonstrates social awareness.

The current model for art outreach is workshop series' delivered in hostels, prisons, care homes, adult education centres, galleries, arts centres or target group specific studios and workshops.

The art model used tends to be traditional. By this I mean with the notion that the route into art practice is through a specific medium (painting, sculpture, drawing, mosaics, collage, photography), object-based, and designed for gallery exhibition (i.e. wall based or plinth based).

Rarely is video, installation, temporal or multi-media work promoted; nor non-object based work (such as performance, dialogical art, social sculpture or interventionist art); nor non-gallery based work (public, social or site- or situation- specific); nor is the notion of using media addressed in a conceptual manner, with forms of abstraction that could be regarded as conceptual being generally treated as expressive.

Usually artwork produced is exhibited at the end of a project, or at regular intervals for ongoing projects. This exhibition may be held in a gallery as part of their own outreach policy, or a space owned by one of the project's commercial associates as part of their charitable profile.

The need for a recoordination of practices: How the current use of art practices is compromising outreach aims

The way the art model is currently coordinated in relation to the rehabilitation model can be seen as compromising outreach aims by causing the following problems:

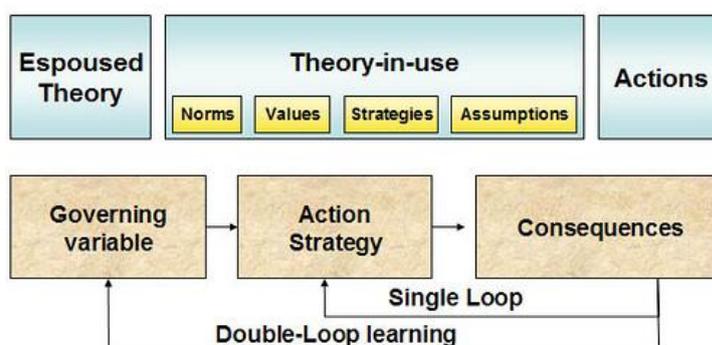
- **Stigmatisation** – One way that the rehabilitative arts attempt to destigmatise target groups is through using creative practice to expand identities and then present these expanded identities to the public through marketing and exhibitions. However, participants can be seen as further stigmatised whilst their art practice is considered in this way rather than a legitimate creative practice in its own right.
- **Compromised mobility** – When art by target groups is exhibited within an art institutional setting, this appears to give participants access to the art world. However, the work is always presented in the context of their past and/or reinforced by an art naïve/ brut/ povera/ outsider art tradition. Although this gives the illusion of mobility, these artists are only superficially included in the upper echelons of the art world, and are not enabled to access the art world independent of the label of their past. This is unless their work is of the appropriate standard, which the following issues prevent:
 - **Reliance on traditional media** - There is a reliance on traditional media within this type of art training, which poses the problem of an incompatibility with the contemporary art world, where conceptual art is prominent.
 - **A delicate approach to critique and curation** – This is intended to maximise inclusion, but it also lowers the quality of art produced, creating non-mobile works and artists. Where curational standards fall below the usual standards of contemporary art institutions, the exhibition of works does not represent genuine mobility.

- **Limited artistic inclusion** – The aforementioned delicate approach to critique and curation, although intended to provide inclusion, actually limits this inclusion to an isolated project in a controlled environment. Giving participants a sense of acceptance that based on low standards generates limited and unsustainable inclusion.
- **Promoting exclusivity** – By largely producing wall based works of art and plinth-based sculpture, the traditional model of art used relies on the gallery space for the exhibition of works. The gallery system is often accused by artists of contributing to exclusivity within the arts. From a perspective of inclusion, many artists chose not to engage in this system, exhibiting in alternative contexts / within self-led projects. Valuing the approval of these institutions promotes the limiting belief that an artist needs permission to exhibit their work.
- **Financial discrimination** - The linear artistic development associated with traditional practice - such as drawing to painting to oils, or clay to bronze - is not realistic for many artists from vulnerable adult backgrounds.

Using the single/double loop learning analytical/investigative methodologies that Argyris and Schon outline in their work (Figure 1)² we are able to discover the limitations and constraints were in the way in which art and outreach practices have been conventionally coordinated. By looking at the values of outreach, we are able to see how the current use of art compromises these values, and see that the use of a traditional art model is a recurring factor.

Figure 1

Double-loop learning is the reconsideration of values and strategies to reassess the effectiveness of organisational values, and can be used to bring unity of vision and purpose from conflicting requirements.



2 - Theory in Practice: Increasing professional effectiveness, by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön. (1974). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Using a non-traditional art model to innovate art outreach - and make art outreach more innovative

A contemporary, conceptual art model can be characterised by the following:

Idea before medium – Media is used in relationship to the idea, or otherwise the medium is conceptualised to the same effect. As such, this model must be taught in non-medium specific way.

Context is part of the work - The context in which an artwork is produced and the context it is produced for effect the work and should be taken into account and decided by the artist.

Consideration of the audience role – The way the audience interacts with the work is part of the artwork.

The work operates independent of the artist – Or otherwise this relationship with the artist is incorporated into the work in a considered way.

Using a conceptual instead of a traditional art model within art outreach solves the issues outlined previously thus:

- **Decreased stigmatisation** – Contemporary conceptual art practice would still expand identities, however the consideration of how, where and why the work produced is shown would be a decision made by the artist, not by the facilitator or facilitating organisation. As such, their art practice is considered a legitimate creative practice in its own right, rather than part of an awareness raising mechanism.
- **Enhanced mobility through:**
 - **Compatible media** – Concept-based use of media is prominent in the art world.
 - **Standard approach to critique and curation** – Curational standards are appropriate to the various stages of an artist's career, reflecting the artistic progress an artist makes over the course of their lifetime. Critique is constructive and honest, enabling this progression.
- **Universal, graduated artistic inclusion** – Real critique puts participants on the ladder for genuine, graduated inclusion through the usual stages of artistic development. Inclusion is transferable to the real world, not to an isolated project in a controlled environment.

- **Promoting empowerment** – By accessing a broad range of legitimate practices suitable for both gallery and non-gallery spaces, a conceptual model for practice allows participants to make non-gallery based work, or exhibit in alternative contexts / within self-led projects.
- **Financial accessibility** - Conceptual art does not necessary deem expensive materials to be an essential part of art making or artistic progress.

Here we can see a recoordination of practices enhancing outreach aims. This conceptual art model for outreach can be seen to be more innovative than the current model through resolving many of the constraints a traditional art model places upon outreach values. This cross-appropriation can be seen to be more considerate of the ultimate aims of outreach.

A Further Argument: How a conceptual art model produces a site that enables innovation

In addition to extending outreach values within and art outreach model, conceptual art practice can be seen as a platform for further innovation, and, by extension, allow art outreach to further affect social change.

There are clear links between conceptual art practice and innovative practice: Conceptual art can be seen as an open model for education that demands self-reflexivity, joined-up thinking, the development of and response to ideas and reflections, questions value systems, and so on; In *Disclosing New Worlds* this type of reflexive understanding is referred to as being aware of oneself as a discloser, with this awareness being the foundation of innovative practice.³

Disclosing New Worlds suggests that “we do not normally sense that we are disclosers because we are interested in the things we disclose, not the disclosing”⁴. In a traditional outreach model, I have observed that – through emphasis on the relationship between the artist and the artwork – it focuses on what is disclosed not the act of disclosing. According to *Disclosing New Worlds* the reason for this emphasis is that “we are designed to cope with practices, not handle practices or the coordination of practices.”⁵ However conceptual art can be seen as the handling and coordination of practices through its conceptualisation of practices: practices are not only considered by what they produce, but by how they emerged and how they are engaged. As such, conceptual art provides a platform for innovation where current art outreach

3 - Page 30: *Disclosing New Worlds: Entrepreneurship, Democratic Action, and the Cultivation of Solidarity*, by Charles Spinosa, Fernando Flores and Hubert L. Drefus. (1997). USA: MIT Press.

4 - As above

5 - As above

practice does not: the use of a conceptual model with art outreach is an innovation that generated new innovators.

If we see innovation as the root of social change, the use of a conceptual art model allows participants to become instigators of social change themselves, further extending the capacity for outreach values to resonate.

The need for reprioritisation: how appropriating art compromises art's social value

If we now return to the double loop method of analysis we may now identify a further problem. Although a conceptual art model resolves the compromise of outreach values that occur when using a traditional model, this coordination of practices still does not make full use of art's capacity to enable social change. Within conceptual art there exists a clear definition of what art's social value is: art's social value is its autonomy. The following ideas that I will use to exemplify this point can be found in the works of renowned, socially orientated artists and writers such as Stephen Willats, Joseph Beuys, the Artist Placement Group, Clement Greenberg and Nicholas Bourriaud.

One way the social value of autonomous art practice can be seen is in enabling artefacts, languages and practices to exist that transcend or undercut an otherwise prescribed world or existing economies. On a personal level, artists can be seen to explore and express their own logic, in order to create and understand their own language, without using pre-determined systems and tools. Applied to outreach values, we can clearly see the value of this for participants in bringing value their own way of thinking, and encouraging the exploration and understanding of everyone's unique relationship with the world.

The social and political affect of this type of activity is that it enables new aesthetic languages to be generated that better reflect society as it is now, rather than through the restrictions of pre-existing formats. Through the historical transference of paradigms from art into society, society's aesthetic experience is expanded. In terms of outreach values, this can be translated as creating a more accepting or socially aware society through experience of fringe aesthetics.

From this outline, we can see how art values are inherently reflective of outreach values. However, when a conceptual art practice replaces a traditional art practice within the existing art outreach relationship model, despite resolving many problems as outlined, art is still being used explicitly for as a tool for outreach: thus art is not autonomous and loses its social value. Whilst outreach values are prioritised over art values, art's inherent outreach values - which are born of its autonomy - are restricted.

Summary

By locating social discourses within art and innovation and using this as a lens on art outreach, we are able to articulate a series of limitations placed on outreach through its appropriation of art practices.

We can see how the current configuration of art and outreach practice effectively compromises outreach values.

A conceptual model more fully integrates outreach aims by maximising and extending the social inclusion generated through art engagement.

We can see that conceptual art practice is a platform that produces innovators. Where both innovation and outreach are seen as catalysts for social change, the use of a conceptual art model within outreach effectively expands outreach's capacity in potentially limitless manner.

Fuller understanding of the affect of autonomous art enables us to see its true resonance with outreach: arts social value.

By prioritising the autonomy of art using a conceptual art model the aims of outreach can be incidentally achieved without compromise.