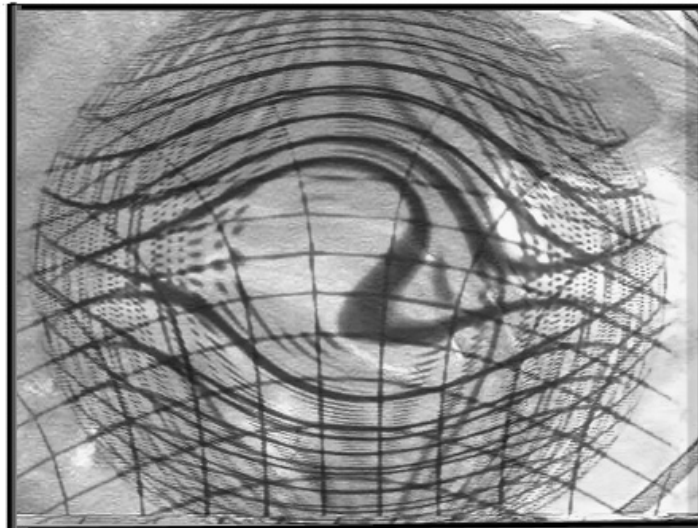


Last Word

*Every exit
is an entrance
somewhere.*

Tom Stoppard



Chad Perry and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt (1992) suggest it is necessary for action researchers to undertake a further private research cycle on completion of the action research in order to satisfy the requirements of writing a thesis. Dick (1997) also states 'Increasingly in qualitative research, it is being regarded as appropriate to discuss yourself and your learning as part of your thesis' (Dick 1997). So I add this postscript, this 'last word'.

On reflection two memories of the PAR workshop process loom large within my reflection. The first was an 'ah-ha' moment when you see the lights go on for some one. In this case it was for a group of visual artists. They had been quite sceptical at first about using group processes. None of them had worked collectively before. In choosing groups they had gravitated together, seeking those with a similar artform and experience to work with. They were in the midst of a general discussion about the function of art in society, when the lights went on for a woman who exclaimed 'isn't it shocking that I, an artist for a long time, had forgotten how important art is!' Others agreed and much discussion ensued. They felt they spent a large amount of time alone within their art and had never addressed this as an issue before.

Time or the lack of it was identified as the reason this situation had occurred, as was the opportunity to get together in a non- threatening and non-advocacy environment. This group, members of which were obviously driven to practice art, had never stopped to question why they were driven. Some felt they had never had this sort of conversation before, while others remembered conversations when they first entered art school. It is interesting that recent graduates were the ones who felt they had not had these conversations at art school and wished they had.

This discussion made me question why I make art. I know for a fact that I can't 'not make art'. I have tried to get a 'proper job' but can't stop being creative so I end up doing both and have no sleep at all. I rarely discuss this however for fear that I will sound like an evangelical missionary who is out to convert the world. I guess I always believed that the intention and power of the art would 'convert' people in its own right. Working on this

thesis has however allowed me to realise I'm not just a bit mad but my ideas and actions fit into an important area of human endeavor that is seeking better ways of doing things.

The second memory that is still vivid is when someone asked me why we had never talked in depth before. I realized that although I knew two thirds of the workshop participants, I had only ever had an in-depth conversation about our sector with five or six of them. At openings and events we all talk superficially about the work or have a grizzle about the latest funding round but we rarely get below the surface. I started to ponder on why this was happening and what sort of forum would encourage these sorts of conversations to occur. I have been to conferences and symposiums etc with a large number of the participants but the structure of these events does not encourage conversations to go beyond the specific topics that are up for discussion. This led me to ponder the effect that specialization has had on narrowing our conversations.

These two reflections coupled with the issues raised from the data have left me with an interesting dilemma. I believe the PAR process we undertook is a valuable model for artswokers to use in the exploration of ideas. An ongoing series of workshops would in fact allow for many of the issues raised, to be addressed. However, the issues also highlight the reason this is not occurring. Issues around time, money and a lack of empowerment, coupled with a perception of being under-valued ensures that artswokers do not get together to do something about it. So the findings are, in one way, limited by their accuracy.

This project has been the perfect example of a situation I find myself in often, whereby I am struggling to wear three different hats, to play three different characters in the same drama at once.

- I was a participant in the action research process with an advocate/activist hat on, trying alongside my peers to use new ways to raise issues.
- I was the facilitator with the artswoker hat on, making videos and engaging in each of the workshops, problem-solving on the run and gently moving the process forward.

- I was the researcher with the academic hat on, always reflecting and documenting and massaging the data into accessible formats so that it could return to the participants, while trying to learn how to write a thesis.

These roles are not new to me, but trying to wear all the hats at once actually gave me new insight into how each of the parts of my working life fit together. They can be complimentary. This was reassuring to know and I thank all those who have contributed to my quest.

I thought this thesis was finished, but no there was one more thing that needed to happen. I had new insight into my own decision-making because I had a better understanding of the different hats that I wear. It was this realisation that led me off on another action research cycle.

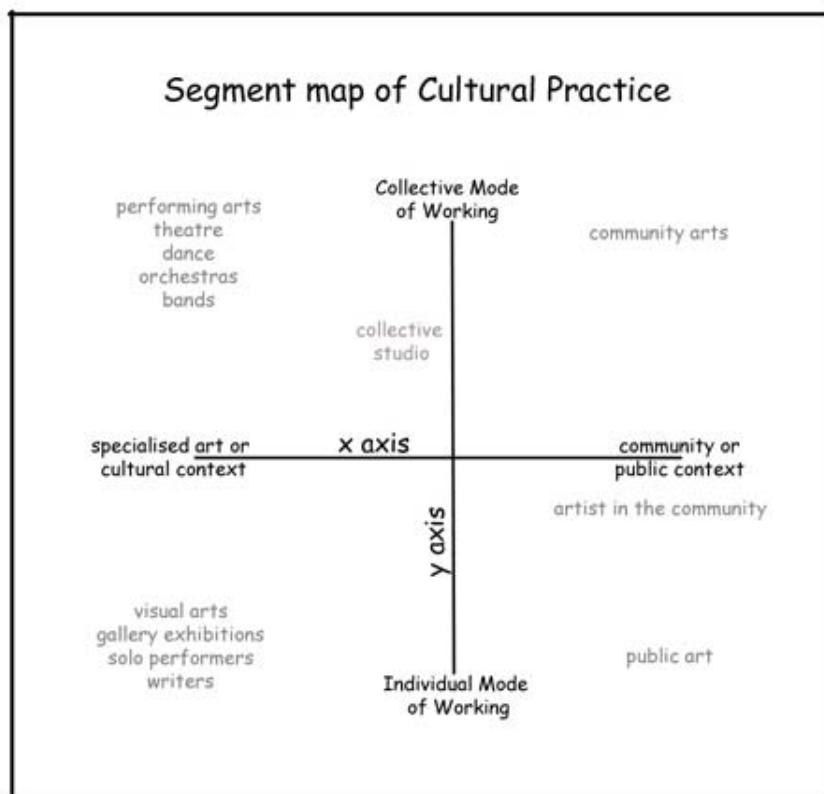
One of the hardest elements I identified in discussing decision-making within a cultural sector is that context influences everything. In previous chapters I have talked about the multi-skilling that has occurred and how this encourages artswriters to see things from different perspectives. In the action research workshops we talked about seeing things as the individual artswriter, from an organisational perspective or from a social perspective. Above I talk about wearing different hats. Artswriters often choose to change hats so they can look at an issue from different perspectives. I have come to believe that this wide view is part of the process of creative investigation. It is wonderful but it does however impinge on decision-making. I stated at the beginning of this thesis that I was looking for a way for my decision-making to be more balanced and that I wanted to make sure that the criteria that I was using for my decision-making was based on the primary practice. But I am often working on 4 or 5 projects at once and each of them sits within a different part of cultural practice. I believe that I need to examine the position of the work within a broad cultural framework to better inform my building of criteria for decision-making.

So I set about doing this.

I started with looking at differences in my own practice and referenced these with the work of my peers.

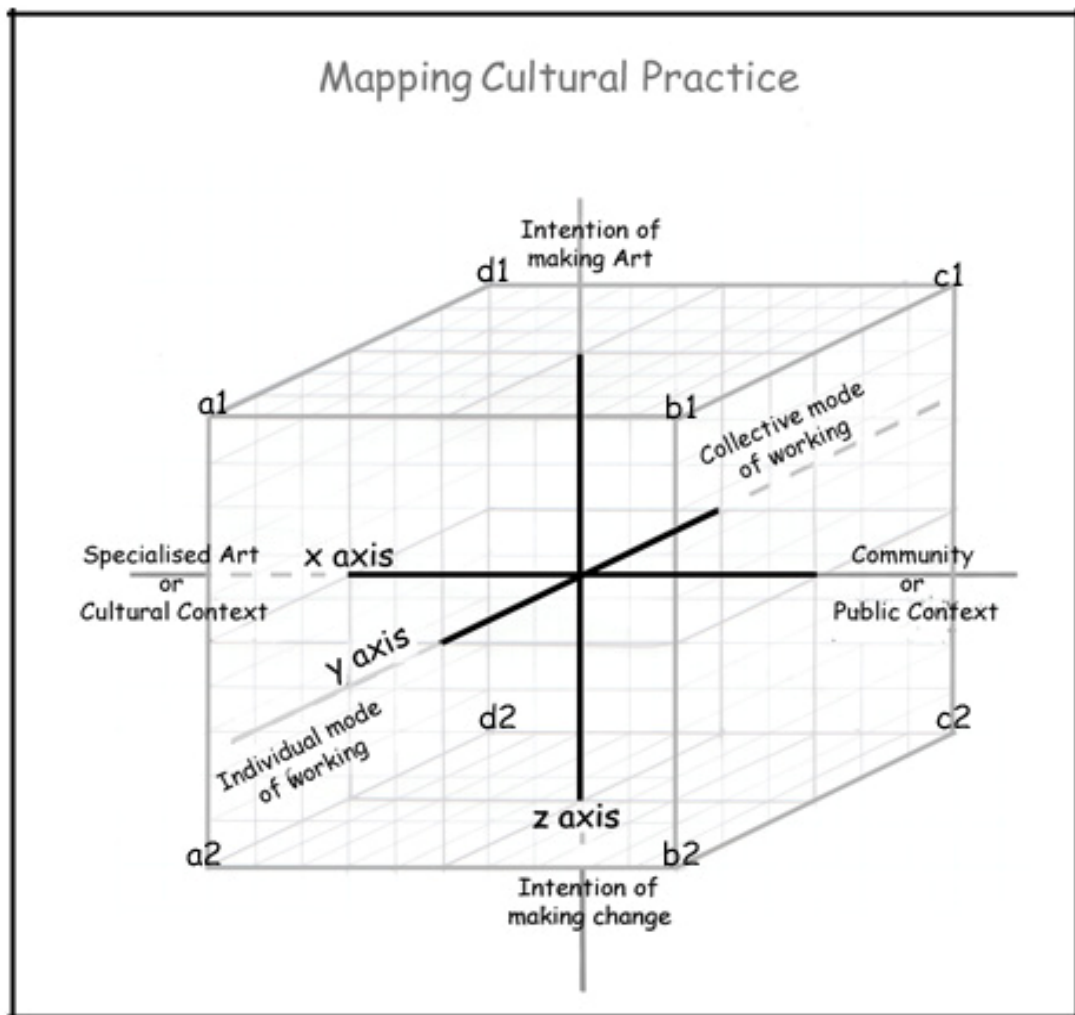
Sometimes my work occurs within a specialised context (eg in theatres or galleries) and sometimes it occurs within a community or public context. This became my X axis.

Sometimes the work occurs individually and sometimes collectively. This 'mode of working' became my Y axis.



This model was adapted from one used in an Arts in Health Workshop run by Christine Putland in the Department of Public Health , Flinders University Adelaide in 2002. Putland's model was based on one shown in Smith (2001) *Common Knowledge: The Tyne and Wear Health Action Zone's Arts and Health project - Interim Evaluation Report*.

I then realised that I need to introduce a 3D quality to this matrix for although the X and Y axis described the where and the who and to a degree the what, it misses out the very important why. So I introduced a Z axis which indicates the intention of the work. Sometimes the intention is to make art and sometimes it is to make change.



This 3D matrix refrains from placing any part of cultural practice as more worthy than another, it may in fact start to build bridges within the practice by acknowledging the inter-relatedness.

However this 3D matrix allows you to understand that different spots within the grid are heavily influenced by different schools of thought and that this influences our planning and evaluating of the work and therefore our decision-making. If we were a painter working in mainstream gallery practice on the 3D matrix we would be at the individual end of the Y axis, at the specialised end of the X axis and at the making art end of the Z axis. (a1) Our decision-making would draw on the study of aesthetics and we would be influenced by visual art theory. However our decision-making would be very different if we were working collectively, with change as our intention and in a community context. (c2) It would then be guided by community development principles and community cultural development philosophy.

Some projects also change during the life of the work. This 3D matrix allows for a plotting of the movements so to inform the changes which may need to occur to your decision-making processes. For example a project I have been involved with started life as collective work, in a community setting, making change. (c2) It was a bunch of "kids at risk" working out of a women's health centre looking at youth issues of substance dependency and violence. The project went through a series of cycles using drama as a format. Over time it moved on our 3D matrix and although change was still the primary intention, making art became more important too. The last round of this project was performed in a theatre and although the work always remained in the collective mode of working, many decisions were being made from an art context. (d1)

The intention of the work need not be 'make art--make change'. Other people it may be 'make art--make money', other to 'educate--to create'. For me however the 'make art--make change' best expresses the major intention of the work.

For me financial considerations are one of the external forces affecting this 3D matrix. Sometimes it attracts or pushes a project to a different spot on the grid. It is important to recognise this as it may require an understanding of the implications of this movement and a change in decision-making to better reflect the new context.

So I leave you to find your spot within this 3D matrix and to contemplate how to be more active in your decision-making processes.

Thanks

Lisa