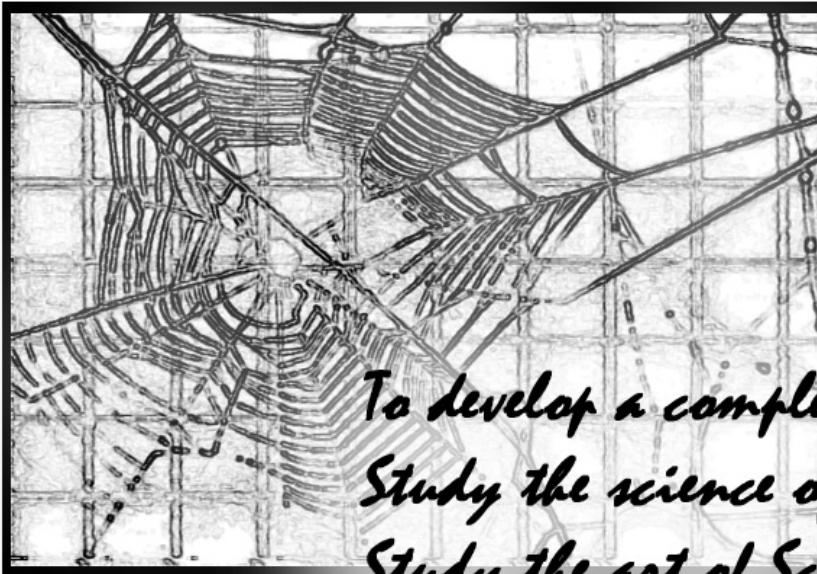


First Word



*To develop a complete mind
Study the science of Art,
Study the art of Science,
Learn how to See.*

*Realise that everything
connects with everything else.*

Leonardo Da Vinci

I am a freelance artist who has spent the last 21 years exploring the overlaps between visual, performing and community arts. My passion is initiating cultural development and social change through arts practice. In 1999 I was selected as the first recipient of the ArtSA/UniSA Arts Management Fellowship. The Arts and Cultural Management Program at the University of South Australia is located within the International Graduate School of Management which is part of the Division of Business and Enterprise. This fellowship demonstrates a partnership between the South Australian Government through Arts SA and the University of South Australia and a commitment to supporting arts practitioners in their undertaking of research. It was this support that offered me the opportunity to consider my role in bridging the divide between practice and academia. A chance to step outside arts practice and contemplate new ways of contributing to cultural development.

I have long been filled with a sense that there was something fundamentally out of kilter within the context of arts practice. On a personal level, I found myself asking if my decisions were based on a set of criteria that were so far removed from the primary practice of making art, that this decision-making process has stopped being meaningful. This questioning has occurred over a number of years and in many different arts and cultural settings. As a practicing artist, was I choosing a medium for an artwork based solely on its availability because I could not afford to buy art materials? As a board member of a theatre company, were we making choices on plays based solely on cast size due to rising costs and decreasing funding? And when I was on a funding advisory committee and asked by the minister to reconsider the funding of a company because the location of a project was deemed to be politically inappropriate; how could I rationalize the decision when political appropriateness was not within the committee's selection criteria? I kept questioning my role within decision-making processes. How was I contributing to the process and was I doing it right? Does this feeling of imbalance encourage us to remain still and hold on, rather than moving forward and exploring better ways of doing things? The vertigo of feeling caught up in the swirl of re-active decision-

making swept over me more and more frequently, until I had to ask, 'Is there a way we can make our decision-making processes more balanced?'

And it went beyond the personal. From questioning my peers I found that decision-making within the arts sector was often seen as problematical as many of the 'primary' decisions are made away from the 'primary' creative practice. The criteria for decision-making are often perceived to be based on organisational or financial need, rather than creative output or social need. As a practitioner, was this 'unbalanced' feeling due to my perception that I was powerless to change these decision-making processes? I believe these perceptions need testing and my quest has been to find an appropriate methodology.

Art is subjective. Art critique occurs by placing art product, artist and the audience within appropriate contexts. The person conducting the critique endeavors to get inside the work to gain more understanding. They actively pursue meaning within the work. In contrast many research methodologies encourage the researcher to maintain distance and impartiality. It is believed that distance is the key to objectivity, validity and reliability. It was crucial for this research however, to embrace the more subjective pathway by ensuring the research was undertaken by and with artswokers practicing in their chosen field. Issues of objectivity, reliability and validity are addressed, but they occur up close and inclusive of the participating artswokers. Another vital element in this research is the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the participating artswokers. They often act as co-researchers –researching their own practice and their working environment with a view to improvement.

Within current art debates there is concern expressed when art is defined in terms of products rather than human values (Dorn 1996; Klammer 1996; William 2001). When this is done, we move the discussion away from whether art has a social function to what is, in effect, the organisational management and delivery of these cultural products.

Too often, when market forces and the bottom line rule, art policy is shaped mostly by what the customer wants and by those management practices deemed

most effective in the production, marketing, and delivery of cultural products, where what is good is not so much about being a good but rather about how good the return is on investment. While it does make sense for arts organizations to function in a businesslike manner, art, culture and identity are not products to be viewed solely from the viewpoint of market penetration and the transformation of materials, labor, and capital inputs into products and services. (Dorn 1996, p.21)

If it is this current thinking that contributes to artists' disquiet about their decision-making, then there is a need to identify the issues that influence the decision-making processes that reinforce this situation. And if we are looking to improve or 'change' our situation, we need to find an appropriate way of operating. I believe it is through dialogue and discussion that a way to 'make change' within the arts sector will be developed.

I have chosen an informal and descriptive writing style, as I want the readers to come on the developmental journey and to understand the special significance of the 'quest' to this research process. In the book *On Stories- thinking in action*, Kearney informs us of the importance of telling the story when he writes:

Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so, in fact, for while food makes us live, stories are what makes our lives worth living. They are what make our condition *human*. (Kearney 2000, p.3)

I want to tell a story. I will endeavour to layer my writing with words and descriptions that evoke images in a creative way. I see this thesis as a large collage-style map. It is a collage rather than a painting or a drawing, as the collage process allows us to place in association, unrelated images and objects to form a different expressive identity. (Wolfram 1975, p.14) This is to both enhance the reading and to address the accessibility of the writing to a range of audiences. In many cases, when quoting I name the books as well as the authors. This is a conscious decision as many of the titles add colour to the landscape of the quote. The titles may seem to be unrelated or non-crucial elements, however placed next to a different piece of information the reader may in fact gain more

insight. Through the writing of this thesis as a collaged ⁽¹⁾ map I am inviting the reader to journey with me, enjoying not only the travel but also the scenery along the way. I am not alone in exploring the use of collage. In *Inviting Learning* Willis suggests the experience of his adult education practice will appear 'in the collage of images creating a dense picture with subjective and objective elements entwined' (Willis 2002, p.215).

This thesis aims to explore the process and product of the journey in a similar way to the topic and content of the research. The criteria used for decision-making in the writing process are therefore tested in a comparable manner to the collection and analysis of the data. Within the data analysis, a clustering technique was used for ratification by participants which contextualised data based on the position taken by the artswriters generating the information. This contextualising or positioning of the participant was of significance throughout the research cycles. I believe it is relevant therefore, to consider the context of the audiences for this written document and the variety of roles or positions that I play within the arts sector.

I am an artist, an advocate, a manager and through this project a researcher. I often work as a visual artist, an arts educator, an arts development worker, a community artswriter and a designer for theatre. I have sat on boards of management of arts organisations and funding committees and am an active member of arts membership organisations. I also mentor a number of emerging artists. This variety is not unusual for artswriters. When asked for an opinion within the arts I have to decide where on the map I am standing, which landscape I am replying from and ensure that my response is understood to be from that context.

FOOTNOTE (1) The term collage is from the French verb *Coller* meaning "to glue." In English it means to attach objects to a surface. It can be used as either a noun or a verb. www.dictionary.com suggests that as a noun it can relate to the assemblage of diverse elements. And adds the verbs *col-laged*, *col-lag-ing*, *col-lages* as relating to the pasting of diverse materials over a surface, thereby creating an artistic product.

The future readers of this document are varied too. Academia of course will be assessing the value of this thesis through the examining process. However for this thesis to be useful it needs to be accessible to other audiences too. Artswriters, who were involved in this action research process, are keen to complete their involvement with the reading of the thesis. The aim of the research is to help make change, so the thesis also needs to be useful to a wider group of decision-makers within the arts sector. I understand that this is unusual as many theses are written specifically for academia with the ensuing publications making the link to the broader audience. I have chosen, however, to communicate with a mix of audiences as it illustrates one of the aims of this thesis to bridge the academia / practitioner divide. It also suits the methodology that stresses the need for the cycles to be ongoing and inclusive. I am seeking to develop what Habermas calls a 'comprehensible expression in order that the speaker and hearer can understand one another (Habermas 1979, p.2).

With this in mind I have developed different writing styles for different chapters. Chapter one, the introduction is written as narrative from 'Lisa the research student' who is exploring the form and introducing the research that was undertaken. Chapter 2 is titled 'the landscape in which we are traveling' and outlines the research setting. It is written through the eyes of the arts advocate who has for 25 years used arts practice as a tool for social change. Chapter 3 is 'the search for a mode of transport', which describes our search for an appropriate methodology. It is written from an academic viewpoint. Chapter 4 is a narrative description from the artswriters/researchers point of view and outlines 'the journey'. Here the researcher becomes part of the action research process and undertakes with other artswriters, a series of cycles that explore, define and analyze issues within the area of interest. In chapter 5 the research student takes over again for a look back when we hit the edge of the map. The first and last words are from 'Lisa the artist', for art is paramount to my work and life.

As indicated earlier, by endeavoring to show both process and product and by using a range of styles and viewing things from a range of perspectives, this thesis attempts to create a large collaged map of the research journey. It not only shows the route that we

took and the landscape through which we journeyed but it also suggests some of the alternative routes that the reader could choose. Anyone who enjoys traveling may recognise that there are different types of travellers: those who know where they are going and plan to get there by the quickest possible route, and those who head off in a general direction knowing the potential of what lies ahead but willingly exploring many of the dirt roads for potentially more creative ways of getting there.