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Writing About Practice

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Writing About Practice

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As Stephen Sondheim (1984) articulates in his musical summary of the artist Georges Seurat:

*Bit by bit putting it together
Piece by piece, only way to make a "work of art"
Every moment makes a contribution
Every little detail plays a part*

The series of papers included in this special edition of *Organizational Aesthetics* introduce a practitioner's perspective on arts-based aesthetic interventions into organisational inquiry. Approaching the task of firstly co-chairing a stream at the 2018 Brighton AoMO conference and now co-editing an edition of *Organizational Aesthetics*, we have experienced the feeling of "bit by bit putting it together". It is a case of making small inroads that together build up to become a movement or a trend, or even the substance of a "turn".

The chair depicted on the cover – an original painting by Cathryn Lloyd - is a response to a tradition for this journal. The features of graininess and incompleteness of the Zen brushstrokes reflect the way in which we have approached both projects. Each article/contribution, whether to the journal or to the conference, contributes a small part, including the reader who is invited to fill in the blanks and expand their own mind to make sense of the contributions. All is not explained – so different to a positivist stance where every i is dotted and every t is crossed. These features also resonate with our ideas on qualitative inquiry – that each reader constructs their meaning of what the paper is saying. There is no single truth!

We have approached this project, in the same way as we approach many projects, as practice-led inquirers (Gray, 1996), and from this stance we have likened our co-chairing and co-editing to curatorial practices.

Curate is a verb associated with knowledge management and defined as "select, organize, and look after the items in (a collection or exhibition)" (Oxford, 2019). Words can be defined in multiple ways and our choice of this definition is informed by the additional definitional phrases that suggest curate also invites practices to "select the performers or performances that will feature in (an arts event or programme)" – a clarification which we believe has a direct bearing on both the AoMO conference and this journal edition.

When we put out a call for our stream *Transforming Organisational Performance: engaging personal and organisational change through performative, artful and embodied processes* as part of the AoMO conference, we made a distinction between the rhetoric of an idea and the application of that same idea – putting a notion into practice. Our intention was to make the stream interactive and experiential and we invited people to present and share their facilitative strategies in experiential, participatory and interactive ways. In the same way as we encouraged presenters in our AoMO strand to model practice, in this edition of *Organisational Aesthetics* we have sought out writing styles and works that give substance to the practice of putting in place artistic or aesthetic ideas within an organisational inquiry context. Such writing, we believed, would give substance to approaches dubbed with artistic names – such as the Dramatistic Approach, the way in which Bordow and More (1991) described Mangham and Overington's (1987) *Organisations as Theatre* – as well as the emergent "aesthetic turn" in Organisational Inquiry (Strati 2019).

Positioning ourselves and the collaborating authors as practitioners using arts based or aesthetic resources to inform our interventions in organisational settings, we pose the question "How do we write about performative inquiry or artistic intervention in a way that illuminates the practice?" In so doing, it calls for writing that helps us imagine and see how these ideas are put into practice.

The five papers in this edition, some of which were presented and workshopped at the 2018 AoMO conference, cover different threads of art and aesthetics: Music, theatre, film, alchemy and literature/sculpture. Included are examples of contemporary applications of aesthetic tools for organisational inquiry in both music and drama. Some examples have migrated well established tools from other disciplines – such as Film Studies and Alchemy – to apply them into a new field of organisational inquiry.

As with any exhibition, the collection may prove provocative. Indeed, just finding common ground between some of the reviewers of the papers has been an epistemological challenge! The styles of writing also represent how new forms of inquiry invite different ways of articulating practice. We invite you to enter this practitioner-writer collection and see for yourself.

Dag Jansson refers to a long standing research which has involved using choir techniques with an Executive team. Dag's paper explores the benefits of singing together, the value of the hidden rehearsal space and Executive team board room, and in particular the space in-between.

Leny Woolsey situates her practice in Organisational Theatre and describes how an aesthetic pedagogy of play and play-making can be a participatory method in the transformation of organisations.

Matteo Ciccognani positions his practice in the field of Film studies. Through analysis of the *The Five Obstructions*, Matteo uses the movie to question and highlight the paradoxes of leadership both within the film and other organisational settings.

Michelle Le Baron and Nadia Alexander invoke an ancient practice of alchemy and use the ideas within alchemy as catalysts as they invite people in organisational life to explore relationships and day-to-day operations.

Geof Hill and Rommany Jenkins draw on ideas from Literature and Sculpture, as particular examples of Provenance at work in the Arts, and migrate the idea into Organisational Inquiry,

positing a Provenance of Organisational Inquiry itself and specifically the turns, one of which is the aesthetic turn.

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About the Guest Editors

Dr Cathryn Lloyd is Founder, Director of Maverick Minds Pty Ltd. Cathryn facilitates and coaches powerful and flexible learning experiences for leaders, managers, teams and professional individuals to help shift thinking, gain new perspectives and create positive long-term change. Cathryn loves working with others to create a space for inquiry and learning. Her experience across the arts, design, education, and business management sectors provides the foundation for a unique approach to the design and delivery of creative professional development workshops and programs. Maverick Minds clients include government, corporate, not for profit, universities, individuals and groups. Cathryn holds a research Doctorate in Creative Industries. She is Australia's first certified creativity coach with the Creativity Coaching Association. She is the co-author of *The Story Cookbook: practical recipes for Change* published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Dr Geof Hill has been a management consultant for thirty-five years. Since training as a work-study analyst in 1980s he has developed management consultancies in business, health, education and mining. His concurrent academic positions in Australian and U.K. universities have also advanced his discipline in professionals interrogating their practice. Geof was the inaugural editor of the *International Journal of Research Supervision* and guest editor for a special edition of the *International Journal of Professional Management* following the 2016 Art of Management and Organisation conference at which he co-chaired a strand on *Making the Intangible Tangible*. Geof has also been the editor of *Ten ways to investigate your research supervision* and is the author and founder of The Research Supervisor's friend (<https://supervisorsfriend.wordpress.com>), a Wordpress blog for people investigating their research supervision.