



Organizational Aesthetics 1(1): 11-25

© The Author(s) 2012

www.organizationalaesthetics.org

Poem Houses: An Arts Based Inquiry into Making a Transitional Artefact to Explore Shifting Understandings and New Insights in Presentational Knowing

Louise Grisoni

Oxford Brookes University

Abstract

This article explores an extended epistemology of knowing through a process of making and inquiring into an artefact known as a "Poem House". The artefact can be viewed as a transitional object and the process of crafting creates a space for "negative capability" and "not knowing" opening opportunities for new insights. The focus for this inquiry was a personal one relating to difficulties and tensions surrounding the pressure to write for publication. New understandings were achieved in the original process of making and inquiring into the Poem House and then shifted significantly as a result of reforming the artefact after a period of time. This article demonstrates how pausing in and returning to presentational knowing in a critically self reflexive way is an important factor in developing deeper levels of insight into organisational issues.

Poem Houses: An Arts Based Inquiry into Making a Transitional Artefact to Explore Shifting Understandings and New Insights in Presentational Knowing

Introduction

Over the last four or five years, I have worked with poetic artefacts known as Poem Houses¹ introducing them into my academic practise as a way of exploring hidden, beneath the surface meanings and understandings of organisational life. In working variously with groups of organisational consultants, academics, managers and leaders drawn from across public and private sectors, I have found that Poem Houses provide a tangible way of dwelling in experience in order to draw out meaning by becoming a transitional object (Winnicott 1971, 1986) which facilitates inquiry into a range of sensitive political and organisational issues (Grisoni and Collins 2012).

Drawing from psychoanalytic theory I explore the contribution of Poem Houses in terms of surfacing the "unthought known" (Bollas 1987) through working with "negative capability" (Keats 1970, Simpson and French 2006, French, Simpson and Harvey 2001). Both concepts add depth to Heron and Reason's (1997, 2001) "ways of knowing" extended epistemology. These concepts are of particular relevance when working to surface meaning and understandings that may not yet have found expression and where the capacity to work with "not knowing" in the creation of an artefact becomes available for sense making. By slowing down and pausing in the reflective space presented by Poem Houses new insights and understandings emerge. This process contrasts with the drive to rational explanation where solutions to organisational problems and issues can tend to rely on what has gone before and what is already known (Simpson and French 2006). Adding a psychoanalytic element to the extended epistemology encourages deeper understanding of "ways of knowing" by including what is known and what is unknown, what is rational and what is sensed or felt, what is verbal and articulated and what is yet to be voiced, leading to a greater understanding of the politics of organisational life.

To illustrate the process of making and inquiring into Poem Houses in some depth, I have chosen to offer a personal example. It was created as a process of "symbolic self curation" (Cherry 2008) to explore the organisational pressures, personal difficulties and tensions I encounter as an academic writing for publication and demonstrates how working with this particular form of arts based inquiry generated new understandings and has influenced my practice. I argue that the benefit of multiple ways of knowing is an epistemological imperative for actively engaging with current organisational challenges.

¹"Poem Houses" are attributed to Brigid Collins, artist, illustrator and lecturer in Design Studies at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, in Dundee, Scotland. Examples of her work can be found at <http://www.brigidcollins.co.uk/>. In her work, Collins has explored the idea that a poem has a spatial presence and has developed her idea by means of creating a three-dimensional spatial context, in which a poem can be said to "dwell". Her suggestion, that by creating a "house" for words (language) we are attempting to safeguard the home, without which, we would be homeless, has been informed by the writings of Heidegger. She explains: "It is this dwelling, in and out of a poem, this relationship between man and space that makes us human. Essential to this is the nature of home and the spaces within it, which form our means of shelter and, hopefully, a place from which we can reconnect with the world. As the poem opens possible routes between our real and imagined worlds, language itself finds a space within which to move, into a place where ideas can form, where thought can happen" (Collins, B. (2006) Introduction to: *"A place where thought happens...."* Edinburgh: Incertus Press)

Dwelling in presentational knowing, pausing on the bridge

Heron and Reason (1997, 2001) identified four different ways of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical which are based on four interdependent "modes of psyche" – affective, imaginal, conceptual and practical (Heron 1992). Experiential knowing is accessed through face to face encounters with a person, place or thing; it is based on empathy and resonance and is almost impossible to put into words. This form of knowing draws significantly on the emotional responses incurred in such encounters. Presentational knowing emerges from experiential knowing and its first expression is found through forms of imagery in the arts, including poetry, story, drawing, sculpture, movement and dance. Propositional knowing is concerned with "knowing about something"; expressed in theories and ideas and tends to be expressed in abstract language. Finally, practical knowing concerns skill or competence: knowing how to do something. No one mode of psyche or way of knowing is privileged, however each builds on the next in an upward hierarchy.

In working with Poem Houses I have found that a focus is drawn to experiential and presentational knowing. These forms are the most difficult to articulate and in my experience most easily brushed aside in a drive towards propositional and practical knowing. Heron theorized presentational knowing as a "bridge" between experiential and propositional knowing (1992:175). The solid structure suggested by this metaphor draws us into forward movement and traverses the space between experiential to propositional knowing using presentational knowing as a pathway. There is a potential danger that important components of presentational knowing: intuition, reflection, imagination and conceptual thinking (Heron, 1992: 158) could be passed over unnoticed. Heron came to believe that presentational knowing "was valuable in its own right" (1992:175) as it was capable of "revealing the underlying pattern of things" (1992:168). My intention is to pause in presentational knowing in the way Seeley and Reason (2008) suggest by directly encountering experience before making sense of it. This involves allowing space to sensuously engage with experience and suspending normal ways of making sense before expressing what we have come to know. They argue that "dwelling in complexity and unknowing", is crucial to avoid a "rushed response" or "jump" to propositional knowing (2008:35).

Dwelling in the uncertainty of presentational knowing, staying a while on the bridge, draws attention to the spaces around, beneath and above as well as what is at each end. Paying attention to the ideas, thoughts and feelings that occur in this space requires "negative capability" (Keats 1970). Keats described negative capability as a state in which a person "is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (1970:43). "Negative capability" involves developing the capacity to live with and to tolerate ambiguity and paradox, staying in the place of uncertainty in order to allow for the emergence of new thoughts or perceptions. The concept of "not knowing" is explored by French, Simpson and Harvey (2001) as it relates to "negative capability". They argue that in organizations there is a premium on observable, measurable competences and certainty, generally described as skills, and knowledge technologies, i.e. what is already known. They describe the capacity to work creatively with "not knowing" as "negative capability". Working with unfamiliar arts based methods such as Poem Houses creates a tangible opportunity for working with "not knowing". Simpson and French (2006) suggest that organisational leaders could benefit from developing their capacity to work with "negative capability" and "not knowing" in order to work with the complex challenges facing organisations today.

Understandably "not knowing" can evoke high levels of uncertainty, emotions, feelings and anxiety which can threaten fresh thinking. As a result there is often a pressure to invoke prior knowledge or to adopt a new certainty too quickly, before a new insight has evolved, hence the need to pause and contain anxiety. Eisold defines negative capability

as “precisely the ability to tolerate anxiety and fear, to stay in the place of uncertainty in order to allow for the emergence of new thoughts or perceptions” (2000:65).

My experience of working with Poem Houses requires an ability to work with both “negative capability” and “not knowing”. The artefact that is produced becomes a transitional object making itself available for inquiry in a way that Bollas (1987) speaks of as surfacing the “unthought known” that relates to the tacit knowledge we hold in our bodies and at the edges of our unconscious, finding expression through feelings and non verbal forms of communication. The “unthought known” refers to what we know but for a variety of reasons may not be able to think about, have forgotten, or have an intuitive sense for but cannot yet put into words. If we conceptualize the “unthought known” as what we already know but don’t yet “know that we know”, one way to access this knowledge is through arts based approaches which engage the emotions and explore the permeable boundary between inside and outside, experiential and presentational knowing, and brings thoughts and feelings and new insights to life. This form of arts based inquiry involves processes of discovery and invention.

A Poem House combines the use of poetry with the creation of a visual artefact. By crafting an artefact the process of making is as important in the creation of new understandings as the object created. Sennett (2008:7) argues that thinking and making are a unified process. He speaks of a unity of body and mind that occurs when working with the hands as a central part of the process of thinking. Crafting becomes a process of exploration, of problem solving and problem finding. More broadly craft becomes a process of making personal self identity and citizenship. This parallels Seeley and Reason’s (2008) claim that “making” through presentational knowing is an experience in itself; informing experiential knowing as well as being informed by it. Orlikowski (2002) in a similar vein speaks of “knowing in practice”, she follows Schon, who claimed that our “knowing is in our action” (1983:49). In her work Orlikowski proposes that tacit knowledge is a form of knowing that is inseparable from action because it is constituted through action (2002:251). This line of argument sits closely with Bollas “unthought known”. In my work with Poem houses I am interested in how the intuitive process of making something tangible (presentational knowing) that is unfamiliar and seemingly unrelated to organisational life (a Poem House) encourages staying in the uncertainty of the present (negative capability) and leads to new insights (unthought known) which can then inform future organisational practice.

Building a Poem House through Symbolic Self Curation

In working with presentational knowing I have experimented with an approach first introduced to me by Healey Clough (2010) described as “symbolic self curation” (Cherry 2008). Cherry draws on Schon’s (1987) proposition of practice as artistry, Bleakley’s (1999) holistic reflexivity, Higgs and Tichen’s (2001) exploration of professional practice as knowing, doing, being and becoming and Van Schaik’s (2005) development of self curation as professional practice and research through reflexivity. Key elements of symbolic self curation include gathering and arranging apt, often nonverbal symbols to represent not knowing as well as knowing. This is followed by processes of creating and crafting for dialogue with others (in person and through literature), and testing insights gained by immersion in action leading to new interpretations. Symbolic self curation is an extension of curation, with connotations of preserving or restoring something and focuses on creating new perspectives for the integration, enrichment and future application of practice (Cherry 2008:23).

Self curation is a reflexive practice that invites individuals or groups to enhance their capability, energy and confidence for engaging constructively with complexities and opportunities that significantly challenge their professional and life practice. It begins with exploring a specific challenge where the particular is seen as a microcosm, the essence of the whole. This is different from logic or language based critical subjectivity.

It is the core and difficult art of simply noticing what is there and what is not there, of realizing that everything about this process counts: the manner of gathering the objects, the choice of text, the space or container chosen for the work, the reflective processes used, the form and outcomes of the processes engaged with. The witnessing self sits both inside and outside all of that, simply noticing. In creating an artefact as a product of inquiry I would suggest that Cherry works with a similar process of "negative capability" introduced previously, being at ease with "not knowing", and finds strength from the process. She says; "I was intrigued by the power of the insight that came in this way. It was not a simple matter of knowing something in my head, but of feeling and acting from a deep integrated sense that something had markedly shifted in myself that was now effortlessly played out in my practice" (Cherry 2008:26).

An example of working with symbolic self creation through a process of first person action inquiry (Reason and Bradbury 2001) follows. The focus of the inquiry is a case study which draws on personal experience. Three cycles of inquiry are described and discussed: gathering materials and making the Poem House, inquiring into the Poem House and remaking the Poem House. The contribution this inquiry makes is to demonstrate how working with art and poetry produces fresh insights into understandings of organizational phenomena – in this case as it relates to my experiences as an academic writing for publication.

Gathering materials and making

The process of making the Poem House is located in the presentational domain of learning. An idea of how the Poem House might look formed over several days as I gathered different components together. My start point was finding a quatrain from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam, I often turn to poetry as a source of inspiration when I feel stuck. I made the box in my "artist studio" at home, gathering the materials as found objects that were "to hand" drawn from work and home. The Poem House is made from a metal gabion 25 x 25 x 25cm, wool, a transparent Perspex box 20 x 20 x 20cm, many sheets of printed cut paper, and brown stationery labels 10 x 5cm.

I worked intuitively to assemble the components holding lightly to the theme of my inquiry. The printed sheets were collected from various drafts of an article submitted for publication and associated work papers from the same period. They form the central focus in the box. The metal makes the box heavy and resilient to knocks, protecting the insides from damage. The wool was left over from a cardigan I had just finished knitting. I decided to weave the wool around the metal cage to bring texture and soften the hard edges of the Poem House.



Figure 1: Ref Box 1

I share Dissaynayake's (2010) claim that there is an inherent pleasure in making. "We might call this *joie de faire* (like *joie de vivre*) to indicate that there is something important even urgent to be said about the sheer enjoyment of making something exist of using one's own agency, dexterity, feelings and judgment to mould, form, touch, hold and craft physical materials, apart from anticipating the fact of its eventual beauty, uniqueness or usefulness" (2010:146). I find that making something is in itself a meditative process, whilst ideas can roam widely; the thing being made is assembled at a slower, physical pace and this slowing down helps open up the space for presentational knowing. Working intuitively, without a preformed plan, the objects were assembled into an artefact. Each object gathered holds a special significance for me evoking *memories* - the poem choice came from a book of poetry given to my mother by my father as a love token over 50 years ago and which was passed on to me and reminds me of my parents and my childhood. It also holds *associations* - the wool reminds me of my first tortoiseshell cat and of my sister who I knitted the cardigan for. The metal gabion links to my love of gardening, designing, growing and nurturing the ever changing possibilities that working close to nature brings. Finally, it also carries emotions - both positive and negative - love, anxiety and envy. They include my love of words, my family, my anxiety of not knowing what would emerge from my inquiry and whether my findings would be good enough to share with others and envy of others and their abilities. The article contained in the Poem House speaks to the difficulties of collaborative working in a competitive academic climate (Grisoni and Page 2010). In their collective form a transitional object (Winnicott 1971, 1986) is created where the separate meanings and associations combine in an artefact, which is then available for new interpretations and understandings.

Inquiring into the Poem House

I used Butler-Kisber's (2010) "Markus Approach" as a reflective method of recording descriptive adjectives evoked by the box, I wrote down adjectives to describe the Poem House and my reactions to it. These reactions resulted in the acknowledgement of contradictory emotions held in my relationship with writing for publication. My visceral reaction to the artefact contained important information about underlying fears. As I looked at the finished box I was both drawn to it and repulsed by it. I sensed a cold, lump of iron feeling in my stomach and a metallic taste in my mouth. I recognised fear. At the same time the wool invited touch and the golden threads inspired a smile, however comfort derived from stroking the wool didn't dispel that underlying sense of fear. My descriptive words for the box included: "comforting", "dangerous", "monochromatic", "clear", "caged", "trapped", and "confusing". Butler-Kisber (2010) explains "in some instances it is remarkable how the adjectives echo what the researcher has intended and this validates the work. In others, some aspect is highlighted in a way that was not intended and brings new meaning to the work" (2010:105). My inquiry and search for new insights highlighted ambiguities and multiple interpretations which are inherent in visual work of this nature.

The particular quatrain chosen for the poem house is one of the most famous passages in the Rubaiyat. Its origins can be traced to the Old Testament, Daniel 5. At King Belshazzar's feast a moving hand wrote on the wall and the king was terrified and offered a reward to anyone who could interpret the mysterious writing "mene, mene, tekel, upharsin". Daniel was able to read it and translated the phrase, which foretold the end of Belshazzar's reign. Later that night Belshazzar was slain and Daniel was made King alongside two others from different countries.

Closer inspection of the choice of verse illuminates my feelings around research and writing for publication. The lines of the verse are separated out and located on different parts of the artefact. The first lines: "*The moving finger writes; and, having writ, moves on*" are inscribed on the inner Perspex box. These lines fill me with the sense of anxiety and dread representing the warning from a ghostly hand that decisions have been made and recipients of the message have been found wanting. That the moving finger moves on after making its proclamation suggests a lack of concern for those who have been damned by the contents of the message. The ghostly presence of the writing on the wall mysteriously appearing, exposes what cannot be said publicly, indeed the words need to be translated to expose their hidden meaning. Writing for publication often feels like invisible people passing judgement through the review process in which language needs to be decoded, especially when the feedback is not positive.

The second line: "*Not all your piety and wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line*", is placed on the front sheet of article itself. I see this line written as a challenge for me to stand by what has been written; to sustain the courage of my convictions and persevere with my particular research interests. The lines also speak to the permanence of the written word as representative of a set of truths held at a particular point in time. However, writing is a politicised process and records of events are never impartial or objective. They are influenced by a range of situational factors which impact on what is remembered and what is forgotten (Grisoni and Gaggiotti 2010). The final line: "*Nor all your tears wash out a word of it*", is written on the label fixed to the metal cage. These words speak to the uselessness of regret; "it's no good crying over spilt milk" would be another way of saying this. Once said or written there is no way that damage can be undone. The final line is written on a "price ticket" and suggests there is a cost related to decisions about how to write, what to write and where to publish.

The lines were set into the poem house in a way to draw the eye into the centre of the work and out again. The first line is set at the middle distance, the second in the inner most point and the third on the outside. A sense of layering is achieved and shifts in

focus from inside to outside and back again create movement as the box is explored visually. The effect conveys a mix of anxiety held in the words of the poem with the sense of being caged and trapped by the two containers (Perspex box and metal cage) and the woven wool which could either be experienced as positive and comforting or negative, contributing to a sense of being tied up and constrained.

Moving to the metal cage, an association can be made to Weber's "iron cage", which refers to the increased rationalization inherent in social life, particularly in Western capitalist societies. The "iron cage" traps individuals in systems based purely on efficiency, rational calculation and control. The "iron cage" references bureaucratic society and organizational bureaucracy, which are technically ordered, rigid and dehumanized. It represents the one set of rules and laws to which we are all subjected and must adhere. Weber argues that Bureaucracy puts us in an iron cage, which limits individual human freedom and choice. The sense of being trapped and stuck feels oppressive. In relation to the wool weaving through the iron cage I discovered that the German word: "weber" means to weave and the derivation of "weave" is "context". It could appear that the "iron cage" context is confirmed through this insight. The softer textured weaving through the metal cage could be interpreted as an attempt by me to make the "rules" that contextualise writing for publication "appear" softer and less restrictive.

Looking in at the Perspex box inside the iron cage it is hard to know whether the article contained there is caged in or safely contained and protected by the iron cage. My general feeling is one of constraint in relation to the organisational pressure to publish. The way I have constructed the artefact it is impossible to access the article without breaking the threads of the "context". The article sitting in the centre of the Poem House could be said to be at the "heart" of the work and this acknowledges the emotional work that goes into writing for publication and which may therefore need protecting in the form of the surrounding container.

Engaging with an artefact as a transitional object evokes curiosity, highlights paradox and confusion and generates mixed feelings. The uncertainty associated with how to engage with the artefact created opportunities for different forms of engagement and interpretation, provoking both intellectual and emotive responses. Emerging questions at this stage included: What are the rules? How will I need to adapt and change my approach in order to be more successful as an active researcher? What judgements will be made and who will make them? Why am I so fearful? Why do I feel trapped? In working with the physical and metaphorical representations of my engagement with writing for publication one more question feels significant: How can I engage more positively and confidently with the broader research process?

Remaking the Poem House

The Poem House then sat in my office for several months. I was stuck in terms of what to do next, wanting to create a poem to catch the important messages, thoughts and feelings associated with the artefact and feeling that my inquiry wasn't finished as I wrestled with the difficult questions I had posed and what to do with them. As a way of overcoming the resistance I was experiencing and in order to re-engage with the inquiry, I created a "found"² poem from my writing and journal notes taken during the process of

² Found poetry is a type of poetry created by taking words, phrases, and sometimes whole passages from other sources and reframing them as poetry by making changes in spacing and/or lines (and consequently meaning), or by altering the text by additions and/or deletions. The resulting poem can be defined as either treated: changed in a profound and systematic manner; or untreated: virtually unchanged from the order, syntax and meaning of the original. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Found_poetry

making the Poem House. Found poems have been likened to literary collage (Adamowicz 1998) and are consistent with the approach taken for the creation of the Poem House.

Wonder why winding
words weave insights, hiding
hard edges?

In the centre: caged
safely sealed, contained, crushed
Labelled.

Carefully cut threads
Look into, see through, alter, mend
and
Wonder why?

The found poem works with the contradictory ambivalences I experience and holds a spirit of inquiry as central. Weaving poetry into my work I am able to access the aesthetic and articulate the emotional dimension of interpersonal dynamics and experience. Poetry can often be appreciated for the feel of the work without needing to understand every line and phrase. This poem provided the momentum needed to shift my thinking where what I came to understand from my stuck place was that I needed to take action and cut through the oppressive bindings of the context and reshape the contents of the inner Perspex box. Generally texts are improved by reworking and editing following reviewers' comments, but in changing the box I knew I wouldn't be able to restore it to its original as I could with an earlier version of a paper and I didn't know what I was going to change it into. The risk and associated anxiety was palpable and at the same time liberating. The result is a clearer more positive acceptance and focus on the need to publish as interpreted by the requirements of the Research Excellence Framework (HEFCE 2009). The questions posed after the first making of the Poem House have shifted with the remaking – a sense of reclaiming personal power, my perspective and understanding has changed, the artefact now feels much more open, positive and containing.



Figure 2: Ref Box 2

Re-working the Poem House provided an opportunity to re-consider the outer cage and inner box as contextual containers, the first of the wider HE context and the second of my own personal "context" in relation to my role as an academic. I reworked the contents of the inner box into a scrunched paper ball – this feels more playful and lightens the whole piece both physically and metaphorically. My sense now is that the artefact is more interesting to look at with glimpses of the original article showing through the crumpled paper ball, held in place by a band of paper inscribed with the second line of the Rubaiyat quatrain. Mending the binding threads of the outer cage has resulted in a looser weave and increased the number of flaws and knots. As a result of re-working its contents, my emotional response to the Poem House is much more positive. My understanding and insights into my relationship to the two contexts are clearer and feel more manageable. As a final flourish I created a grid poem written into the spaces of the caged article. The poem reminds me of the realities, challenges and nonsenses of academic writing. The reworked Poem House sits in my office as an object of curiosity and inquiry. At some point, when I feel ready, it will be recycled into something else – quite what I don't yet know!

		Upside down Inside out Fragments Rumpled, crumpled		
	Words sigh Whispering Secrets Half told		Words fill Spaces Diverting meaning	
Words hesitate Interrupted Blinded Bandaged				Words hide Wrapped Muffled Suffocated
	Words fight Wars of meaning Weaving Politics		Words rest Folded into Each other Pleading Forgiveness	
		Words call To be Reassembled Reconnected		Lost but for words

Final Thoughts

I have shown how bringing poetry and art into dynamic combination, through a process of making a Poem House opens a space for challenging understandings, revealing hidden potential and adding meaning. By adding another dimension, the fusion between verbal (poetry) and visual (decorated box), a unique artefact is created. Poem Houses provide information not only about situations but also reflect ways of relating to our surroundings and the circumstances of our lives. In this paper I have demonstrated how they can be used for individual reflections on experiences and exploration of understandings. They can also be used collectively, creating the potential for shared individual and organizational insights and understandings, resulting in the emergence of new forms of organisational narratives (Grisoni and Collins 2012).

In this paper I have demonstrated how working with psychoanalytic concepts such as the “unthought known” and “negative capability” has added depth to my understanding of presentational knowing. This was explored by adapting a process of self curation into making a transitional object for inquiry called a Poem House. The slowing down process that was involved in making the artefact contributed to opening up the space necessary for the “unthought known” to emerge. This came to the surface as I worked in the form of memories, associations and feelings. Working intuitively and hopefully, not knowing whether what would be created would result in positive or negative new insights was anxiety provoking. It took time to stay with the process of making and inquiring into the Poem House. I felt I was actively engaging in negative capability by returning to the place of presentational knowing several times through making, remaking and working with poetry. I have now arrived at a point in my inquiry where I feel ready to share my understandings and insights about the process of inquiry and the contribution it makes to extended epistemology.

The process of self curation impacted directly on my sense of personal context and that of the organisation. I found the transitional object in the shape of a Poem House presented itself for insights that can be contradictory and confusing. If I had stayed with the first set of understandings I would have missed the experience and shift in perspective achieved through remaking the Poem House. I appreciate better now how knowing changes and is changed over time as context, view points and emotional connections to the subject of the inquiry change. I would suggest that this aspect of presentational knowing needs greater emphasis in the drive to propositional knowing which tends to feel less provisional in nature.

Barry and Meisiek speak of “analogous artefacts” that “defamiliarise organisational members” habitual ways of seeing and believing enabling them to make new distinctions and shift contexts: to see more and see differently. As evocative representations they do not serve immediate organisational purposes yet invite inquiry and reflection by defamiliarising organisational members habitual conceptualisations” (Barry and Meisiek 2011:1505). This may feel awkward and uncomfortable. Being in a place of not knowing - risks exposing what could be viewed as weakness and a natural reaction might be to stick with reshaping what is already known in ever decreasing, reductionist ways. Creating a Poem House may at one level feel very unfamiliar and disconnected from the daily practice of organizational life. I would argue with Barry and Meisek that this is an important feature of the work necessary to explore not knowing. Whilst the inquiry I have presented has a very specific focus, I can also see how it is possible to take the insights gained and apply them more broadly to my role as an Academic Manager. An appreciation of the importance of containing anxiety, slowing down and staying in the present moment, ambiguity and contradictory meanings, stuckness and the risk taking required to move into action, can be applied to leaders and managers in a range of organisational contexts.

Organisational inquiry within business settings using a range of arts based methods has developed over recent years to include a range of approaches and purposes: ethnographic, reflective, therapeutic, descriptive and critical analysis, capturing experiences and emotions. Eisner poses a challenging question which asks those of us who work with arts based forms of inquiry to critically examine why and to what purpose we use them. He asks “Are the arts merely ornamental aspects of human production and experience or do they have a more significant role to play in enlarging human understanding?” (2008:3). One response that I identify with is offered by Seeley who argues that arts informed research is fundamental to making sense of being part of the world. “How we receive, understand and respond to ourselves, others and the contexts we are part of, comes from tacit and explicit knowing through our sense and bodies as well as the ideas assumptions and theories that live our heads” (Seeley 2011:84).

Arts based inquiry takes shape in an interaction between public and private worlds forming spaces between people, politics, imagination, theory and action. The presentational space of knowing is found both in the process of creation and its outcomes. Paying attention to making, looking and seeing reveals ambiguities and uncertainty as well as multiple possible meanings. The complex interplay of visual and verbal in a Poem House, helps focus on the space where new insights and understandings can be accessed. It is an aesthetic inquiry, that “takes us back to the root meaning in Greek of an act of perception, a sensory response, literally a ‘breathing to taking in’ (*aesthesis*)” (Cheeke 2008:3), which in turn breathes new life and transformative potential into those who engage with both the process and the products of such inquiries.

We can be persuaded that engaging with art based inquiry helps us connect with personal subjective emotions. Working with a Poem House has also demonstrated how it also helps us discover our own interior landscapes providing the conditions for

organizational sense making discovering new meanings, understanding and knowledge. However these practices may seem overly self absorbed and indulgent if they do not translate into improved organisational effectiveness. The enlivenment of engaging with arts based forms needs to be translated into action based outcomes. I am hopeful that the inquiry presented here is a tangible demonstration of the kind of action that can result from arts based inquiry.

References

- Adamowicz, E. 1998. *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: dissecting the Exquisite Corpse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barry, D. and Meisiek, S. 2011. Seeing More and Seeing Differently: Sensemaking, Mindfulness and the Workarts. *Organization Studies* 31(11): 1505 -1530.
- Bleakley, A. 1999. From reflective practice to holistic reflexivity, *Studies in Higher Education*. 24:3: 315-330.
- Bollas, C. 1987. *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*. London: Free Association Books.
- Butler-Kisber, L. 2010. *Qualitative Inquiry: thematic, narrative and arts informed perspective*. London: Sage publications.
- Cheake, S. 2008. *Writing for Art. The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Cherry, N. 2008. Symbolic Self Curation: A reflexive activity for practice, life and scholarship. *Creative Approaches to Research*. 1(1): 19-37.
- Dissayanake, D. 2010. Art and intimacy: How the arts began. In B. Boyd, J. Carroll, and J. Gottschall (eds.). *Evolution, Literature, and Film: A Reader*. 144-155. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Eisner, E. 2008. Art and Knowledge. in J.G. Knowles and A. L. Cole.(Eds.) *Handbook of the arts in Qualitative Research. Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples and Issues*. 3-12. London: Sage.
- Eisold, K. 2000. The Rediscovery of the Unknown: An Inquiry into Psychoanalytic Praxis, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*. 36(1): 57-75.
- French, R., Simpson, P. and Harvey, C. 2001. Negative Capability: mapping the confusing uncertainties of change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*. 14(5): 480-492.
- Grisoni, L. and Collins, B. 2012. Sense making through *Poem Houses*: An Arts Based approach to understanding Leadership. *Visual Studies*. 27(1) 35-47.
- Grisoni, L. and Page, M. 2010. Two to the Power of Three: power coalitions in (women's) collaborative leadership. *Organisation and Management Journal*. 7(1): 13-25.
- Grisoni, L. and Gaggiotti, H. 2010. Memory is the Mother of all Wisdom. 25th EGOS Colloquium. Lisbon June 2010.
- Healey – Clough, F. 2010. The Art of the Psychologist: A symbolic self curation. Unpublished thesis, University of the West of England.

- HEFCE 2009. Research Excellence Framework 2009/38. www.hefce.ac.uk.
- Heron, J. 1992. *Feeling and Personhood: Psychology in another Key*. London: Sage.
- Heron, J. and Reason, P. 1997. A Participative Inquiry Paradigm. *Qualitative Inquiry* 3(3): 274-294.
- Heron, J. and Reason, P. 2001. The practice of co-operative inquiry: Research "with" rather than "on" people. In P. Reason and H. Bradbury (Eds.). *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. 179-188. London: Sage.
- Higgs, J and Tichen, A. 2001 as cited in Leavy, P. (2009) *Method meets Art: art based research practice*. Surrey: The Guildford Press.
- Keats, J. 1970. *The letters of John Keats: A selection*. Gittings, R. (ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Orlokowski, W. 2002. Knowing in Practice: Enacting a Collective Capability in Distributed Organizing. *Organization Science*. 13(3): 249-273.
- Reason, P. And Bradbury, H. 2001. (Eds.) *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. 179- 188. Thousand Oaks California: Sage.
- Schon, D. A. 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner, How Professionals Think In Action*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schon, D. A. 1987. *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Seeley, C. 2011. Uncharted Territory: Imagining a Stronger Relationship between the arts and Action Research. *Action Research* 9(1): 83-99.
- Seeley, C. and Reason, P. 2008. Expressions of Energy: An epistemology of presentational knowing. In P. Liamputtong & J. Rumbold (Eds.), *Knowing Differently: Arts-based and collaborative research methods*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Sennett, R. 1998. *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work*. New York: Norton.
- Simpson, P. and French, R. 2006. Negative Capability and the Capacity to Think in the Present Moment: Some Implications for Practice. *Leadership* 2(2): 245-255.
- Van Schaik, L. 2005. Self curation as portal from mastery to creative innovation, in L.Van Schaik (Ed.) *Mastering Architecture: becoming a creative innovator in practice*. 212-234. Chichester: Wiley Academy.
- Winnicott, D. 1986. *Holding and Interpretation*. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of PSA.
- Winnicott, D. 1971. *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock Publications.

About the Author(s)

Louise Grisoni is Head of Department of Business and Management at Oxford Brookes University. Her research interests include inquiry based methodologies for leadership,

learning and change in organisations. Over the last few years she has developed an approach to art based inquiry which draws on psychodynamic and systemic perspectives. She has developed a methodology for working with poetry and art forms in individual and group inquiries into organisational experiences of change and leadership. She is committed to applying learning from these projects to her own practice in a critically reflexive way. Louise regularly presents at conferences such as EGOS, SCOS and the Art of Management, where she has co-lead a stream on Poetic inquiry with Per Darmer. Publications on her arts based informed work can be found in *Aesthesis*, *Tamara*, *Visual Studies*, *Journal of Organisation and Management* and *Management Decision*.