

The Special Topic of Organisational Disruption: An Editorial

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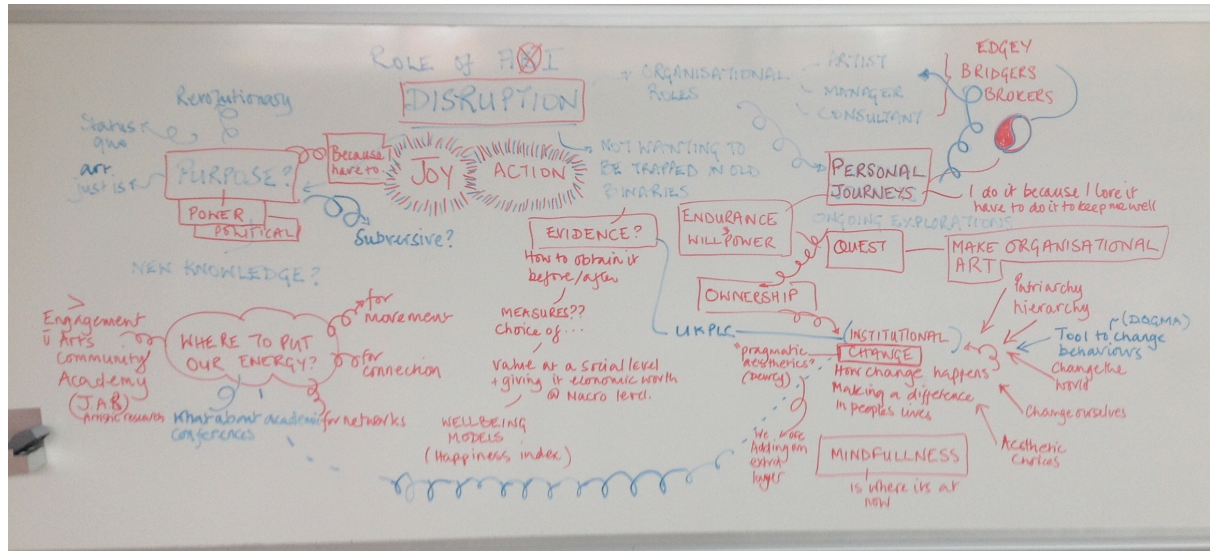
In August 2014 we ran a stream on *The Disruptive Potential of Arts Based Approaches* at the Art of Management and Organisation Conference held at Copenhagen Business School. We were curious about trends in organization studies literature that are encouraging a search for new and innovative modes of inquiry questioning “assumed certainties” and disrupting predominant narratives (Dey and Steyaert, 2007: 443). Linked to this, we have noticed increasing recognition of the need to find new ways to address demands for flexible responses, innovation and knowledge creation in times of unpredictability and instability with calls to the organizational and management studies community to take inspiration from the arts. Nancy Adler (2006), for example, argues that new ways of seeing are necessary to understand the actual “realities” of the world we live in, and not to mistake them for seeing things as they are labelled. She suggests that people have to be able to dream, to envision possibilities, quoting Hamel who says: “Companies fail to create the future, not because they fail to predict it, but because they fail to imagine it.” (Hamel, 2000: 120). Arguing that such methods offer a fundamentally different way of approaching the world, Taylor and Ladkin (2009) suggest that arts based methods enable us to access and develop different ways of sensual knowing which can “contribute to a more holistic way of engaging with managerial contexts” (2009: 56). Taking inspiration from these approaches our own research invited participants to engage in a variety of arts informed approaches designed to stimulate imagination and intuition to disrupt predominant managerial discourses and thinking towards diversity management. By opening spaces to access tacit knowledge, imagination and dream participants were able to re-engage with their experiences of diversity and apply them to re-energise their practice (Page, Grisoni and Turner 2014).

To develop our understanding of the disruptive potential of arts based approaches for the Art of Management and Organisation Conference, we invited contributions from scholars and practitioners to critically engage with the claims that have been made. Contributions were invited in the following areas:

- The disruptive nature of emotional engagement
- The use of irony and parody
- Art based inquiry as organisational therapy
- Another oppressive management tool
- Transforming individuals, transforming organisations
- Redesigning organisations
- Using arts based approaches in daily organisational practice

- Using arts based approaches to examine ambiguity and uncertainty

A lively and well attended stream took place, in which a spectrum of approaches and views were explored and debated concerning the potential and limitations of arts based inquiry processes to interrogate and to disrupt predominant narratives and power regimes. Emergent contrasts and themes were mapped by a core of participants at a closing session and are shown below:



Following the conference we set out our call for contributions to a special topic in the journal of *Organisational Aesthetics*. This special topic invited contributions which demonstrate new ways of seeing that are necessary to understand the actual “realities” of the world we live in. Arts informed methods have been recognised for exploring, examining and eliciting the less obvious, the unaccountable, the so-called non-rational elements of organizational experience, countering the more traditional business and management tools of logic and rationality. In this way they can make a significant contribution to disrupting what we already know about organisations and organisational life. However, as demonstrated by discussion of submissions to our conference stream, this is by no means guaranteed. It may simply be the case that arts informed processes are valuable, because we love to engage with them, and arguing that the need to make a case for using them based on evidencing predictable outcomes of any kind, disruptive or not, is not a road worth travelling.

Papers published in this special edition suggest that arts informed methods enable us to access and develop ways of accessing sensual knowing which contribute to our engagement with organisational life. They demonstrate how working with the arts can enable access to the range of human emotion and can make a holistic contribution to understanding by giving voice to those unheard via traditional mechanisms. Moreover they explore how arts informed inquiry can enable access to tacit knowledge and, in contexts in which we are faced with ambiguity and uncertainty; they can offer transformative, imaginative ways of approaching, analysing and reflecting on old problems in disruptive and interruptive ways.

The four papers that form the special topic each make a distinct contribution to the debates around arts informed methods and in particular the disruptive potential that these methods afford. Jenny Knight's contribution takes the form of a beautifully crafted poem, itself a disruptive form of writing in academic journals, but something that we recognise in *Organizational Aesthetics*. She draws attention to the emotional layer of experience that drives behaviour in organisations and which tends to go unexplored and undiscussed. The poem explores how poetry can contribute to making sense of the

darker side of organisational life. Given the range of existing perspectives and academic literature that analyses and describes what makes organisations tick, the poem presents an in depth argument, supported by reference to literature, for the use of poetry to make sense of organisational complexity, to give people a voice and to develop a deeper understanding of what really drives organisational behaviours and subsequently affects organisational outcomes.

The poem is called "Making Sense of Nonsense" and has a central theme of power and powerlessness – contrasting knowing the rules of the game and how to play them, to the "other game" where the rules that are in operation are not written. Jenny argues that poetry can not only help to articulate feelings but also find a way through the confusion and "cleanse" an individual from organisational politics. Jenny adopts a humanistic stance and suggests that poetry offers a means for accepting the conflation of written and unwritten rules and exposes the political organisation game for what it is.

The second paper by Adam Dzidowski takes our thinking in another direction. He raises the disruptive and challenging question as to whether human perception is still central to organisational aesthetics, especially if we start to give a stakeholder position to artificial systems. In part this could be construed as a problem for the future, but in Adam's view the future is already here and operating alongside traditional and perhaps outmoded patterns of thinking and processing. Adam argues that organisational designs and processes have ceased to rely only on human agency. He calls for serious consideration of emerging philosophical trends, such as Speculative Realism, Object-Oriented Ontology, New and Speculative Aesthetics and the extent these trends have impacted on organisational perception and design.

Cecilie Meltzer's contribution is based on the assumption that every human being has a creative potential and that a deliberate use of longitudinal artistic work and creative processes in everyday life can enhance individual and group creativity and expand arenas of competence when dealing with most of life's challenges. Cecilie examines the ambiguity and emotional challenges involved in the creative process and explores whether an understanding of the Cycle of the Creative Quest (Meltzer 1998), an educational tool which combines phases in the creative process with phases of learning, can promote sufficient courage and trust in non-artist teachers, students, leaders or employees to utilize arts-based methods in processes of development and change. The different phases of a creative process are presented and illustrated through an artist's personal experiences with working with art. The article concludes with a condensed version of how the Cycle of the Creative Quest can be a helpful educational tool and fill the gap of uncertainty when introducing creative work to non-artists.

Finally, Alexia Mellor identifies trends within visual arts practice where artists have worked with corporate and organizational structures. The research investigates artist projects that parody corporations with the aim of "identity correction;" exposing, critiquing and revealing the proliferation of corporate and legal language in culture; and mimicking emerging business models with the intention of disrupting them so that they can be applied in new ways to new contexts. Considering Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) concepts of deterritorialization and the rhizome, this research suggests that art practices borrowing from business culture serve to simultaneously disrupt and re-contextualize economic systems while offering opportunities to make new, unexpected connections. Beginning with a discussion of Conceptual art practices of the 1960s, Alexia explores ways that artists have co-opted and pushed the boundaries of business practices within the context of global capitalism. She proposes the term "re:organizational aesthetics" to describe recent aesthetic developments of artists repurposing business models, and concludes with the suggestion that such practices are paving the way for us to redesign our economic and cultural landscapes.

Whilst these four papers capture a variety of approaches, they do not offer a complete or consistent picture. In the same way, no consensus was reached in the final session at the Art of Management and Organisation conference. We can therefore only reach a temporary conclusion that arts informed inquiry processes offer rich potential for disrupting and interrupting established discourses in organisations, offering alternative truths and presenting new knowledge and understandings. The extent to which this can be guaranteed or predetermined is uncertain and at the same time instrumental use of such methods is not recommended. Where arts informed methods are introduced without being tied too closely to predicted outcomes there is plenty of potential for aesthetic enjoyment. This is a value in itself and it may indeed be that the quality of pleasure offered is one of its most powerful disruptive potentials resonating with the ideas surrounding Deep Play (Ackerman, 1999). Deep play is described as "a refuge from ordinary life, a sanctuary of the mind, where one is exempt from life's customs, methods and decrees" (199:5) and that this is "central to the life of each person" (199:17) and contrasts with Bentham's utilitarian notion of Deep Play which considered the stakes and risks too high to be worth engaging in. The need for bounded space and time, with freedom to explore organisations, their processes, experiences and the "rules of the game" are considered essential components. We would argue that by acknowledging the emotional investment and risks in exploring arts informed approaches, we can question, learn, challenge and change ourselves and the organisations we encounter.

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