







# Feeling clumsy and curious. A collective reflection on experimenting with poetry as an unconventional method

Noortje van Amsterdam<sup>1</sup>  | Dide van Eck<sup>2</sup> | Katrine Meldgaard Kjær<sup>3</sup> | Margot Leclair<sup>4</sup>  | Anne Theunissen<sup>5</sup> | Maryse Tremblay<sup>6</sup> | Alistair Thomson<sup>7</sup>  | Ana Paula Lafaire<sup>8</sup>  | Anna Brown<sup>9</sup>  | Camilla Quental<sup>10,11</sup>  | Marjan De Coster<sup>2</sup> | Alison Pullen<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Utrecht University, School of Governance, Utrecht, The Netherlands

<sup>2</sup>Work and Organization Studies, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

<sup>3</sup>IT University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark

<sup>4</sup>Aix Marseille University, CNRS, LEST, Aix-en-Provence, France

<sup>5</sup>ECOOM, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and SEIN, Hasselt University, Hasselt, Belgium

<sup>6</sup>UQAM, Université du Québec à Montréal, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

<sup>7</sup>Tasmanian School of Business and Economics, Sandy Bay, Tasmania, Australia

<sup>8</sup>Department of Management, Aalto Business School, Helsinki, Finland

<sup>9</sup>University of St Andrews, School of Management, Scotland, UK

<sup>10</sup>Organization Studies and Ethics Department, Audencia Business School, Nantes, France

<sup>11</sup>Business, Organizations & Society, Social Sciences, NYU AD, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

<sup>12</sup>Department of Management, Gender, Work and Organization, Macquarie University Business School, Sydney, Australia

## Correspondence

Noortje van Amsterdam, School of Governance, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands.

Email: [n.vanamsterdam@uu.nl](mailto:n.vanamsterdam@uu.nl)

## Abstract

In this paper, we offer a collective, multi-vocal reflection on using poetry for research purposes. These were reflections on an online sub-plenary session organized as a workshop, which was held at the European Group for Organization Studies conference in 2021. During this workshop, the first three authors presented a step-by-step method for doing poetic inquiry and invited participants to apply it to their own empirical data or research praxis. The method was

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created in response to the marginalization of affect and embodiment in mainstream research in organization studies. Poetic inquiry aims to formulate specific practices of “writing differently” that assist researchers in their attempts to analyze and articulate their findings in embodied and affective ways. In this paper, we describe the method and bring together multi-vocal reflections from the participants and organizers of the workshop on the affects of poetic inquiry and the (ethical) questions that it poses.

**KEYWORDS**

affect, embodiment, feminist praxis, poetic inquiry, writing differently

we snuck out,  
escaped the invisible masses  
to meet each other/author  
*differently*

a virtual bubble  
where we performed vulnerable selves  
through the language of poetry

individual words became part  
of something bigger  
intertwined  
and moving forward

together

moving, rippling  
clumsily, curiously

beyond the writer  
across our messy differences  
bringing us to a  
liminal space  
between the private and the public text

we chase away the 'lone wolf' expert academic  
and end up here,  
wondering  
where the rippling effect  
will take us next

worrying  
whose voices got lost in the process

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2021, we encountered each other differently in a space usually designed for the “AcademicConferenceMachine” (Fairchild et al., 2021): a sub-plenary at the European Group of Organization Studies (EGOS) conference focused on poetic inquiry. We connected via our computer screens to write poetry. We wrote by turning to our senses, focusing on what touches, moves, or changes us in our research encounters between researchers and researched, authors and audience (see van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019; van Eck et al., 2021; Ward, 2011). Little did we know that this shared writing activity would become part of something bigger: by creating space to experiment with poetry and affect in a small group setting devoid of authoritarian voices, it disrupted both the individuality of academic practices and the regulation of what counts as academic knowledge.

In this paper, we share the steps we undertook in the sub-plenary for writing research poetry. We offer this as an invitation for readers of this journal to try the writing exercise themselves, with colleagues, students, or friends. The aim of this paper is two-fold. Firstly, we provide the method used for this particular format of “writing differently,” outlining the step-by-step guide for writing research poetry we used in the sub-plenary. Secondly, we present our reflections as participants and organizers of the sub-plenary workshop at EGOS. With this aim, we collectively encourage the use of poetic inquiry in MOS and build on previous writing that addresses the need to reflect on and experiment with practices in academia based on collectivity and vulnerability (e.g., Henriksen et al., 2022; Meriläinen, Samela & Valtonen, 2022).

The paper starts by presenting some context of the motivation for arranging the workshop. Invigorated by several other collaborative projects (e.g., Kjær & van Amsterdam, 2020; van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019; van Amsterdam, van Eck & Kjær, 2022), Noortje, Dide, and Katrine initiated the organization of a sub-plenary at EGOS around poetic inquiry. They invited Alison as a discussant, because her work has been foundational in building a community in MOS of scholars who are interested in experimenting with unconventional writing styles and formats—“writing differently” (e.g., Pullen, 2018; Pullen & Rhodes, 2008). Together, they wrote a proposal for a sub-plenary for EGOS 2021. The organizers' motivation was to build on the growing interest in and practices around “writing differently” (e.g., Gilmore et al., 2019; Grey & Sinclair, 2006; Pullen, Harding & Helin, 2020). In particular, we were interested in experimenting with ways to attend—through creative writing practices—to the embodied and affective experiences and events that emerge in the research encounter between researchers and researched, authors and audience (Gherardi, 2019; Phillips et al., 2014; Pullen, 2018; Pullen & Rhodes, 2015; Thanem & Knights, 2019). Affect is theorized and practiced here as “responses that live in our flesh” (Pullen et al., 2017, p. 106) that are simultaneously individually felt and socially and politically situated and circulated (Ahmed, 2004). The workshop's purpose was to extend arguments around the current exclusion of embodied and affective accounts in conventional academic writing.

The sub-plenary workshop focused on poetic inquiry as a specific method for writing differently that attends to affective circulations in the research. Moreover, poetic inquiry engages with these affective circulations within the research by paying attention to what touches, moves, or changes us in the data or the literature, as well as on what research participants are moved or touched by (see also van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019; van Eck et al., 2021; Ward, 2011). Affect and embodiment are particularly relevant when representing marginalized people and experiences through research. Patricia Hill Collins writes:

Because elite White men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship... Investigating the subjugated

knowledge of subordinate groups ... requires more ingenuity than that needed to examine the stand-points of dominant groups.

(Collins, 2002, pp. 269–270)

By playing with the rhythm of the text, poetry enables researchers to better approach the chaotic and not-yet-known experiences of life (Chadwick, 2017). Moreover, poetic inquiry equips researchers with the sensibility to grasp the affect that circulates through the data, the literature, and us as researchers (Faulkner, 2019; Owton, 2017).

## 2 | POETRY AS METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

Our understanding of poetic inquiry as a research methodology is one that allows for an embodied and affective reading or analysis of the data (Chadwick, 2017; Faulkner, 2019; Owton, 2017). In contrast to the highly systematized and quantified ways of analyzing data that seem to become more prominent in qualitative research (James, 2013), we turn to the (emotional or affective) “value” of the data rather than the “numbers” (e.g., number of codes). However, this does not mean that poetic inquiry does not follow a methodology; it is an affective methodology (Knudsen & Stage, 2015). It seems to us that writing differently approaches focus on the end product of writing, and that the way to get there remains a mystery. The workshop addressed this processual mystery by presenting a methodology that enables concrete steps to be taken to conduct embodied and affective readings and analyses of data. This builds on previous work on poetic inquiry as a methodology (Anthym, 2018; Chadwick, 2017; Faulkner, 2019; Owton, 2017), as well as on other methodologies that allow for a more embodied and affective reading of data (e.g., Chadwick, 2021; Gherardi, 2019; MacLure, 2013).

Experimenting with this methodology collectively was crucial. As one of us mentioned when reflecting on how our approach was collective: “in a collective there is the force of being surrounded... (...) ‘Being a gang’ creates legitimacy and courage in a situation where risks are taken.” Being part of a collective allowed for feeling safe enough to take risks and write differently in a conventional academic context. Other reflections too indicate how the individual reflections presented later on in this paper (the multi-vocality) are informed and made possible by the collective experience. This turned out to be a mutually interdependent relationship as the act of writing differently also enabled this collectivity to emerge. This is underlined in the reflection of one of us who wrote “people who were there, were ready or curious to be vulnerable because poetry was on the table. The proposition of doing poetry has a role in creating this safe, collective space.” Experimenting with poetry together allowed for vulnerability and connections to emerge in an online space where some of us did not know any “faces in the r(/Z)oom” nor would they recognize each other if they “were to cross your path in the street.” The emergence of this unexpected collectivity in and after the workshop was an added bonus to the already relational and situated feminist practice that poetic inquiry can be.

In sum, we experience poetic inquiry as a feminist methodology that allows researchers to see, feel, and understand the embodied and affective intensities of everyday phenomena. As one of us articulated in the process of revising this paper “It entails an opening up to what is there, a freedom to allow my body to partake in the research process attending to the question ‘What is going on here?’” Following this, we see poetic inquiry as feminist for several reasons. Firstly, it takes seriously the body as a space of knowledge creation (Faulkner, 2018; van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019; van Eck et al., 2021). Secondly, as Black feminist writers have taught us, poetry leaves more room than conventional methods of writing and analysis for addressing marginalized and/or silenced experiences, precisely because it offers a vocabulary that is rooted in resistance and otherness (e.g., Anthym, 2018; Lorde, 1984). Thus, in line with feminist ambition and intent, poetic inquiry has the capacity to destabilize the white heteromale and colonial heritage of the Academy (Collins, 2002, 2016) and offers ways of speaking from a position of situated authority rather than universal authority (Anthym, 2018).

### 3 | THE WORKSHOP AND CRAFTING A COLLECTIVE REFLECTION

Poetic inquiry offers a broad range of opportunities to attend to embodied and affective aspects of research (see van Eck et al., 2021). In our online workshop at EGOS, we zoomed in on poetic inquiry as a method for data analysis. As preparation for the workshop, participants were asked to bring a text that was relevant to their research projects such as an interview transcript, fieldnotes, and an academic paper. This could be a text that inspired them or sparked emotions in some way (e.g., anger, frustration, joy, shame). The sub-plenary started with an introduction on the official platform through which all the sub-plenaries were organized. But as this set-up offered only a streaming function, and no opportunities to see participants and exchange thoughts with them, we switched to a Zoom room outside the platform.

Starting from the texts participants brought, we followed four steps, allowing time to work on each step for 10–15 min.

- Step 1: Underline words and (parts of) sentences that strike you (because they touch you, inspire you, resonate, or because they make you angry, sad etcetera). Aim for 10–20 selections.
- Step 2: Write those sentences and words on a separate piece of paper and see if there is a pattern or a storyline. Organize accordingly.
- Step 3: Try to come up with alliterations, metaphors, and rhymes for what you have written down or selected.
- Step 4: Reorganize into a poem—select, remove, reorder, and add when necessary. Listen to and play with the rhythm of your text, for example, by using repetitions, layout, punctuation marks.

While participants were working on each of the steps, the Zoom room went quiet, creating space for everyone to work with their texts in their own way. The session ended with a collective reflection, chaired by Alison. Here, many participants shared how they experienced the workshop, what they learned, and some offered to read the poetry they crafted or shared it through the chat function on Zoom.

In her closing comments, Alison commented on how special it felt to have this type of workshop as an EGOS sub-plenary and suggested we craft a collective publication. Responding to this, Noortje invited by email all participants of the sub-plenary to be part of the working paper. The authors who responded to this invitation were asked to share their poetry and reflections on how they experienced both the workshop and doing poetic inquiry. After receiving the texts, Noortje, Dide, and Katrine wrote a first draft of the article, which was sent out to all contributing authors for their contributions. After incorporation of these, the article was submitted to *Gender, Work and Organization*. When the editorial and peer review comments were received, Noortje created an open document with these comments, inviting all authors to respond to them and suggest changes to the manuscript. All authors wrote extensive responses to the reviews; these responses focused on what the comments provoked for them in relation to their engagement with writing, embodiment, and affect. Furthermore, readings that authors were using in their own writing were shared with the group, and there was an increased sense of collaboration. The final article that you are currently reading is a result of this collective revision process. The poem presented at the beginning of the paper was crafted by Noortje, Dide, and Katrine from the open document in which all authors exchanged insights for the revision. The poem was crafted by following the four-step process described above. As such, although the poem is not collectively crafted, it offers a representation of our collective voice.

In the next section, we present the written reflections of the workshop participants. The reflections are presented in random order. Since some of the participants of the workshop did not respond to the initial call, not all participants are represented here. We would like to acknowledge those who participated in the workshop who for a number of reasons might not have responded to our call, as they contributed to the collective thought process by sharing their personal reflections during that event. Moreover, their presence in the workshop can be interpreted as a form of support for experiments with poetry and writing differently. The paper ends with reflections written by the workshop organizers.

### 3.1 | Margot Leclair: The poet experiment

I have to admit that I felt quite clumsy during the exercise. As an avid reader of poetry, I felt ashamed and very much inexperienced—Me, writing a poem? What a farce! Not to mention the English language—the easiest culprit I could find.

Secondly, I also have to admit that I was a bit suspicious of the 4 steps proposal. Can we really reduce being—or trying to be—a poet to four steps? I have to say I was impressed by the result and by all the beautiful poems shared within the chat. Yes, actually, we can. Or perhaps there is some kind of *poetry-ability* that some do possess more than others.

Finally, I wrote a poem about designing a dress. And then I read in the chat poems about harassment, sadness, exploitation. It led me to wonder: is darkness the necessary muse for writing poetry? Is it possible to touch the audience as subtly when writing about drawing, sewing, love of the fabric? At some point, I have to admit I felt artistic organizing was not dark enough to belong to the group. Is hardship easier to turn into a poem?

A bit of context: I am doing research on artistic organizing. I am more specifically interested in the relational encounters between materials and bodies throughout the creative process. The methodological implications are the following: atmospheres are invariably placed beyond or rather before representation and thus summon spatial poetics. Trying to describe the large, complex, and atmospheric space where materials and bodies circulate around the creative actor is a challenge in terms of representation, and poetry seems like the perfect answer to transcribe in-depth ethnographic work in the studio. But it raised some questions.

First, I have found that writing descriptions through stories and narratives was the answer for me so far, when describing arts, atmospheres, and the organizing. It is the choice of written style that is key within these stories—a language of affects, intensities, and flows. I often write my findings with this challenge in mind: writing as a performative communication, and research as a challenge to convince readers. I work on stories again and again, using the chosen extracts to immerse the reader in the materiality of a creative studio's daily events and feelings, its different and indeterminate spatialities and sensualities. The embodied, committed, and immersive tone through stories is my own tentative of avoiding the customary-static moves of representational and trusted scholarship. After writing this poem, I ask myself: isn't there some sort of risk of losing a conceptual/narrative grip when dealing with so many “floating” concepts (relationality, spatial multiplicity, ambiguities, creativity...), through poetry? Could this poem really help in tightening the narrative, to convey to the audience what I want to describe in a stronger way than a story?

Also, I write about atmospheres and this is in itself already something that can be classified or criticized as evanescent and provocative—at least within the management field. This is all the more true when it comes to creativity: playfulness and the superficiality of creative endeavors often prevail in the social representations of the concepts. I very much agree that so much energy derived from the arts could be laid down in social sciences (how not to?), but I guess if I used poetry, I would feel like part of the 21st *creativity dispositif* (Reckwitz, 2017) by seeking novelty or originality in the writing. There is a risk, I believe, when writing on creativity and the arts, to “try to be like the-ones-we-study.”

In the end, I consider poetry as one possibility within critical and alternative writing. I am so glad when I get the opportunity to read academic papers that include poetry. But for me, perhaps all this could be summarized to those five words: I am not a poet. Or I feel like a clumsy one. And the consequence (again, for me, with my data), is a text that I find less persuasive than an immersive story of a few pages. But both could work hand-in-hand, a poem within a story for instance—particularly for elements for which words are lacking, or which are silenced on the field—and I will definitely try to carry out more poetry-experimenting with my data in the future, or, even better, collaborate with a poet.

*Black or greenish  
Designer not satisfied  
Darker, the colour*

*A cloud of disappointment  
Surrounding us*

*Black or greenish  
The fabric did not appreciate the dye*

*Will try again.  
A cloud of hope  
This time*

### 3.2 | Alistair Thomson

A question asked during the workshop was whether it was possible to use poetry to analyze “dry” data such as statistics or strategic documents. During the workshop, I was a PhD in my first 3 months of research and had no data to draw on during the workshop. To get around this, I quickly downloaded a piece of dry data: an NGO’s strategic document relevant to the region I will likely be researching. As such, I want to provide a reflection on my experience using “dry” data to write poetry as something that can help foreground embodied experiences related to such dry data.

Writing poetry in the workshop through a strategic document contextualized my feelings within broader projects going in the field I intend to study. The document itself painted a dark tunnel through which the strategies outlined in the document could provide a guiding light composed of the cooperative efforts of several local organizations. However, my reading of this document imparted a disappointing dimming of this light as some of these organizations had quite publicly quit the strategy. The feeling of disappointment stirred up memories of people I’d met who seemed to embody the challenges expressed in the strategic document. Indeed, the strategy within the document presented a certain desire to change the way these people lived insofar as they represented the outlook of specific demographics. Consequently, I became very aware of how the document’s strategy was both informed, and desired to affect, certain lived experience through the process of writing poetry in the workshop.

Using a strategic document to write poetry felt like painting a landscape using a map. Maps summarize and order knowledge as an image and, in the process, make said knowledge feel distinct from human perception (Maréchal et al., 2013, p. 191). We use maps as tools to organize and understand the world around us in the same way we use strategic documents and statistics to inform our ideas and actions. The key difference for strategic documents is that they map temporal landscapes and provide means of navigating them (see Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013).

Conversely, landscapes are *experienced* rather than curated. Landscapes are tied to embodied processes of sensing, movement, and being alongside people in an environment (Maréchal et al., 2013). Maps are means to make sense of the embodied experiences in landscapes that would otherwise be difficult to fully comprehend. In some sense, maps flatten the depth of experiences present in a landscape into an image. To write poetry through maps is to reintroduce the embodied experiences of landscape to which the map refers.

To write poetry using maps is therefore to foreground our embodied experiences of landscape. I feel this has two implications. First, strategic documents as maps are the product of experiences located in landscapes. Writing poetry through these “dry” documents provides a means to be reflexive about how the narratives imparted by such documents affect and are drawn from embodied experiences of landscapes. Second, writing poetry through strategic documents distills feelings and thoughts we experience or encounter within the landscapes we study. Both these implications still require a qualitative sense of the environment research takes place in. However, I feel this idea of writing poetry through maps could apply to quantitative data insofar as this data could be used to raise questions about how this data exists in relation to embodied experiences of landscape. Perhaps, we can use maps as muses to help us understand the relationships the lived experiences we research in the field have to the statistics and strategy articulated by organizations.

### 3.3 | Anne Theunissen

At the start of the exercise, I felt insecure and curious. The workshop sparked my self-awareness of my own lack of talent in writing poetry, and I wondered whether this style of writing (or is it more a tool for data-analysis?) is something that any researcher could deploy, irrespective of any prior experience with it. I also asked myself whether there is something such as a good academic poem. How would journal reviewers determine the quality of poetic academic writing? Would they focus on the process, or rather on the end product? Or are these two elements intertwined and equally important?

I liked the way in which the organizers of the workshop stimulated us as participants to select a piece of text from our collected data that we recalled for evoking strong emotions in ourselves, as I felt that that type of data tends to be the most interesting kind. I also thought: Would I need to discard large parts of my collected data of which I do not have particularly strong memories? Are certain types of data more suitable for poetic writing than others? If my own emotions are the guiding principle in data selection, how does poetic writing relate to assumptions about knowledge production? What are the ontological and epistemological implications of this all?

During the process of selecting sentences that would form the basis of my poem, I felt liberated by the freedom that I suddenly had. While my conventional writing style would restrict me by the need to look for concise and to-the-point citations of which the content would capture complex power relations in a few sentences, I liked the way in which I could now focus on the emotions of my respondents instead of on how accurately they could verbalize their experiences. I felt that this approach enabled me to stay much closer to what my respondents attempted to convey, and that it allowed me to capture much more than only that which was literally said. During my conventional approaches, I often experienced frustration about my inability to communicate a sense of what was expressed in between the lines, as that was not quotable. Maybe poetic writing can reduce the loss of valuable yet unquotable data, and thereby enhance our understanding about organizational (in)equality mechanisms in ways that go beyond knowledge as captured by conventional writing styles? I started to see the potential of deploying poetry as a relevant approach to give voice to historically underrepresented groups, as I often noticed during my data collection how these types of respondents experienced difficulties articulately verbalizing the problems that they faced. This may not only be related to the way in which they tend to be the kind of actors who are generally silenced and are simply not used to talk, but also to the complexity of the inequality mechanisms with which they are confronted, which may be particularly hard to pinpoint and talk about.

When writing my poem, I stayed very close to the original words of my respondent, and only copied and pasted some sentences in order to make them flow and rhyme like a poem. I felt quite embarrassed about the result, especially when taking a look at the poems of the other workshop participants, which I perceived to be more aesthetic and as appearing to more accurately reflect respondents' emotional experiences than my own poem. I wondered whether my poem stayed too close to traditional types of writing in which respondents are literally cited, as it seemed to me that my colleagues had written pieces of text that deviated much more from mainstream types of quotes than my poem. I wondered whether I should continue my attempts to write academic poetry to improve my skills, as I felt excited about the potential of academic poetry.

### 3.4 | Anna Brown

Poetry writing provided a sanctuary amid the intensity of online conferencing and from the constant push and pull of academic life. In the workshop, I chose to draw on interviews and auto-ethnographic diaries that explored the experiences of UK-based early-career academics and their experiences of transition from doctoral studies to academic posts. For 20 min, I was reabsorbed by the data, reconnecting with words on paper highlighting phrases that stood out to me. As more of the page turned yellow in highlight, a pattern emerged from otherwise disconnected words; forming a story and developing a rhythm previously unheard. The interview was coming alive. The words poured



over anew, aroused feelings of sadness and familiarity, as well as urgency. The text felt rawer, and the experiences more personal than before; exposing stories of inequality that had lain dormant, so far unnoticed, and taken for granted.

Writing poetry was not easy. Most prominently feelings of (il)legitimacy arose: whose voice was being privileged in the making of this poem? How could I maintain the meaning of my informants and not overwrite their experience with my own? It had felt odd to openly write my experience into somebody else's, to move their words around on the page and to frame their story in different ways than was spoken. Yet at the same time it was freeing, in the sense that I had found a way of giving voice to experience that was threaded throughout the interview in creative and playful ways.

As I let go and followed the resonant phrases, I found myself jumping from sentence to paragraph rather than reading in a naturally linear format. This gave a sense of re-casting the interview of replaying the conversation with different emphasis. The emerging structure of this new dialog felt less of my making and took on a shape of its own; offering a new way of telling our story, together. It feels like so often in research we try to erase our researcher body, but here, unabashedly, my body met other bodies and together we delved into new ways of seeing and interpreting experience.

I was excited to find that writing poetry allowed me to see as well as feel the data in ways that I had not before. Yet my thoughts soon returned to my skill in poetry writing as I questioned further, had I over pruned the text? Had I elaborated enough? Was the poem good enough? The writing felt more intimate and personal, which heightened my concern about its completeness and resonance with others. It was comforting to hear that poems do not need to be "good" although I remained shy of sharing my work, with the perfectionist in me rendering my attempts "unfinished."

Through this experience of writing poetry, I have come to know my research differently, and have seen how it is possible to privilege corporeal and creative methods in developing resonant and faithful research texts. In particular, a creative engagement and license to play with words opened up new ways of writing and thinking. In the re-organizing and re-writing of the text, the interview became malleable and plastic, giving way to the emergence of new forms and new ways of knowing. Insights and connections began to take hold that sparked new imaginaries, allowing me to attempt writing research differently. No matter how uncomfortable this new approach felt, poetry offered a framework within which this activity could take place. Although only a fleeting engagement with writing poetry, I was left hopeful to try again to explore how informants' experiences might intersect or become as one through the use of creative writing and to let go of perfect and complete notions of what we are told research should look and feel.

### **I was lucky.**

I don't know if that's a real job then,  
covering all bases?

Moving to London  
Delayed study to keep up academic paces

Relocation costs, no chance  
But there's profile to enhance

The nightmare begins,  
my optimism dims.

Stressed and overwhelmed.  
which one does what, timetables  
emails  
the whole lot.

### 3.5 | Maryse Tremblay

I have a theatre background. I wrote a play and have been an art manager for several years before I decided to begin my PHD.

Insidious discrimination.

Normalized sexist behaviors.

Mistrust. Exhaustion.

Willful blindness.

I wanted to make sense of these experiences and bring that knowledge to the world.

To make a difference.

To use the voice of science to give *them* a place to be heard.

But science has its rules. Science has an “objective” voice, a traditional neutral tone.

How to bring despair, anger, or even hope and joy within these monotonous constraints?

Science writings cannot make us feel what it's like to experience phenomena.

Writing science was boring work.

Before attending the sub-pleinary “Writing Organization Studies from the Margins: Poetry, Embodiment and Affect” at EGOS 2021 Conference, I understood poetry as a way to more meaningfully communicate the experiences of a field so that readers could feel what it was like to be there. I had never thought of poetry as a way to analyze data.

I was fully committed to trying this proposition even though I was not prepared to participate in it. The majority of my data is in French... I believed it would be easier if I used an English transcription and I found this old transcription from an ongoing and stalled project about organizational change in an orchestra.

They asked us to underline sentences that were inspiring to us. I began reading and thought that there were not many inspiring quotes to be used. Unprepared people are not that eloquent (myself and the interviewee included). I started thinking about what it meant to be “inspired.” It seems to me that it was filled with feelings. To choose inspiring quotes meant to follow these feelings. Following my feelings. That seemed like an easy task. But our academic training teaches us to be rational and to put emotions aside to prevent us from being biased. We learn to distance ourselves from the subject we observe; to be non-participative observant. Therefore, I was not “feeling” much while reading through this transcription. I have to say I was not the interviewer during this transcribed encounter. I transcribed it and I analyzed this transcription in Nvivo a while back (maybe 2 years ago), but I was not there when the interview occurred. I did not see the expression on the interviewee's face while he was talking and I was not the one who asked the questions. I wonder if it would have changed something. If I would have “felt” more?

There was also an expectation to write something beautiful... After all, poetry is an aesthetic art. Maybe I wanted to impress? It was my first EGOS conference. My first big conference, period. I'm an unknown PhD candidate surrounded by eminent researchers, including the editor of *Gender, work and organization*. I surely wanted to make a good impression...

In fact, I was filled with emotions that were not associated with the transcription, which made me numb to the feelings communicated by the respondent in my transcription. It required me to let go about the expected results and focus on poetry as an analytical tool to start writing something. Process is imperfect. Expecting imperfection was reassuring.

I started considering another strategy. What if I stopped focusing on me and started considering the feeling of the moment my interviewee was describing? My respondent wanted to share the first concert of the new artistic director. The audience had heard about this new arrival through the media. The members of the administrative board were eager to see if they had made the right choice. It was a crucial moment.

### The resulting analytical “Poem”

- that anticipation has become a reality
  - they were riveted
  - they were cut up
- they were on the edge of their seat, engaged
- you could have heard a pin drop into the audience
  - And I could feel that too
  - no cough, no movement
- strangely, no perceptible sign of life
- but while time seemed to have stopped, we were more alive and together.

Indeed, it is not a piece of art. Writing poetry in a second language is challenging altogether. However, the beauty of this “poem” is not its result. It is its process. Poetry as an analytical tool and not a communication device helped me reconnect with the person behind the data, hence bringing that dusty data back to life.

## 3.6 | Camilla Quental

During the exercise, I felt very comfortable and peaceful, even if we were meeting online. I saw some faces through Zoom that I already knew, some new faces, and I felt there were no power games, that everyone participating in this session seemed to be genuinely interested in sharing, in learning how to write from the margins, in using poetry in their writing. I thought “this is so rare in academia,” and felt grateful to be there, at that moment, to give myself that moment to write something together, at the same time as the other participants.

Using poetry, which is something I have been trying to do more recently, allows one to “write from the heart.” It allows us to use other forms of knowledge, to be less stuck to the right format expected (with which we can lose sight of what we wished to convey in the first place), to write freely, to draw from our emotions. Using poetry made me think that we get closer to the Epistemologies of the South, which is an area I have been studying and reading a lot about, in particular the work of the Portuguese sociologist and activist de Sousa Santos (2018).

The exercise generates, in my view, more pleasure in writing, more enthusiasm, and an interpretation that is different from what we are used to experience in “traditional academia.” In a way, it allows us to reflect and make sense of the phenomenon we are studying in a more profound, affective, and embodied way that should be valued.

The exercise also generated questions for me about the language used. Writing poetry in another language, other than your native, is not easy. Being Brazilian, I first took notes with words in English during the exercise. However, when it came to writing, I could only write in Portuguese, which is my native language. The flow and the rhymes of the writing were only possible in my native language, and then I translated it later. It made me reflect on the additional challenges academics whose native language is not English have to face to be able to write articles for Anglo-Saxon journals with an academic language. I also reflected on how great it is to see that some rare academic communities (such as GWO) are opening up to streams and workshops in other languages, allowing for a greater inclusion, in particular from the so-called “Global South.” It is certainly a beginning to try to reduce the cognitive *injustice* and to open a conversation with other ways of knowing.

Below, I expose the poetry I produced during the sub-plenary, which was about the session itself and what I felt during it, what it meant to me to take part in it (in Portuguese and the translation in English):

Esse silêncio é confortável	This silence is comfortable
Nesse Zoom vejo todo mundo amável	In this Zoom room I see everyone is kind
O que será do amanhã?	What will tomorrow be?
Nenhuma de nós aqui sabe falar	None of us can say
Mas nós sabemos o que não queremos	But we know what we don't want
Aquilo por que temos que lutar	What we have to fight for
Tanta coisa em comum	So much in common
Temos que conseguir criar	We must succeed in creating
Um cordão de solidariedade	A chain of solidarity
que nem em palavras conseguimos expressar	Not even words can express
Sem hierarquias	Without hierarchies
Sem egos para demonstrar	Without egos to show
Mais coisas para agradecer	More things to thank for
“Obrigada por tudo” falar	To say “Thank you for everything”
Assim talvez conseguiremos	So maybe we'll be able to
Fazer a humanidade continuar	Make humanity go on
Mas tudo isso é incerto	But all this is uncertain
Quem viver verá	Those who live will see

Translated with [www.DeepL.com/translator](http://www.DeepL.com/translator) (free version).

### 3.7 | Ana Paula Lafaie

#### 3.7.1 | Writing differently as “travesura”: A mischief we do for fun

I am attending this important conference for the first time, at the end of my second year of (pandemic) doctoral studies, to present a paper that shows that I'm learning the practice of writing in academic ways.

Academic English is not my mother tongue.  
My fingers get stuck, hesitant, fearful.  
How to start *this* paragraph?

Another type of writing is possible, one that facilitates engaging in an open “infinite game” (Harré et al., 2017), where I don't judge beforehand my ideas and my fingers relax in typing.

Just a short poem.

For myself, for you.

My confidence will kick-in, the focus will *flow*.

An affective flow where something emerges,

ideas dare to come out and materialize in words I can see.

Sometimes in this language, *y a veces en otro*.

I used to be fluent in expressing ideas through drawings to design, produce, and install furniture in spaces. My thought process works better when I can communicate through images and objects. I still get lost in the sea of text, trying to perceive and grasp the figures and meanings. I doodle in the margins, with mind-maps and colors to anchor myself to the texts.

### 3.7.2 | By writing differently I gain space

During the exercise, the attention is not passively on the screen, rather active somewhere else. There is a sense of exciting curiosity, without hurry, even if we have 1h. We are sharing silence in this mischievous activity.

The instruction is to read something related to your research and note what calls your attention. I chose to work with the fieldnotes that my co-author wrote on the LGBTQ + protests against the discriminatory laws that Hungary approved recently. I have not read his text beforehand, this is an ongoing collaboration about how identity work is organized through Instagram. As I read some phrases stand out sharply.

I can recognize myself reacting "*mmh yes!*".

Why is it affective? I don't know but I underline: A word, a phrase, a concept, emotions.

Now we have a new instruction: we should type them and re-arrange them. 'Do' something with them.

I type the exact words and I play around by giving them different positions.

I give them space to breathe.

Ones aligned to the left margin, others to the center.

From the sea of text some clear ideas emerge: a red thread?

It seems like a collage. An image. Beyond plain blocks of text.

I'm seated next to my co-author, we are alone in the office. He has been listening to the instructions, while working on the slides for his upcoming presentation. I took advantage of his company and I read out loud the new poem. Hearing myself vocalizing and saying it aloud makes me relate differently with what I'm writing. He smiles and mutters "*mmh interesting.*" The mic is muted so the other co-participants can't hear us.

Privacy to mischief?

I iterate. I read out loud again.

*Poesía en voz alta.*

The rhythm it's easier to find.

Yes, it's ready.

"*I like it*" Our time together is ending.

"*Are we sharing?*" I wonder. I'm curious to read others' poems and see how they engaged with the process.

"*Are we going to read them out loud?*" I have not heard their voices yet!

An urge itches and I dare to share my text in the chat.

Two clicks.

Ctrl + C Ctrl + V

there it goes, now it's public for everyone's eyes.

I get a thrill.

Others share theirs!

The hour is over. We need to return to the very-serious-academic-conference we are at.

The glimpse of other ways of doing is a joy that will carry me through the next days (of staring at my screen).

I thrive in these spaces.

I learned to: not hesitate, no overthinking it. To *feel* what I'm reading by paying attention to how I resonate with. Then to rearrange key concepts so I can tell the story differently.

*Academic English*  
*I must remember that I*  
*may start by*  
*typing*  
*just*  
*one*  
*at*  
*a*  
*time*  
  
*I*  
*let go*  
*by*  
*entering*  
*another line*  
*not go back*  
*get on track*

### 3.7.3 | Resulting poem

*emptiness?*  
*intimidating*  
*looming danger*  
  
*they voguing*  
*at parliament*  
*not paedophilia*  
  
*affects*  
  
*single narrative*  
*sharing and caring?*  
*too much*  
*performative*  
*activism*  
*problematic*  
  
*stream of never-ending*  
*yet lonely*

## 3.8 | Marjan de Coster

This sub-plenary on “writing from the margins” was great. For me, it was a very embodied and relational experience, something quite exceptional, especially when considering the virtual environment. I believe this has largely to do with the space it created—somewhat surprisingly at a conference like EGOS—for like-minded academics who are

trying to move beyond the normative (masculine) conditions of writing and publishing. Though our topics of study and research might differ, we were in there together, trying to figure out how to translate what has been said in-between respondents' lines. At least, that is precisely what I was and am looking for and why I attended the plenary. I believe that by presenting the "coherent" narratives of respondents in our papers, we limit ourselves in bringing across what has been told. In recent years, I have been interested in understanding how we can encourage respondents to express themselves differently, before their narrative inscription into the norms that constitute us, for instance, by using visual methods such as photos, drawings, craftwork, and so on. By attending the workshop and doing the exercise, I came to understand how poetry still offers a different way of bringing the narrative forms of constitution. It is a different way to narrate oneself or to re-constitute the narratives of respondents, which allows for a deeper dimension of what can or has been told. It enables us as writing researchers to express what moves the respondents and/or moves you as the researcher, to show the emotions and affect expressed throughout the interviews, the silences, the hesitations, the struggles... without necessarily writing them down. For instance, using metaphors, playing with interpunctuation, iteration, and space, it allows us to convey feelings that are not easily put into words. In this sense, I consider it a very powerful tool for any qualitative study in which the focus of interest is quite sensitive, such as inequality, vulnerability, loss, harassment, and so on. And I already have some ideas on how to use it for some of my future research projects, both as a way of interpretation and as a form of data-gathering—by asking respondents to write down their experiences in poetry. The only thing I am still trying to figure out is how to add text, or an interpretation of the poetry presented as "findings" of a paper. So any advice on this is always welcome.

Below, you can find the excerpt I wrote during the exercise. I wrote it based on my study on a protest movement, in which those at the margin of society mobilize against neoliberal capitalism, the economic regime that impoverishes them. I tried to express the struggle, desire to break free from the hegemonic system and the desperation that often came through their voices.

As a fragile bird who moves in its cage,  
 spreading its wings,  
 searching for a way out.  
 The vulnerable body moves the street,  
 raising its voice,  
 disengaging as a way out.

Overall, I want to thank the organizers again for this interesting plenary, and the insightful exercise. It would be great to have a longer seminar or so on this.

### 3.9 | Alison Pullen

Spaces emancipate, if I trust them,  
 and create if we trust ourselves.  
 Bodies that write in, and through space  
 engender possibilities for solidarity.

Solidarities amongst newly formed bodies,  
 assembled with purpose  
 to contest the normative conditions imposed,  
 most women, in search of a home, belonging.

Trusting to write,  
writing poetry to trust.  
Rooted in unconventionality,  
Activist writing.

Recalling, subtly powerful,  
Still, quiet, trembling,  
United,  
“Every woman is a rebel” — Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*.

“She did not want to move, or to speak.  
She wanted to rest,  
to lean,  
to dream.  
She felt very tired.” — Virginia Woolf, *The Years*.

In the present our histories are remembered,  
and leap into the future,  
leaving trails on the page  
as if she always mattered.

## 4 | ORGANIZERS' REFLECTIONS

In the aftermath of these contributions, it feels inappropriate to write a traditional conclusion laying down the main take-aways in a disembodied and distanced way. Instead, we share some of our own reflections on organizing and hosting the workshop, and how these tie in to some of our own considerations and ambivalence about writing poetry. There are many we's in play here: the we of all the authors; the we of the organizers, the we of the participants. There is an awkwardness involved in these different positionings of our collective voice(s) and our individual ones that is reflected throughout this paper. Below the main organizers and leading authors present their reflections to add to the multi-vocal accounts of the participants and discussant. In doing so, we also address the power differences inherent in this collaborative endeavor.

### 4.1 | Katrine Meldgaard Kjær

I relate deeply to some of the insecurities expressed by the contributors in relation to writing poetry; to me, writing poetry feels like a particularly vulnerable endeavor for a researcher. Writing poetry always feels to me like stepping out of line, like taking on a project I can't really claim and am not sure I know what to do with. It's an unruly space, at once both separated but also deeply embedded in traditional academic practices and structures. Perhaps, this is why I also felt a sense of unease when reading the reflections about the workshop that expressed gratitude and congratulations for creating a space for exploring this method. Who am I to receive this gratitude? The participants did all the work, after all, all we did was provide a space to do this work. But perhaps that space was in itself something of a contribution: when we first signed up to do this sub-plenary at EGOS, we didn't know what it actually was—we



thought we knew, we certainly had unarticulated ideas about it as a space to do more informal workshop-based activities. But it turned out to be something else indeed, something much more traditional than we had assumed. First of all, sub-plenaries were, we found out, typically not workshops. This was shown in the technical set-up as well: the default setting for the meeting platform was set so only “speakers,” not participants, could be heard. After much negotiating and many miscommunications, we ended up finding a work-around: we provided participants with a link to a Zoom room outside the conference platform where we could migrate to in order to speak to each other without technological restrictions. This, I think, turned out to be a perfect setting for doing poetry work; for engaging with methods that spring from a frustration with the limitations of possibilities within the established ways of doing things in academia. And which finds ways to scope out a place for voices typically not heard. Poetry as a workaround to traditional academic writing if you will.

I am grateful for any space to do this work, and to do it in collaboration. The vulnerability of writing poetry for research feels less dangerous when in a collective; when we can create new standards and methods for academic research together. Doing this kind of research and writing pushes me to continually reflect on questions of representation; also in relation to how this poetry writing is practiced. One of the above reflections raised the issue of power. A question I have myself been pondering is how power is at play in our own research collectives, those who aim to “do different”; what does it mean for an editor of *GWO* and three published and profiled scholars to ask contributors to reflect on this workshop, and what would it look like to confront the uncomfortable issue of hierarchy and power in research environments that study these precise things? I am not sure I have an answer to these questions, but as writing differently in general, and poetry in particular, becomes more established—hey, we went to *EGOS* after all! As we learned, it doesn't get much more established than that—I think power is a key point to consider.

## 4.2 | Noortje van Amsterdam

Thanks for raising the issue of power, Katrine. It brings up a set of additional questions for me: What does it mean to draw inspiration of Black feminists about articulating marginalized experiences in a predominantly white, highly educated group? What does it mean that the workshop was conducted in English, as Camilla aptly pointed out? What kind of knowledge do these contextual framings and power relations produce? Who gets to speak and about what? This also dovetails with the question from Margot, who wonders if poetry can only be used in research to express hardship and suffering. My answer to that question would be that poetry is more widely applicable than that, because affect is everywhere—any social space is an affective space, and emotions and affectivity are always part of research. Affective methodologies pay attention to any number of emotions or sensations that circulate, be they positive, negative or otherwise (Chadwick, 2017; Knudsen & Stage, 2015). The reason I turned to poetry in my own research was because it allowed me to attend to the taboos that impel silence and as a result are often highly affectively charged (e.g., Kjær & van Amsterdam, 2020; van Amsterdam, 2020). Yet this doesn't mean poetry can't be used for other purposes, as Alistair also indicate. Similar to his arguments about ‘dry data’ I have had students write poetry from policy documents that seemed quite boring to me. This poetry turned out to be very insightful and evocative. As in this workshop, new perspectives and practices challenge me to be humble and appreciative of what others can offer.

Coming back to Katrine's point about skewed power relations within this group; I believe issues around power need to be thought through and re-worked through the lenses of ethics, care, and solidarity. This way, I hope we can move toward more accessible spaces in academia where a multiplicity of voices, languages, and experiences can be spoken and heard. I am not sure the workshop succeeded in doing this, and maybe that's too big an ask. Yet all the clumsy, uncomfortable, inspiring, confusing, and energizing attempts at doing something differently, at breaking through the white, hypermasculine structures of academia, must count for something, right?

### 4.3 | Dide van Eck

I wholeheartedly agree with the concerns that you both raise. Maybe one way to confront the issue of hierarchy and power between us and the participants could be by sharing some of the vulnerability that our workshop participants have shown. Thus, rather than turning to conventional academic writing, I will share my reflections on the workshop below:

#### 4.3.1 | A space of conflicted possibilities

In our desperate attempts  
to make up for lost connections  
we turn to our computer screens

We sit back  
and let ourselves become connected  
Turning into little pop-ups,  
boxed within each other's screens

Something feels off  
We pop up in a space that  
only facilitates  
ego's talking

EGOS -  
funny name for this  
conference

Something feels off

so we flee  
only to stay silent,  
collectively

I feel safe here  
In the dis-/comfort of our collective silence  
wrapped up in my 2D presence

Something feels right  
Something feels off  
I feel conflicted

Who can inhabit this space  
without feeling squeezed

into the corseted conventions  
that dominate here?

How can we inhabit this space  
while using it  
differently?

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## ORCID

Noortje van Amsterdam  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4758-1298>

Margot Leclair  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7851-1308>

Alistair Thomson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1735-1830>

Ana Paula Lafaie  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1802-2577>

Anna Brown  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0509-9647>

Camilla Quental  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2290-6554>

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

The authors of this article met at the EGOS 2020 conference on a sub plenary about writing from the margins. We share an interest in writing differently, in particular poetry and poetic inquiry. We come from diverse institutions but all work within management and organization studies.

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