

Empowering the Intangible

Art of Management & Organization Conference 2016

Conference Proceedings

Edited by Dr Jenna Ward & Prof Stephen Linstead



EMPOWERING THE INTANGIBLE
exploring, feeling and expressing through the arts

Photo: Mariano Cecowski, Cueva de las Manos (Cave of the Hands), Río Pinturas, Argentina, c. 7,300 BC

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**Empowering the Intangible:
Exploring, Feeling and Expressing Through the Arts**

8th Art of Management & Organization Conference

IEDC-Bled School of Management, Slovenia, 1-4 September 2016

In the spirit of exploration, play, creativity and critique, the 2016 Art of Management and Organization conference highlights the intangible aspects of organizational life. Proliferating our academic and professional discourses are calls to recognize, engage and empower the intangible aspects of organizational life – the felt, sensory and emotional aspects that so often go under the radar. Like the medieval court jester that could speak of things courtiers could not, the conference theme “Empowering the intangible” seeks out novel ways of exploring, feeling and expressing management and organization through the arts.

Building on the work of the 2012 Creativity & Critique theme in York and the 2014 Creativity and Design theme in Copenhagen, the 2016 conference embraces the arts and aesthetics as critical design elements – as inquiry, methodology, development resources, etc. – to explore, feel and express the felt, sensory and emotional aspects of management, leadership and daily organizational life. The 2016 Art of Management & Organization Conference sees over 150 delegates from around the world coming together to explore, feel and express what it means to empower the intangible through the arts in the form of conference paper presentations, interactive workshops, community art projects, films, installations and performances. Where else would you find such an open, critically creative approach to business and management studies?

For more information about the Art of Management & Organization conference and other activities including the journal *Organizational Aesthetics* please see our web site and Facebook page www.facebook.com/ArtofManagementandOrganization

This publication presents a selection of full papers presented at the AoMO conference in 2016 and have been subject to peer-review.



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Beyond an island experience towards an archipelago of collaborative learning.

Daniel Doherty

Abstract – this paper constitutes an autoethnographic account of one's delegate's inner process post participation in the September 2016 Art of Management and Organisation Conference (AoMO) in Bled, Slovenia. This account troubles issues concerning the persistence of learning and social connection post the 'island' experience of a conference itself. It charts the 'call and response' patterns of written exchange between the autoethnographer and his respondents, relating the effects of this reflexive 'call and response' on both parties sense of self and sense of professional direction. The paper suggests that through this written exchange the conference experience ceases to be a nostalgia infused island and instead becomes a generative archipelago that clusters learning and propulsive action towards itself.

Introduction

Academic conferences represent a moment in time, the highlights of which are usually feted then consigned to memory through award distributing, expressions of appreciations, a clamorous taking of photos before air-kissed farewells, book-ended by the publication of the proceedings. With the best of intentions, the commitments made by delegates to stay in touch, to work collaboratively with each other across disciplines and institutions, and to work differently in their field tend to display a dishearteningly short half-life. Beyond the wistful knowledge that we delegates may all very well meet next year to do it all over again – when we will make the same vain promises to keep in touch – we know deep inside that contact with each other will be spasmodic and that potential departures from current practice will be suffocated by the pressures of the day-to-day..

For many, academic management conferences constitute a quite perfunctory experience, a transactional arrangement presaged by low expectation. The conference in memory remains an island experience, where the main aim is to give 'my' paper an airing in a professional setting, and to meet some folk that might help progress your next paper. It may also serve at some level to assess the competition. With such low expectations, it is little wonder that the half-life of conference learning is subject to intense decline. This dynamic is well known and often enough complained about: yet the question of what factors might cause learning persistence alongside of enduring collaboration as opposed to those factors driving derogation is rarely explored. The AoMO series of conferences seek to redress this entropic tendency through engaging affect through the aesthetic, in addition to working at the cognitive level. Even then, AoMO is subject to the dynamics of derogation. t

This paper seeks to address the tensions between decay and persistence through autoethnographic exploration of one delegate's post-conference experiences. It tracks in particular the 'call and response' with other delegates that is evoked through the sharing of a post conference blog. The blog is also shared more widely with other colleagues who did not participate in the conference but who are sympathetic to the themes in play. This paper presents verbatim transcripts of the two major blogs thus far written; interspersed with some detail on delegate feedback on my 'voice' offered at the conference itself and in response to the blog. In addition this paper include personal reflections from respondents relating to the impact of the blog on their experience of the issues expressed; and of the extent to which the blog propels them towards singular and collaborative action.

BLOG 1, three days on from conference:

'Busking my way towards Bled'

As i basked in a sense of profound plentitude following the closure of the Art of Management Conference at Bled, Slovenia, I ask myself why it was that this particular conference hit the spot so well for me, this

time around, when often academic conferences leave me flat and frustrated, unfulfilled? The answer comes back that this sense of completion was much to do with what had come before, and then the way in which the conference process pulled together a number of loose and somewhat disconnected strands in my life. Leading up to the conference, summer 2016 contained a powerful mix of music festivals and voice / singing workshops of all kinds, interlaced with an urge to engage in reflective writing into my past and possible futures, an urge that pressed deeper the longer summer went on. This writing included rumination on the music that shaped my 1980s, a specific provocation initiated by Stephen Linstead on Facebook, which propelled this inquiry into the role of music in my life well beyond that particular decade.

Alongside of that introspection was my pushing to get tangible and semi-respectable publications out of a backlog of writings that have been hanging around on my guilt- list for an increasingly long and frustrating time, as I continued to struggle with what various reviewers have made of them. What occurred in this re-writing process though was far from simply editing my backlog to a state somewhere fit for consumption. Instead I found myself increasingly writing reflective 'accounts of practice' based on close personal experiences, two such offerings proving to be well received by editors and reviewers of 'practice' journals.

Meanwhile my more controversial autoethnographic pieces continued to receive the usual knock-backs from the editors of posh journals, which was hardly a surprise. In the end i sent off these by now archaic pieces to zero star journals that seemed happy enough to Hoover them up, placing them somewhere out there in the ether, while offering me closure and an opportunity to move onto fresh writing. All of this helped me to clarify what it is that i like to write and how i like to write it, personally and expressively, at a time in life when i am not under the guillotine of 'publish or perish,' but while I am still feeling strong need to make sense of the the world within me and around me in written form. This impulse to word my world includes my need to explore my whole self all, not simply those pieces that might be of academic or professional interest to others.

In the course of all of this I have found myself writing about my various musical and voice workshop experiences, including 'men singing' events, then sharing these reflections with fellow participants in a different form of accounts of practice, in a different setting. I also found myself writing into and revisiting of a number of academic and professional 'ouch' moments that were presenting themselves, which were asking to be looked at and dealt with. This need for backward sense making was accompanied by the usual 'age and stage' questions that continually present themselves in the seventieth decade, including asking the perennial question of how long one might persist in teaching and researching management in a business school setting. Some days the answer feels like 'forever'; while just the wrong thoughtless email at a time when the body protests a little too much is enough to make me want to pack up working in that context immediately.

All of this then was the existential soup swirling around in my life as i approached the AoMO conference in Bled. It occurs to me now that if i had assembled these various elements in a Venn diagram. then the answer right at the centre of that diagram might well have been the Art of Management Conference, and all that it brought with it. The beginning of the conference was perfect, as i thought it might be, featuring as it did Frankie Armstrong, long time hero of mine leading an Archetypes voice workshop that was unparalleled in its range and power. Those of we twelve participants fortunate enough to experience this event severally said that 'this workshop alone would have made the conference fee worthwhile'; 'there could have been no better start to a conference' to 'all conferences should begin with a voice workshop like this one.' The voice workshop felt immediately familiar, but the exploration of leadership archetypes through voice and movement was new and highly enlightening. i learned and corporeally intuited a great deal, including a painful review of some of my more recent lucifer - type falls from grace, and the pain of speaking truth to power. Once this fundamentally challenging and embracing workshop finished I dropped into a plenary inquiry into how this conference might be made

different from other 'academic conferences'. The need for this question made little sense to me. Not after the power of the archetypes workshop provided the answer.

The Frankie Armstrong workshop caused those of us who were there to bond powerfully around that intimate embodied experience. We were there for each other throughout the conference. We had the inside track. We found ourselves following each other into similar workshop streams, including the 'storytelling' stream, where much licence was afforded to express ourselves in dialogue, in song and in movement. In between the cracks of these various presentations and events, close conversations were held in poetic spaces and on crammed bus trips between gala dinners and musical performances, where raw moments and unfinished business in our histories and ensuing personal dilemmas could be given an airing.

Beyond this catharsis and personal repair flowing from sharing with fellow travellers who have been there or somewhere like it, there was the opportunity to share one's own arts based learning interventions, and to have others appreciate and build upon these. In turn we were intrigued and often inspired by the dazzling artistry of our fellow delegates various creative and courageous approaches. One aspect of the conference process was that each of us had only thirty minutes or so to share our arts based practice applied in a management setting, a challenge that meant that our work and expression needed to be compressed in 'haiku' form. For many of us this meant that we needed to forsake the intellectual scaffolding surrounding our offering and dive straight into experiential immersion. In my case this meant reducing the explanation of my piece on the application of voice work to the training and development of executive coaches into one or two sentences. I found myself saying 'my voice work and my coach training used to occupy distinct universes. Now I am finding that each are informing the other, more strongly by the day, as I grow bolder in my experimentation.' This was new to me, and played at the back of my mind as I launched the group in resplendent song.

Casting my eyes around the room as we moved towards a close, it occurred to me that one similarity between this gathering and music festivals was that while some participants were materially well endowed, through a regular job that may or may not have been connected to the arts; that there were others, in the same way as so many musicians and street performers, living a precarious life sustained only by their commitment to the expression of their art. I never fail to be so admiring of such folk that persist without the aid of a safety net.

Blog 2, four weeks after conference:

'Emergent autumnal threads, post Bled.'

Immediately after the Bled conference I stayed on in the town itself, away from the Business School, welcoming Louise and continuing to breathe the mountain air, while allowing the heightened excitements of the conference to settle to a more reflective place. Sitting at the kitchen table, gazing over the snow tipped mountains, I allowed myself to free-write. What emerged from that doodling was the blog I shared with you a few weeks ago, which indicated that a sense of fresh direction was afoot, without knowing exactly what that direction might be. In a tentative plan for 2016 - 17 - which I had drafted pre- Bled - I had sketched 'more of the same', suggesting I follow the pattern of the past two years. However, satisfactory though those experiences have been, the Bled revelations have turned that direction on its head. This blog represents my next level of sense making, four weeks on from Bled, and seeks to gain a sense of what that new direction might be.

On completion of my original Bled blog, I sent it out to the world, primarily to those who had shared the Bled experience, but also to those close to me who might help me make better sense of this fresh direction, or even want to join in with wherever it might be headed. I pressed the send button then

eagerly awaited a response, but for a while nothing came back from this blog sharing. As time wore on I began to feel no little embarrassment at having sent this piece out at all, wondering if Bled was after all a chimera. Perhaps I was alone in the romantic notion that something had profoundly shifted, while others were sensibly back at their day jobs, leaving me adrift, wistfully staring out at the far away mountains, while my day job inbox lay unattended. It was just at the moment when, with a sigh, I was resigning myself to returning to 'more of the same,' that the slender threads of connection that I had tugged in my flush of post Bled inspiration began to yield responses.

The first response came from my near neighbour Jo Trefla, with whom I had shared a sequence of conference moments while sat in the narrative stream. She wrote 'I note that at the point of writing you do not move to start shaping 'it' into 'something', some direction or output. I like this – I like it as a way of being/working/thinking – to hold out the 'what' for as long as possible, to let the 'what' emerge as opposed to forcing a something before it is ready.'

This invocation to hang with the uncertainty proved relieving, and I immediately felt less awkward at having put out such an invitation. It was good to be reminded by Jo of the emergent properties at play, and to know that I was not alone in experiencing this incubation period, this birthing, with all of its attendant tensions, excitements, and apprehensions. Following Jo's encouragement to hang in there, I was then to receive a highly encouraging email from Frankie Armstrong, as well as from several others from within my 'critical coaching research' (CCRG) network who practice in the field of 'archetypes.' As these responses tumbled into my inbox, my confidence that there was after all something tangible emerging here for me - and for others - grew apace.

As many ideas jostled for focus, I began to reframe some existing aspects in my life in a new way, bringing them into play together, when in the past these elements had lived somewhat separate existences. I had been wondering if, after ten years of existence, that CCRG that I had spawned had outgrown its academically 'critical' purpose. I admitted to myself that it probably had, and that it could now be refreshed with the focus on the archetypes work. I speculated that in this way it could become more the Creative Coaching Research Group as much as the Critical Research group.

I speculated that my university teaching work could be pointed more and more towards reflective practice, and towards deeper understanding of where untapped capacities for leadership might reside within the individual students. The prospect of my travelling to London each week for the next six months to teach suddenly feeling less irksome when I received an enthusiastic invitation to rejoin a mens' singing group in London on Tuesday evenings, as well as to do some flash mobbing and whatever craziness might transpire with them. Meanwhile the singing that I have been doing over the past few weeks has assumed more seriousness, more of a sense of purpose. As it happened circumstances offered me the opportunity to be lead voice in a bass section not once but thrice, across different choirs, an experience that I greatly learned from; while the chance to be MC at a fancy wedding allowed me full scope to feel my voice working in a different, dramatic way. At the same time my ancient Volvo passes its MOT road worthy test, reminding me that there is life in this old dog also. This is my festival-going, singing camping car and it tells me that it is ready to go, one more time, for at least one more year on the road, feeling fully alive.

Plans I have hitherto made to sing with my siblings during this autumn in a number of 'my' choirs takes on new resonance, as my disparate worlds begin to collide, harmoniously. Within the family we talk of the deep alchemical nature of change, over all these decades of living together and apart. It feels as though my constellations are being reconfigured in real time, as my spirit guides meet and nod acquaintance. Continuing messages from the universe pour in, as former students make felicitous contact to say how powerful and enduring our adventures into deep learning have proven to be, whetting my appetite for more of the same this academic year. The phony wars that occur at the beginning of the new academic year are nearly done, as the institutional emails subside and the space

clears for some teaching of the new intakes. My efforts to get my backlog of writing published during the summer prove successful, duly harvesting seven publications, fully acknowledged by the university. These are not typical pieces of academic writing, and their acceptance signifies that it is possible to write with a distinctive personal voice and still get published. The clamouring for academic journal star ratings is over for me, while the writing process is not.

If Bled reminded me that there is an academic tribe out there that embraces my approach to development work, then my return to university in preparation for the new year reinforces my feeling that comradeship among my institutional colleagues is not similarly rooted. One recent singing event brought together ten men that I know from a variety of singing contexts over the past five years. The strong bond that we spontaneously recreated in that moment, around a table where we instinctively huddled together, reminded me that these men are my tribe. 'Men who talk together are friends. Men who sing together are brothers.' One asked how I survive within an institutional setting, given my free-spirited, rebellious nature. I reflected to him that many years back I was described by a coach as playing a 'Gulliver' type role within bureaucracies, forever hog-tied by pettifogging detail. I realize in that moment that my natural leadership may only fully breathe outside of such institutional contexts, though it does not limit me from intervening from an outside positioning.

All in all this has proven to be a miraculous few weeks as the incubation process proceeds ever deeper. The question still remains – 'what is truly being created here, really?'. I cannot sleep at times with all of these synchronicities playing together in an energetic whirl. Each time I shake the kaleidoscope then a new element suggests itself before the pattern settles. In the event the moment to crystallise the gestalt arrives on a long train trip where I take over an empty table and begin to map out what all of this colliding of ideas and impulses might mean, in an attempt to divine where it might be headed. On the train table before me I mapped out the various events that I have already signed up for over the coming year - together with the more recently surfaced events that have just suggested themselves - on a time line. I plot my teaching and CCRG commitments on the same timeline and somewhat miraculously it all falls into place in a grand pattern without significant diary conflicts. As I test the financial reality I discover that it can all be done within a budget based on my current income. Leaning back to looking at this overall picture, I feel a rush of adrenalin. Suddenly this is all feeling very real, this fresh apprenticeship I am creating and investing in.

Alongside of this linear plan I craft a Venn diagram capturing the various elements existing within this emergent direction. Voice work; discovery writing; reflective practice; coaching; leadership development; learning and facilitation; constellations; accounts of practice; performance; psychodrama; narrative work; writing into coaching, coaching into writing; constellation; men's voices, alone and together. As these circular plates developed a capaciousness, one with another, I allowed my eyes to freely focus on the centre of this diagram, inviting into consciousness what might be common across these disparate fields. After a while, the working title that suggested itself was

Discovering / releasing Voice

and I remain happy with that title, for the time being. It captures the work that I have been doing on myself in recent times through a variety of media and will continue to do so in service of the emergence of my distinctive voice – and alongside of that the facilitation of others discovery of their voice through writing, through song, through drama, through film-making, through whatever is up. It is also about the discovery of collective voice as much as individual voice – what happens when those distinctive voices seek to blend? What happens in the world when that happens?

I would like to think that my leadership is in play here, and that it invites others in good and playful ways. There is no doubt that I will learn much about this type of leading along the way, as well as about the ways in which my voice may be of service.

I am not looking at this stage to create a 'programme'; or a market offering that is aching to be monetized. I am not discounting the possibility of that occurring sometime into the future but at this stage that is not a commercial goal. I am well aware of associates who in the recent past have sought to fast track and then monetize ideas that are need of considerable inquiry – including deep self-inquiry – before they are unleashed on the world. In this sense I see myself as an amateur, and would never want to lose the sense of playfulness and joy that is currently running inside me.

Transitional containers/ incubators for this work at this point could include the CCRG; there is also the possibility of a coaching stream that we run through the university, working together with the performance arts and psychology departments. Then there are of course the singing groups themselves. Not to mention the AoMO community that is well established and networked, with a focal point of the 2018 Brighton AoMO conference. We could also to look to set up regional activities, especially here in Devon. There is a strong feeling of incorporation of the new, alongside of reintegration of the new.

This is a time for materialization, and already the tugging of a variety of slender threads is causing them to growing into strong ropes. It would be really good to hear from you as to what this latest blog might inspire in you ... Please write as freely and as generously as you may. I am so looking forward to discovering where this might be headed. At this stage it is good to be thinking of a plan yet I know that for this next year so much is about me placing myself in situations where I know learning will be abundant, if not tough at times. It is time to put this blog out – it feels along the lines of Paul Simon's description of putting a song out into the world – 'not so much finished as abandoned.'

This is my birthday week and autumn my season – what better time to hasten this birthing? As a friend and supervisor wrote on reading the first blog 'lots of powerful threads to tug at and pull through in your narrative, looks like great fruitfulness and a coming together of various elements that may have been laying dormant under the soil - I know it's autumn and mellow fruitfulness and all of those influences of abundance and harvesting what you have seeded and tended. Powerful, pregnant and lots of possibilities.'

An exploration of my distinctive voice.

Given that what flows for me from the Bled experience is a strong impulse to work with voice, my own and others, then I ask what did I specifically learn from Bled with regards to insights into my voice, that have prompted me to give priority to voice work in my future plans? As I reflect I feel that part of the impulse came from the fact that quite a number of delegates were spontaneously moved to give me unsolicited feedback on how they experienced my voice, both sung and spoken, in personal conversation as well as in group sessions. Alongside of the feedback on my voice were expressions of their experience of my presence in the wider group, and of how that presence was appreciated in the way that it catalyzed the group at certain pivotal moments.

When I look back then I think it was the weight of this feedback that caused me to reflect that I should take the impact of my voice more seriously, make efforts to get to know it better, to rise beyond the embarrassment we can all feel around our voices, while avoiding undue egotism or indulging in the disease of conceit. I think there is little doubt that the liberating climate of AoMO allowed me the freedom to be truly expressive and I was conscious of some experimentation going on, with the full encouragement of others. Aligned with that encouragement, there is no doubt in my mind that the the original Frankie Armstrong prefacing the conference voice workshop did much to liberate my voice right from th beginning of Bled. It really helped to know there were others present who had heard this voice as much as I had heard and respected theirs, and to know that each of us were in touch with our archetypal grunts and keening cries. Among the encouragers and enablers, those who also experienced

Frankie featured most prominently.

Regarding the specifics of the feedback for one man said that at the beginning of our stream he felt I came across to him as way over the top; but that as the weekend progressed he could see how my interventions catalyzed much cumulative shift within the group. He worried at first that I was a clown, pure and simple; he then saw me as a disruptor, perhaps unhelpfully so, but then later came to value me as a constructive subversive. He then knew me as an evoker of expressiveness in others, to be the jester that is allowed to say the things that others might hold back on saying. Another suggested that I was quick to spot falsity, to call it as such, and to promote a critically disruptive view of uncontended issues. I balance to this she saw me as and supporting strongly of those who struggled to express themselves. She concluded that 'I may be one of the elders but I am still an imp, with a strong free-child in play.'

Further feedback talked of me as a free spirit, a live wire, of someone who at his best demonstrated radical aliveness. They talked of my capacity to enable the group, to sing ourselves into vibrant life, and referenced my intuitive sense of the collective song of the group. One person referred to 'my wild, untamed voice' and I liked that. Another said that my voice had a hypnotic quality to it. I blush to write this but then I need to listen to this feedback also, if I am to best use this voice in service of others. What this reminded me was that I am best often when I being playful and creative. My use of humour was mentioned more than once, and it is true that I can be really quick in my response. I do love a spontaneous environment where quickness, where wittiness is allowed to freely flow, where the pattern is allowed to emerge, to everyone's dawning delight. It is liberating for me to recognize that there little need for me to play precisely by the rules, there are more than enough people in this world who will attend to those rules.

Writing into this reminds me of a somewhat parallel experience I had at a week- long singing event in Riga, Latvia, four years ago, a time when I remember feeling fully alive. Two choir members at Riga said I reminded them of a Douglas in their choir and I liked the idea of being Douglas for them, and for others in the group. They explained that Douglas was my Mr Hyde to my more sensible Doctor Daniel. Douglas in that way was to become my dark side my alter ego, to be treated as a living thing and to be openly evoked by the group. I liked this idea as I freely admit to there being many sides to me, the 'multiple selves' which I enjoy inhabiting fully as fully as imagination and sometimes reality allow. After this experience of the liberation of Douglas, I wrote thus in response to the

the question 'who is Douglas really?'

Revealing the voice of Douglas

Among my multiple selves there co-exist an activist, a fantasist, an ironist, a comic, an original plagiarist, a divine interventionist, a man who flows alongside of a jerk who cannot stop interrupting at times; a confusionist, an illusionist, a clarifier and summariser, a gift from god, a snot nosed brat who sniffles and whines, a chameleon, an adapter, a contrarian, a buffoon, a controversialist, a provocateur, a lover and a fighter, a courageous fool who cannot help but speak truth to power, an experimentalist, a blabbermouth, a philosopher, a wizard and a total disgrace. I am a writer who has been profligate and may have squandered his gift, maybe not; there may still be time for redemption of that writerly impulse. I am a wanderer and searcher, never truly content, always restless, always thoughtful, sometimes wildly reckless, intuitive and impulsive but not always so. The impulse to express can often get the better of me, or the worse depending on circumstance.

I am not quite sure of the place in my life for Douglas ? How could I be? For that is part of his charm and his joy. He is an unsettling but necessary presence that co-exists somewhere beneath the surface, sometimes popping up at times when least invited or wanted. He makes the psychodynamic leap when least invited. As a teen I devoured Herman Hess's Steppenwolf. Douglas is my Steppenwolf and I love him with all my heart. I am not sure if it is Daniel or Douglas you are interested in –but both of them write to you.

Responses evoked by my Bled blog 'call' to interested others

My sharing of my initial blog evoked a variety of responses, in classical 'call and response' mode, as categorized below, including at the contextual level of conferencing; to personal feedback for me on my voice; to others personal insights and sense making invoked by my reflections; towards propulsion towards separate as collaborative action.

A contextualization response.

One of the first responses was from the AoMO organisers, who helped me contextualize the ways in which AoMO is different from other conferences, and why it might be that its galvanizing impact on me has been so strong, long after the effect of a traditional conference might have worn thin, or degraded altogether. They wrote on the AoMO FaceBook page thus.

Thanks for this beautiful reflection, Daniel. One thing that chimed for me was the oddity of the question how can this conference be made different from other academic conferences. It started in difference, to be a place and space FOR difference, where boundaries can be joyously blurred and to which you come because there is nothing else like it. If it doesn't achieve that there's no reason for it to exist. That's why it's every two years - to maintain the creative energy, to resist the production line. We want everyone to look forward to it, to be in a "can't wait for the next one" mood. Of course, we have to be in many ways "normalised" as an academic conference or people won't get the funding to come, but negotiating these boundaries is what artists have done for centuries - including my great (x3) grandfather who exhibited 16 times at the Royal Academy but went bankrupt for a year in 1869-70. We are trying to make things easier for those who need extra support by ploughing any surpluses we receive into supporting both activities and individuals. The real thing that makes the conference different I think are the people who attend. Whilst the technical challenges of running this conference are way, way beyond those of any other conference, I always have the feeling that if everyone turned up to an empty building they'd create a fantastic experience for themselves over three days just working off the buzz of being together. We hope that everyone can find something to provide a little bit of inspiration for whatever else they do.

Personal feedback on my voice, my presence.

It was reassuring to note that the written post-conference feedback on me chimed with the direct face-to-face conference feedback. One piece was written by a delegate who, for the first day or so of the conference referred to me as Frank, a choice that I never chose to correct (and in fact rather enjoyed.) Interestingly this correspondent echoed strongly the Douglas invocation from the previous singing event, cited above. She first wrote to say that 'It was such a pleasure to know the outer Daniel and the inner Frank.... I loved, loved, loved meeting up with you and getting to know you just a bit. You have such a big personality, a booming voice, and a great presence. Who can ignore you for more than two seconds?' This rather took me aback, and I share it because the inner me does not register that I may be making such an impact. This immediately gave me more cause to reflect on this feedback more seriously, and not to automatically discount such feedback, as I often do. In response to this call, I sent her the first blog, and she responded thus

Dear Frank aka Daniel:

I love your writing. You write with utter frankness and abandon; you say what you mean; your words emerge from a deep space of your body past your heart and the throat chakra off course. Perhaps your words emanate from the sofa space behind your knees--and therefore there is such an oooooomph to what you are saying. Your words have power and frankly you have little idea of what this means to others. I sensed in you the utter faithfulness that comes from being committed (frankly enough) to the spontaneous, child-like, awe-filled wonderment that is life itself. You amplified for me the miracle that is life. Your voice spoke of Inca emperors and Scottish clansmen, of the magic of shamans and the enterprise of executives. You have power and in all frankness I found that you had not embraced it as fully as you were able. I do not say this with any sense of authorial superiority; frankly, I am terribly guilty of this as well and I find myself gravitating to people and events that empower me to fully and frankly find my voice. That's why, both of us loved Franky as much as we did and we look forward to spending some time with her before our Brighton Beach experience.

Frank aka Daniel, it is for these reasons that I chose to call you Frank--you fit frank as fully as you could and I could not get myself to trudge back to the Biblical era to find out yet again why Daniel did what he did so you could be named for him.

What pleased me about this was to know that there was such consistency between my spoken and written word, and in particular to know the development of my written voice on the side of authenticity and away from third-party formalism. A long-term colleague who was not at Bled wrote 'I love the blog. I can almost hear your voice as I read it – which is something that many authors strive towards and fail to achieve. It is gentle and mindful to read and I can feel myself relaxing into the thinking.' A conference delegate expressed that 'Your writing opened a door to you – and you write in such a beautiful way, dancing the line between reflective, personal and general/transferable.' Another stated that 'I marveled at having been left with such a clearly positive impression of your life direction, despite the sense of Daniel-sometimes-being-less-than-totally-enamoured-with-his-world.'

Others' personal reflections evoked by the blog.

As an autoethnographer you have to worry about the provocation posed by Andrew Sparkes – 'autoethnography - self-indulgence or something more?' I was relieved to find that beyond respondents feeling that they now knew more about me; that my writing also caused them not only to look inside, but

to capture their self-insights in written form. One wrote 'I have just read the blog and am utterly transfixed! I need to read it again; it took me through a scarily wide range of my own emotions and reactions.' Another wrote 'Wow - great blog post! a right paisley swirl of being and experiencing - complexity with patterns. I get that sense of guilt-list - something I have been actively limiting in my own life, but still manages to show up from time to time. How we choose to show up as our authentic selves and damn the critics!'

A delegate wrote 'I enjoyed your reflections, wrote quite a bit about the conference myself- including some of the feedback- but have not asked anyone permission for placing some comments etc in it- I will send if you'd be interested a partly raw reflective document.. or perhaps can also distill it further first and then share... -still a pondering- in it also sits a question on "what do I claim", want to shine my light on... I am both starting to make piece with that needing to "grow itself"- but at the same time I feel impatient for some completion too! It's bringing together my theory strands which interested my: feminism and artful knowing as well as phenomenology; but how to interweave all of those strands is yet a quest..'

Another talked of the cathartic effect that sharing such a blog can have. She wrote 'It (Your blog and your responses to my first email) moved me very much. I opened it just after a bruising meeting with my Line Manager (me having won an internal award, him not giving me the hours to do it) and your thoughtful comments brought me to tears such that I couldn't think how to respond that would explain all of this! Distance from the moment makes it easier! Perhaps not too surprisingly, I have been ill since then, back in work today.'

Propulsion towards collaboration or parallel work evoked by the Bled Blog

It is clear that beyond evoking self- reflection, the blog acted for some as a spur for action. In this mode one wrote 'I'm particularly excited about the notion of the CCRG morphing into something more creative. You know that I've been playing for a long time on my love of music and love of leadership. Do you do Twitter? I'm finding it quite a useful and interesting way of blending the two.' Another suggested that 'I would love to write with you...and present with you in the future.' In a similar vein another suggested 'Let me know if we should exchange articles (written by ourselves off course) so that we can develop better awareness of who we are and where our interests lie.'

One was prompted to directly engage with AoMO at Brighton in 2018, and to invite me to a number of archetypes workshops. Another alluded to the cautionary nature of contemporary Higher Education, and of how 'I would relish the opportunity to explore discovering/releasing voice for myself - how careful I need to be in work these days, higher education being no longer 'high' but quite low business issues about brand, numbers and money. I can think about it in terms of being a woman, I can think about it in terms of being this particular woman! I would relish the opportunity to explore collectively too, to explore the impact this can have to enable others to discover/release their own voices.'

When I shared recent publications with another delegate, we discovered that we had both have an Account of Practice due to be published in the same journal this autumn. In the face of this synchronicity, she wrote 'We may be able to reflect together as a way of joint reflexivity? I find it interesting too that you are male and a little further in this academic path than I am; I seem to revert to "bringing more femininity" into this facilitation world- and would be interested in how you look at that too.'

With regard to the Critical Coaching Research Group, one respondent welcomed the suggested shift in emphasis: "this shift from Critical to Creative is very juicy. It's clearly the shift from Techne to Phronesis isn't it! I love the challenge of critical thinking and my ego gets such a lovely stroke from it all but as we know it can be a little destructive.'

Other reflections welcomed the joining of voices that the blog invited: 'I see the threads weaving themselves together and whilst the form is still unknown, they are dancing along to a strong tune from that lovely voice of yours and others.'

Epilogue

I am not at all sure if it is possible to neatly wrap up this account. Even as I write (once more on the train), responses to the blog continue to flow my way. Salient dates that add to the mix keep dropping from the sky, magically fitting into the schedule, with the most delightful synchronicity. At a personal level I feel shifts coming about as result of committing to this writing, then sharing these texts on a rolling basis with others. I remember when I returned from the singing week in Riga four years ago - to teach for the first time at my current institution - when my voice felt clear and strong post the intensive voice work, and the ensuing learning experience for all concerned was a rich one. In similar fashion, I have found myself at the start of this new ac. The spirit of the singing group was brought to my leadership in the classroom. In this academic year I feel that I am similarly engaging with students with more awareness of my voice - and it satisfying to note that this is evoking an already powerful learning response. My writing feels as though it has become more fearless, more authentic, while alternative writings of mine are finding a path towards publication. With all of these developments, what was only five weeks ago an emergent Venn diagram has now progressed towards a rudimentary Gantt chart mapping the year before me, and beyond. That act of constructing this Gantt chart has felt grounding, as the fear of the crashing together of various elements of what was being invited from the universe was growing by the day, alongside of the growing excitement.

It is clear then that this engagement with blog has taken me to places both in my interior and exterior world that I would not have glimpsed had I not subjected myself to this writerly discipline. There is no doubt that this writing - and the sharing of the same - has greatly assisted in defending against the inertia gradient that is likely to undermine all post-conference good intentions. It will be interesting to see how this pans out over time, and to assess to what extent 'writing as inquiry' continues to play a part in persistence and development of ideas and collaborative action beyond Bled.

I am not sure if I am now going to jump to a generalizable conclusion that such blogging is the way to defend against post-conference decay. Apart from anything else AoMO is set up as an exceptional conference and it would not be reasonable to compare it to a more conventional conference. On the other hand you would be inclined to think that blogging would do no harm in enabling persistence, no matter what the context.

In the qualitative tradition that autoethnographic inhabits, where 'show' is valorized over 'tell', then I would not presume to tell the reader of this paper how to interpret what she reads. However I have been fascinated by the variety of responses to flow from my creatures to date and am intrigued to know how this might impact on third person inquirers. I say third person inquirers as - in a naturalistic way - this call and response process has evoked the classical third part action research progression from self to close connections then out into the wider world. There is little doubt that from my perspective this engagement comprises an Action Research project, as the scope of the work clarifies and the extent of the (selective) crowd-sourcing develops apace. Please consider your self part of the selective crowd, dear reader, and feel free to share any sense-making that has occurred: as well of course as indicating was in which you would might to join this / these projects at d.doherty@mdx.ac.uk.

Daniel Doherty
Middlesex
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