

'I Write Like a Painter': Feminine Creation with Arts-Based Methods in Organizational Research

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Feminine writing and organizational aesthetics are brought together in this paper to sketch a different form of academic production in organizational research that involves arts-based methods ('feminine creation'). Feminine creation relates to *écriture féminine* (Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva) and also to *peinture féminine* (Nancy Spero) and modern choreography (Trisha Brown). Feminine creation responds to the feminist and the aesthetic critique of conventional academic writing and has the potential to challenge its masculine stereotypes of rationality, rigorous method and explicit knowledge production. The paper discusses the practices of poetic writing, painting and dance that are used to present academic research. It includes its own series of 'peinture féminine', some of which are contributions by the artist and organizational scholar Schrat. They illustrate my argument in a synecdochic aesthetic format and encourage a different, aesthetic way of perceiving academic research and of re-imagining gendered bodies.

Keywords: arts-based methods, *écriture féminine*, dance, painting, maternal body

Introduction

'I used to say that I write like a painter', French feminist theorist Hélène Cixous (2007) said in a speech given at the New York State Writers Institute. 'I have a large table ... on which I have hundreds of notes, thousands of notes, ten thousands of pieces of paper, of all dimensions. Small ones, large ones, long ones, thick ones, thin ones ... And, maybe thirty, forty, fifty different types of pens and pencils.' Writing at length, without interruptions, her writing resembles a 'dream', a 'journey' or a physical exercise. This understanding of writing as an intensely visceral and sensual form of artistic expression with un-orderly, creative and embodied impulses will be developed in this paper to provide an understanding of alternative, arts-based forms of academic writing. So-called arts-based methods include the use of painting, visual arts, drawing, performance, poetry and even dance and movement, and they are used to represent (and also to generate) research findings in ways that differ from typical academic writing (Leavy, 2009b). This paper brings together arts-based methods and what French theorists term 'feminine writing' (e.g. Cixous, 1976), to develop the notion of 'feminine creation' that has the potential to challenge and oppose the masculine discourse of academic writing.

The widely accepted standard of academic writing with 'rational' scientific language stands in the positivist tradition of management studies and has faced criticism. Organization studies writing is shaped by masculine stereotypes of scientific rationality, objectivity and rigorous method. Phillips *et al.* (2014, p. 314) argue that 'the legacy of science, as a privileged mode of inquiry and knowledge production, both formally and in terms of a culture of scientificity, is central to the pervasion of

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masculinity as the mode par excellence of organizational theorizing'. This leads to a situation where the only gender that can be done legitimately in research (by men or women) is masculinity (Pullen, 2006). Advances are needed to expose masculine organization research discourse and the oppressive practice of regulating the text in ways which keep women and their work, the feminine 'impurity' and bodily presence, in conformity with the phallogocentric order (Höpfl, 2000, p. 100). Feminist perspectives in organization studies have suggested, as alternatives, writing with 'dirt' (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008) or subversively (Höpfl, 2007), and expressing the researcher's self-multiplicity (Pullen, 2006). I suggest that arts-based forms can be seen as another alternative to masculine academic writing, in particular arts-based methods as 'feminine creation' with an emphasis on female corporeality and experience in organizations.

Emphasizing aesthetic experience relates to organizational aesthetics research, which also has criticized shortcomings of conventional academic writing. Organizational aesthetics research explores embodied forms of experience and knowing which contest, challenge and complement the seemingly rational side of organizations and finds that traditional forms of writing are not able fully to capture and convey the bodily and sensual existence of women and men in organizations (Taylor and Hansen, 2005). This seems to be particularly relevant for women as Butler (1988, p. 528) argued that gender is not a biological factor but a social practice, whereby social agents constitute social reality through their bodies — through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social signs. An aesthetic approach emphasizes that these elements create sensual experiences (Biehl-Missal, 2011a, p. 621), so that interaction in organizations is seen, from a phenomenological perspective also (Merleau-Ponty, 2012 [1946]), as an embodied and reciprocal encounter (Ladkin, 2013). Feminine issues are strongly related to the aesthetic, involving the body, its experience and appearance, and are typically oppressed in organizations (Gatrell, 2011; Hancock and Tyler, 2007; Höpfl, 2007; Höpfl and Hornby Atkinson, 2000). Aesthetic methods as 'feminine creation' hence bear a strong potential to negotiate and give form to these issues that typically are suppressed in masculine organizational reality and writing, and also to imagine alternatives to masculine discourse.

The aesthetic research focus has led to the application of sensual methodologies (Warren, 2008) and, consequentially, to new forms for the representation of research findings: Arts-based methods go beyond rationalist forms of academic writing to include poetic forms, visual narratives and imagery, fabrics and materials, and actual bodily movement in choreographies (Knowles and Cole, 2008). This aesthetic extension of traditional academic writing questions persistent forms of (masculine) academic presentation and structures of gendered organization studies writing that limit what organizational researchers are allowed to produce and that restrict what 'readers' are allowed to understand. Arts-based research methods allow for research findings to be experienced aesthetically, including gender issues, creating a form of presentational knowledge that differs from propositional knowing that is created by standard academic writing and its rational theories and methods (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p. 1213). By doing this, they can contribute to efforts to 'destabilize, undermine and confuse the implicit yet powerful dominance of masculine theorizing in organization studies' (Phillips *et al.*, 2014, p. 317). Feminist perspectives in management studies have pointed out that we need to open up language and allow for ambiguity in order to imagine and understand alternatives (Cooper, 1992, p. 19) and feminine creation can be a way to do this.

Organizational scholars have already emphasized gender aspects of arts-based research methods (Grisoni, 2012; Rippin, 2006) by putting emphasis on their epistemological value (Rippin, 2013; Warren, 2008). Arts-based methods in organization research have not been linked explicitly to the works of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous about *écriture féminine*. Doing so can sketch a concept of 'feminine creation' that provides opportunities for researchers to bring in, express and negotiate their corporeality, challenging the discourse of masculine writing. This develops feminist research practice that analyses women's experiences that are largely ignored in positivist mainstream research, to oppose structures and to empower women (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007). While these methods often rework the positivist paradigm and involve emotion and embodiment either with interviews, archival and narrative, or with ethnographic approaches which emphasize written output, arts-based methods bypass 'rational' academic language. Their aesthetic form makes them generally

adept at challenging dominant ideology, raising critical consciousness and fostering empathetic understandings (Leavy, 2009b: ix).

The argument presented here focuses on arts-based forms and feminine creation that do not oppose directly the masculine discourse of organizational writing but which question and suspend this established practice. Feminine creation can be political, in the sense of Kristeva (1977), when it deconstructs the practice of masculine writing by not writing directly against it but by illustrating its limits through the aesthetic form. This goes beyond an essentialist gender argument of the feminine versus the masculine and strengthens the suggestion of Phillips *et al.* (2014) by destabilizing the gender binaries and considering a bi-sexual practice of writing that produces new modes of embodied communicative exchange devoid of (masculine) efforts of domination (Cixous, 1997 [1975]). Expanding the consideration of texts, stories and narratives, arts-based forms of writing, poetry, painting and performance may be an option for all critical scholars, whether female, male, intergender, transgender or other, no matter what their culture, to articulate suppressed aesthetic experiences and to challenge the dominant phallogocentric academic discourse and its inherent pressures on gender and identity.

Outline

To explore the aesthetic links between *écriture féminine* and arts-based methods in management studies, I first shall review writings on *écriture féminine*, putting an emphasis on Cixous' understanding of the 'semiotic space' that relates to aesthetic experience and embodied knowing produced by arts-based forms. In a second step, the idea of 'feminine creation' in management studies is further explored. I shall review some of the extant arts-based methods, including poetry, painting and dance, that have seen increasing interest from management scholars, both female and male. I will discuss how these examples create an aesthetic experience or 'semiotic' space (Cixous) and enable a more bodily-based understanding. I will consider poetic forms and performative writing that may enhance conventional academic writing, then discuss painting, which gradually dissolves letters to include other visual forms, creating a different aesthetic situation. Finally, dance and movement are discussed. When writing is considered, according to Cixous, as a physical process, dance is a form worth considering because it is a body-based expression in space and time, and commonly is referred to as a something like a universal language. These examples have been chosen because they are strongly related to feminist theory and practice, including *peinture féminine* (Nancy Spero) and modern choreography (Trisha Brown) which have not yet been linked to arts-based forms of writing in organizational research.

My argument is illustrated by a mini-series of *peinture féminine* presenting the businesswoman, the maternal body and the moving woman. These examples link to extant studies on gender that theorize embodied phenomena in organizations, such as the pregnant body, and they are created through arts-based methods of painting and dance. Linking to a feminist consideration of bodily imagery, they reflect the aesthetic, embodied, not purely cognitive awareness (Irigaray, 1993) females have of their bodies. They have been included to re-imagine shape and give form not to the male but to the female experience that often is rendered invisible (Höpfl, 2007). These images, on an aesthetic dimension, function as synecdochic examples of arts-based forms that encourage questions and interpretations, rather than provide seemingly logical and rational arguments and answers that are the domain of masculine organization writing (Phillips *et al.*, 2014). Using a different 'language', arts-based methods also are culturally inclusive — an issue that will be discussed in the conclusion along with further ideas about academic resistance and some practical implications for the development of this approach in management studies.

L'écriture féminine and aesthetic experience

In order to explore relationships between *écriture féminine* and arts-based forms of writing in organization studies with a focus on women's experience (feminine creation), my argument focuses on

aesthetic perception, on sounds, visuals and movement. I will draw on French theorists who have contributed to the concept, including Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Despite differences between their perspectives, common ground consists in advances made against the oppressive, phallogocentric Western culture wherein the white, elitist man at the centre appropriates and objectifies the world through symbolic discourse, reduces it to his terms, and speaks on behalf of everything and everyone else — including women (Jones, 1981, p. 248). Rather than being a neutral playground of expression, language, from the perspective of *écriture féminine*, is considered in various contexts to be a medium of patriarchal expression that disadvantages women, particularly female writers, who have to submit to masculine forms of expression. For Kristeva, resistance against phallogocentrism is related to the re-experience of the physical pleasures of infancy and of later sexuality, repressed but not obliterated by the Law of the Father (Jones, 1981, p. 248). This Law of the Father equals the language of the symbolic, in contrast to what Kristeva (1984 [1974]) in *La Révolution de langage poétique* terms the semiotic-anarchic realm. The semiotic relates to the motherly dyad, to a pre-linguistic, pre-oedipal, infantile fusion and unity of mother and child in the corporeal realm, which presents a space of sound, rhythm and polyphony, and thus can be interpreted as being related to aesthetic, sensual perception. Kristeva (1984, p. 68) suggests that even if the semiotic, originating in bodily experiences, is repressed in the realm of the symbolic, it may still emerge in writing. This was a topic for Irigaray (1984 [1974]) who in her work *Speculum de l'autre femme* discussed how masculine writing, in its phallic forms of representation, tries to confine and ignore the ambiguous (or the semiotic, according to Kristeva). But the 'semiotic' finds its way into linguistic expressions such as metaphors through which the suppressed body emerges. Bodily experiences require complex articulation in almost musical and poetic writing practices, which Mallarmé called 'the music in letters' (Kristeva, 1981, p. 165). Writers such as James Joyce, Stéphane Mallarmé and Antonin Artaud were found to re-experience subconsciously these infantile 'pulsions' and 'set them into play by constructing texts against the rules and regularities of conventional language' (Jones, 1981, p. 249). Males, for example the writer, playwright and poet Jean Genet, also were included by Cixous, emphasizing the idea that gender does not consist of bipolar opposites but contains a fluctuating range and a potential for masculinity and femininity (Cooper, 1992, p. 23). Kristeva (1981, p. 165) asserts that 'all speaking subjects have within themselves a certain bisexuality which is precisely the possibility to explore all the sources of signification, that which posits a meaning as well as that which multiplies, pulverizes, and finally revives it.' These ideas on feminine writing, I suggest, can be developed with the actual use of aesthetic and arts-based methods that comprise music, sounds and bodily movement created by, for example, female writers estranged from language, 'dancers who suffer as they speak' (Kristeva, 1981, p. 166).

Feminine writings, by expressing corporeal rhythm, movement and sensations, can be seen to construct a specific aesthetic experience for the reader. This is obvious in particular with regard to Artaud, who used his texts to create a new form of theatre which worked against dramatic linearity, narrative plots and 'centred' subjects. This form of 'postdramatic' theatre shifted the weight from intellectual interpretations of dramatic storylines to the corporeal experience of sound, silence and materiality (Lehmann, 2006). This shows how corporeal 'writing' by means of arts-based methods in organization studies may also re-invoke a three-dimensional aesthetic ('semiotic') space that goes beyond the masculine written discourse.

This style of writing is 'feminine' in the sense that its origins are in the pre-Oedipal child–mother relationship and also in the sense that it escapes the rule of the Father and the dominance of patriarchal language and thought. This dominance has also been discussed from a management studies perspective. Drawing on Kristeva, Höpfl (2000, p. 100) used the term the 'submission to a journal' in its two-fold sense, with regard to a female writer's forced compliance to the management discourse. Höpfl (2000, p. 102) argues along with Kristeva that this can be achieved naturally by men but remains a paradox for women: 'It is either possible to submit and become the same, in other words to achieve and demonstrate mastery, to become part of the project or to be other, rejected, abject. So, a woman can seize phallic power and become a man, albeit an effeminate man, or be different and risk eradication'. So it seems that female mastery of standard writing only leads to new

forms of incompleteness. For Kristeva, women can exert semiotic liberation only indirectly, from their ever-marginal position and their attitude of resistance to dominating language: 'If women have a role to play ... it is only in assuming a negative function: reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society' (Kristeva, 1981, p. 166). This idea is relevant for my argument: the aesthetic form, with its marginal norm and questioning stance, is in the nature of art and arts-based forms (Biehl-Missal, 2010). In management studies as well they can be used to challenge and resist the masculine discourse from a marginal position.

Irigaray and Cixous emphasize that women can establish a new language accounting for a developed consciousness of female bodies and sexual pleasure which is always suppressed, absent or misrepresented in masculine discourse. In her manifesto for *écriture féminine*, 'The laugh of the Medusa', Cixous (1976) developed an understanding of a female form of writing which is related to the female body and its specific potential that may be considered superior to phallic linear-mindedness. Cixous (1976, p. 889) stated that the 'female libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide'. Similarly, Irigaray (1985, p. 28) describes the female geography of pleasure as 'much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle' than the more centred and linear male sexuality. Female corporeal experience, and sexuality in particular, explain the tensions caused by masculine language. Here again appears the motif of 'rational' linearity versus what can be considered the aesthetic, three-dimensional situation. Irigaray (1985) in this vein proposes finding a language which does not eliminate the corporeal, but rather gives voice to the body, thereby opposing the regulated language of the Father. Being *Ce sexe qui n'en pas un* (Irigaray, 1985 [1977]), women, in their everyday life, are habituated to the flux of speaking which prevents unambiguous statements and identity constructions. This leads to a concept of *écriture féminine* as a different, poetic language that privileges non-linear, cyclical writing.

Cixous (1976, p. 886) sees female writing as an abundance of signs and as a digression in terms of syntax and grammar. This form of writing is considered as a search to approach and articulate the alien (das Fremde) without locating, establishing and ultimately identifying it. This process of engagement and giving does not fix and retain meaning but opens up spaces via a searching, synesthetic way of speaking which reintegrates previously separated senses (Gölter, 2003, p. 60). The synesthetic perception mentioned by the linguist Waltraud Gölter brings together different senses when, for example, individuals see graphic letters and simultaneously perceive colours, smell or sound. This synesthetic perception is related to a body-based perspective of feminine writing, as when Virginia Woolf, for example, described subtle sensations and colours and, in a certain sense, recreated them (Kristeva, 1981, p. 166). This is of importance for alternative forms of writing and arts-based methods in management studies and will be explored further in this paper with regard to an example of *peinture*.

Linear academic writing reaches its limits when it tries to address aesthetic forms of knowing, which are tacit but strong drivers of human interaction in organizations (Taylor and Hansen, 2005) and also strongly relate to oppressed female experiences (e.g., Gatrell, 2013). Arts-based forms, on the other hand, may provide 'a holistic way to get at the whole of the experience, something that the intellectualization and abstraction of traditional organizational research often seems to miss' (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p. 1224). Female creation as an appropriate form of (synesthetic) representation may generate a more nuanced understanding of organizations by articulating some aesthetic experience that typically is suppressed not only by male domination but also by traditional masculine forms of 'rational' academic writing. Advances which challenge a research tradition based on the opposition of mind and body also resonate with Irigaray's (1993) critique: the female is regarded as being enmeshed in her bodily existence without a language, which makes it impossible for her to do 'neutral' genderless scientific inquiry. The use of subjective, embodied, arts-based methods for feminine creation seems to be an opportunity to challenge what is described as the 'disembodied but profoundly gendered symbolic order of academe' (Fotaki, 2011, p. 47). Arts-based knowledge production goes some way towards fluidity and mobility and the rejection of stable forms of phallogocentric Western rationality (Irigaray, 1985, p. 79). Feminine creation helps to imagine a space for experienced existence beyond masculine 'rational' stereotypes. Accounting for a biological

essentialist critique and relating to the idea of bisexual writing (Phillips *et al.*, 2014), it includes all researchers to give form to their aesthetic and body-based experience in organizations.

'Feminine creation' in management studies

The strong aesthetic dimension of *écriture féminine* resonates with the main argument that is made for the use of arts-based methods in management studies. The general suppression of lived experience and aesthetic forms of knowing by mainstream management theory, and the resulting power issues, are also problematized by gender studies (Pullen, 2006, p. 292) and by aesthetic approaches that call for sensual methodologies (Warren, 2008). This leads to a reconsideration of academic forms of representation. Whilst explicit knowledge can be represented through discursive forms of writing in journal articles and books, aesthetic knowing requires a more intricate, emotional and multi-layered form (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p. 1214). Arts-based methods of writing (Knowles and Cole, 2008) are presentational forms, which, due to their multi-layered aesthetic nature, are able to convey a more holistic understanding of and feeling for organizational life. With the use of arts-based methods, research findings can be transformed into theatre plays (Taylor, 2003), quilts (Rippin, 2006), poems, songs and multi-media tracks which may complement or replace conventional forms of writing. These forms of aesthetic expression ('semiotic' in terms of Kristeva's dichotomy) may allow authors to negotiate embodied existence in organizations: pregnant bodies and everyday movement are examples discussed in later sections of this paper. Bodily existence and experience, particularly those of women, in organizations are often suppressed in traditional forms of writing. Höpfl (2000, p. 99), for example, has argued that 'the text and, indeed, the organization, are not a place for women with physical bodies which produce menstrual blood, breast milk, maternal smells'. Hence individuals, particularly females, are given, by arts-based forms of representation, an opportunity to assert their space.

In management studies, Pullen (2006, p. 286) has emphasized that 'gender itself is a social practice', and earlier studies in linguistics (Gölter, 2003), psychoanalysis (Mitchell, 1974) and cultural theory (Alderson, 1986) have successfully challenged essentialism by deconstructing the category of 'woman'. A constructionist approach has long asserted that women lack an unmediated and direct experience of a body as a pre-given entity, but perceive the body as a product of social histories, relations and discourses. An essential and stable identity of 'women' and women's bodies cannot be assumed. Janet Wolff (1997, p. 92) argued that 'identifying women with their bodies is perilously close to those reactionary arguments in sociobiology and other disciplines, as well as in conservative common sense, which justify women's oppression in terms of their biology — size, hormones, lack of strength, child-bearing functions, lactation, monthly cycles, and so on.' Despite having included male writers, in order to re-valorize women, Cixous (1976, p. 881) referred to *écriture féminine* as 'white ink', emphasizing some essence of the feminine and a form of textual 'expression' of the female body. In light of the essentialist discussion, Gross (1986, p. 140) finds that in *écriture féminine* 'some concept of the body is essential to understand social production, oppression, and resistance; and that the body need not, indeed must not be considered merely a biological entity, but can be seen as a socially inscribed, historically marked, psychically and interpersonally significant product'. This view supports the aesthetic and phenomenological perspective that emphasizes the materiality of the body, and helps to see feminine creation as an arts-based approach that is bi-sexual, with the ability to emphasize female embodied knowledge for the purpose of challenging oppressive masculine discourse.

Some examples will be explored in the next sections. I will start with poetic and performative writing that also conveys aesthetic forms of knowing, before considering peinture and crafted structures that exist in three-dimensional space. Finally, dance is considered as a method of feminine creation that involves movement in space and time, thus creating an even stronger 'semiotic' space, and creating an aesthetic situation based on the female body that enables different forms of understanding.

Poetic and performative writing

Poetic writing is an arts-based form in organizational research and can be seen as feminine creation as it has a clear connection to *écriture féminine*. Poetic forms are related to narrative approaches that stand in tension with scientific approaches (Rhodes and Brown, 2005) and they are also related to other forms such as feminist auto-ethnographic writing (Ellis, 2004; Rippin, 2009) where authors draw on their own lived experience. Poetic approaches dissolve syntax and semantic structures of the text to a greater extent and are far from being widely used. Poetic academic accounts have been applied to recreate emotional aspects of organizational members (Grisoni and Kirk, 2006) and to convey an aesthetic understanding of complex attitudes that go beyond rational forms of management, for example the 'spirit' and 'energy' of leadership that may be evoked through verse, rhyme and rhythm (Darmer, 2006). These experiential elements could be expressed only inadequately in a conventional academic paper that focuses on propositional knowing.

From the perspective of feminist performance studies, for example, Bonnsetter and Ott (2011) have put into practice the notion of feminine writing to report their findings on a popular genre of fan fiction by female authors. They find that it challenges the patriarchal economy of writing by allowing women to express poetically their own desires beyond the typical author-god position. Their essay enacts this argument by employing a performative, intertextual style and a (semi)fictive, first-person narrative account, operating from the assumption of a fluid and constructed subjectivity. It invites readers to co-produce the essay actively rather than to consume it passively. Such arts-based methods, along with many forms of artistic practice, aim to open a space for recipients' own associations and interpretations rather than providing clear messages and solutions (Biehl-Missal, 2010). This is an anathema for mainstream management writing that claims to operate from a normative position of truth, which it controls and manages. The essay simultaneously makes an aesthetic stance for feminine art which 'values meaningfulness, which opens up writing, over meaning, which closes it down and cordons it off' and which, coincidentally, is devalued by the very patriarchal economy of writing that *écriture féminine* challenges (Bonnsetter and Ott, 2011, p. 364). This practice seeks to challenge the limits to what organizational researchers are allowed to write and how they are allowed to write it. By writing about and giving form to female narration, the authors take a stance against society's discriminating practices to 'privilege art that is produced principally for consumption, celebrating and canonizing its (predominantly) male artists' (Bonnsetter and Ott, 2011, p. 364).

Despite their epistemological value, arts-based approaches commonly face devaluation. Warren (2008, p. 565) reports how 'aesthetically sensitive methods (such as Linstead's "anthropological poetics" or Rippin's work with quilts) are often regarded as self-indulgent by the mainstream academic psyche'. They are denied legitimacy because rigour and rationality are seen to be displaced by unscientific 'indulgence' — although, ironically, phallocentrism in masculine writing often is self-admiring, self-congratulatory and self-stimulating (Phillips *et al.*, 2014, p. 322). Approaches rooted in a tradition of female housework and handcrafts involving 'female' materials such as fabrics are not often driven forward by male researchers. They are regarded with even more scepticism than are more established text-based approaches in organizational writing, which still are subject to the gendered distinction between subjective (feminine) and objective (masculine) (Phillips *et al.*, 2014, p. 320). I suggest that arts-based methods may provoke a fear of castration and the 'fear of being a woman' (Cixous, 1976, p. 884), though not by directly opposing and thereby reproducing the binary relationship between 'the feminine' and 'the masculine'. Rather, arts-based poetic forms, which are open to and are employed by female and male researchers, create an aesthetic space of ambiguity and possible alternatives, rejecting the masculine need to name and to classify, and giving space to experiences that typically are repressed by masculine academic writing. We can expect that these forms of 'feminine creation' have the potential to irritate masculine discourse by addressing these fears via their content, form and means. I will elaborate on this idea by moving away from written approaches to consider pictorial (peinture) and moving forms (dance) of representation.

Painting

The step from the written poetic form into the three-dimensional has been taken by Louise Grisoni (2012) and her poem houses. These artefacts comprise written words and crafted structures, and initially were an attempt to cope with difficulties and tensions surrounding the pressure to write for publication. With regard to epistemological issues, the 'process of crafting creates a space for "negative capability" and "not knowing" opening opportunities for new insights' (Grisoni, 2012, p. 11). These houses provide miniature architectural spaces and, once again, an aesthetic space to open up possibilities for turning arts-based forms into a resistant practice for emancipated reflection in an organizational context.

Nancy Adler (2010b) has illustrated a similar idea with her *Leadership Insight* journal that combines paintings, quotes from famous leaders, reflective questions and, most importantly, blank pages. The journal, in an aesthetic form, presents her research findings on leadership as a practice that requires a sharper focus on sustainable and humanistic thinking and on more spontaneous and innovative ways of managing (Adler, 2006). The artefact simultaneously opens up spaces for creative action, inspiration and reflection so as to turn managers 'away from their often frenzied lives and ... to a deeper dialectic with their influence, and potential influence, on the world' (Adler, 2010a, p. 92). In this sense, the arts-based approach of watercolour leadership illustration expresses Adler's personal and research experience on the potential of leadership as not grey but colourful, not fully controllable and potentially soft. This form of feminine creation can be seen to challenge not only the privileged masculine style of writing, but also masculine styles of leadership thinking. The watercolours are about creating space with creative forms that can be interpreted as a projection of hope for management models that are more human and sustainable (Biehl-Missal, 2011b, p. 41). The interactive *Leadership Insight* colouring book draws the recipient into a process of interpretation and literal co-creation when the white space is filled with personal reflections. Adler's brushwork can be considered as a feminine style with soft and dynamic forms while the masculine is represented in bold, black, serif sentences taking occupying space on the paper. One example is the rather straightforward, self-reliant quotation from Warren Buffett 'I am not a businessman, I am an artist.'

In the words and concepts of *écriture féminine*, this creation draws the male reader/painter into a (semiotic) colourful space where pulsions, rhythm and bodily warmth can be experienced and where the male has a presence in the black text (symbolic). With regard to an essentialist reading of Kristeva's biological model, however, this form of feminine academic expression, which aims to inspire executives, could be read as metaphorical imagery for motherly academic embryonic nurturing of male managers. I would rather want to emphasize the potential it has for challenging concepts of 'rational' leadership by proposing a new beginning, a turn, dialogue. This motif of *écriture féminine*, according to Irigaray (1985), runs contrary to male fantasies of the end, of castration and grief, as often expressed by psychoanalysis. Adler's (2010b) arts-based approaches to masculine leadership thinking encourage readers to play with associations, to open up interpretations and to explore their own bodily perceptions of organizations.

This form of expression and thinking has been an inspiration for one of my Executive Masters students at the University of Hannover a business consultant. Following the style of Adler's (2010b) reader that we have discussed in a seminar, she applied Buffet's phrase to herself and created her own painting (Figure 1). It shows her with a colourful mind that extends into space, illustrating 'open-mindedness, something unrestrained that relates to Cixous' concepts of worldwide and cosmic female experience. The body can be seen also as somewhat fluid and changing; however, it comes across as dark and boot-shaped. This can be read as an allusion to widespread concerns about female corporeality in the business world. It can be assumed that this form of aesthetic expression by a practitioner renders visible her embodied knowing and some of the invisible and intersubjective relations of leadership as an aesthetic and full-bodied activity (Ladkin, 2013). When the gendered subject is brought into being through the body and the recitation of cultural norms (Butler, 1988, 1993), this act of painting the consultant's body can be seen as an aesthetic and phenomenological renegotiation of her identity — that also produces a visual reminder and evidence in the discourse.



Figure 1: Tanja Föhr 'I am not a businesswoman, I am an artist'

Female forms of painting have their pedigree in art history, where they also expressed and negotiated how artists experienced their social existence. Artworks have, for example, criticized the equation of women with their biology. Judy Chicago's famous installation *The Dinner Party* comprises artefacts of genital imagery and was received with much controversy. As a development of *écriture féminine*, the notion of *peinture féminine* was explored by the painter Nancy Spero, who adapted the idea of an *écriture féminine* to her paintings during the 1980s. A feminist artist, she created political works opposing violence, power abuse and male dominance. Lisa Tickner (1987, p. 5) described these works as a 'form of writing marked by the pulsions of a female sexual body ... and effecting various kinds of displacement on the Western phallogocentric tradition of writing and the subject'. The aforementioned writer Antonin Artaud also was a significant influence for Spero who created a series of Artaud Paintings (1969–1970) which included fragmented, non-linear text in the pictorial space, marking a bridge from writing to the aesthetic form — a general motif of arts-based methods. Removing the male form from her works in favour of the female form for the *peinture féminine*, Spero illustrated gender and cultural developments. The visual encounter constitutes an aesthetic situation that provides a space for synesthetic perception that appeals to a range of sensual facilities (e.g. perceiving a colour as 'warm') (Biehl-Missal, 2013a, p. 359), rather than emphasizing only the social character of elements, as for example when a female body is cognitively linked to a gender and social role. Yet again this is a 'semiotic' situation and the strong dynamic and rhythmic patterns in her paintings can be seen to convey movement and change, so I see *peinture féminine* as an illustration of the search for a body which is constantly aesthetically, individually and socially negotiated.

In management research this idea can be developed by discussing how depictions of female bodies can give aesthetic presence to their marginalized corporeality, and thereby support a change in perceptions. Work in organizations is associated mostly with healthy (and often white) male bodies (Höpfl and Hornby Atkinson, 2000) and an example par excellence of oppressed female corporeality is the pregnant body, which was a topic for French feminist writers also (Cixous, 1976, p. 891). With pregnancy, the female body becomes even more alien and visible and this leaking, uncontrollable, bloating maternal body forces women to adopt strategies of secrecy, silence and even stressful supra-performance so as to blend in (Gatrell, 2011, 2013). Organizational research in this area is young and the few existing studies problematize the struggle to comply with norms of controlled,

bodily existence (Warren and Brewis, 2004). The reality of (male) incomprehension and denied legitimacy not only leads to ignorance about the female nature and her needs but also to active discrimination, as for example when pregnant employees are forced out of the workplace because their aesthetic appearance evokes old-fashioned concepts that associate the female and reproductive with the home, not the workplace (Gatrell, 2011, p. 170). This again emphasizes that oppression is related to the visceral, aesthetic experience in organizations, which is socially constructed, being reproduced in and disregarded by masculine writing.

The mere aesthetic presence of such gender issues in public discourse is not enough to solve problems or shatter glass ceilings. For example, journalists find that, despite the 'many breathless and celebratory bump watches' in tabloids, the stigma around working while pregnant still has not disappeared. Ordinary working women who are not Yahoo bosses, royals, or movie stars still keep hiding their pregnancy (Quart, 2012). So why not negotiate this discourse back into working organizations by, for example, creating visual images (paintings or photos) and exhibiting them in the organizations. This could be done, for example, on the corridor walls of a university business school where cases of pregnancy among academics are rare and mothers are fewer than fathers (Sang *et al.*, 2013, p. 165). These images would give a visual and aesthetic presence to research findings on the taboo of the pregnant body (Gatrell, 2011). This topic, with its essentialism, obviously calls for caution and careful academic framing as it might be mistaken for a reproductive celebration that discriminates against women who do not want to or cannot get pregnant, or might cause other unwanted disturbance. But the point remains that these arts-based forms, via the aesthetic situation they create, have a potential to provoke people's thoughts (Warren, 2008, p. 572) and also to challenge the dominating discourse of the male body, asking the question of how organizational reality could be different.

Other opportunities may be to invite and produce artistic reflections on the topic. I have asked the artist and organizational scholar Henrik Schrat (2011) to express on paper his ideas about this topic, using drawings that he produces as a new form of expression in the academic discourse. His first words in response were: 'Bodily fluids! Sounds like water colours!' This resulted in a series of four silhouettes (Figures 2–5), which will be discussed briefly to encourage readers to exercise their imagination.



Figure 2: Henrik Schrat: Woman looking down at a small office chair ...



Figure 3: ... which then suddenly, like an alien gothic animal, attacks her



Figure 4: Henrik Schrat: Pregnant woman in a broad stance with a weapon whose ammunition is drawn from the bodily fluids in her growing womb, leaking breasts and vagina

The silhouettes in Figures 2 and 3 show a massive and clumsy pregnant woman looking down at a small office chair, which then suddenly, like an alien gothic animal, attacks her. The imagery of a transforming office chair may be viewed as an organizational threat growing in counterpoint with the ever-inflating body of the pregnant woman. This, again, is a motif that we find in Gatrell's (2011, 2013) studies.



Figure 5: Henrik Schrat: Shock-haired woman and a water-gun

Figure 4 shows a pregnant woman in a broad stance with a weapon whose ammunition is drawn from the bodily fluids in her growing womb, leaking breasts and vagina — motifs invoked in studies previously cited (e.g. Höpfl, 2000) and directly resonant with Cixous' metaphor of the 'white ink' — thereby subverting and taking possession of the male metaphor of shooting or ejaculating (and writing). This silhouette can be viewed as an expression of castration fears and of the emotions of threatened males who feel attacked by or exposed to an ever-growing maternal body which eventually fires back its own fluids — the threat of the pregnant body in its intimate, swollen, exploding aesthetics, which consequently has to be expelled from the organization (Gatrell, 2013).

Less intimate is the more cartoon-like drawing of a shock-haired woman and a water-gun. It can be interpreted as the female reproduction of a cohort of male rectangular gestalten, or the maternal figure targeting them. The spiked hair may also hint at the spiritual aspects of pregnancy, that in masculine discourse often is seen as a mere 'physical event in which a woman's participation is limited to patiently waiting for (and not harming) the foetus within her' (Mullin, 2002, p. 37). Emphasizing the phenomenological aspect, the illustration shows the experience of a pregnant body 'out of control' with rapid and undesired corporeal change, social and medical. It is also reminiscent of the classic cartoon *John Difool* by Alejandro Jodorowsky, drafted by Moebius (Jean Giraud), which uses a visual abundance of maternal and sexual symbolism. This graphic history of the topic and the recently acknowledged communicative value of the comic in organization studies (Schrat, 2011) emphasizes the potential of this form of arts-based (feminine) creation. As employees in organizations, viewers of these drawings, on being exposed to their aesthetic and emotional form of communication, may begin to question their perspectives on the issue of maternity and are left to draw their own, potentially disturbing conclusions. In this way, feminine creation demonstrates that the synthesis of an academic text can be expressed differently (and perhaps more strongly) in a synecdochic aesthetic format.

Dance

Taking the concept of female creation further away from paper and pencil into the bodily sphere brings us to the actual use of the body and its movement. Choreography and dance reflect Cixous'

understanding of writing as an intense physical process which begins with and inside the body: In 'The laugh of the Medusa', Cixous (1976, p. 878) links the action of writing to the flows of breath and blood which run through a body and energize its flesh, in ways that materialize what she is thinking and bring language into life. Dance has been referred to as a 'universal language' and the 'mother of all tongues' and has been given recognition as a historically embodied, discursive and interconnected domain of lived experience (Leavy, 2009a). Contemporary choreographies thrive beyond the art world in an ever-expanding field of applications, including scholarly and political contexts (Butterworth and Wildschut, 2013). The movement of the body in space and time, also referred to as choreography, seems to be worthy of consideration in management studies and a logical continuation of the ongoing interest in embodied forms of knowing in organizations (Warren, 2008), developing recent interest in dance as a metaphor for organizations (Chandler, 2012). For example, Tyler and Cohen (2010, p. 194) emphasize that organizational space (much like the body) is 'an intentionally organized materiality' (Butler, 1988, p. 521) against which gender is performed within organizations, by practices of occupation and appropriation that require non-static methods of analysis. Feminine creation with dance can help us to explore and to represent how the use of organizational space is aesthetically perceived, contested and negotiated. Human movement and dance is a method of creating data that takes seriously the material, bodily basis of interaction in social contexts (Leavy, 2009a) and this is of importance to feminine creation. I shall draw on some of the key texts in cultural studies that consider dance to be a culturally shaped and gendered bodily practice, and link this to an aesthetic approach in organizational studies using a recent research project as a point of reference.

In 2013 Katrin Kolo began work on an artistic research project *UnternehMENSCHoreographie* (*Organizational Choreography*, whereby in German both words converge into the noun HUMAN) to create, through a choreographic process, structures of interaction, leadership and implicit values in an imaginary company. This approach combines arts-based exploration and presentation of research findings. Rather than focusing on dance conventions, steps and styles, Kolo's project, like other forms of contemporary choreography, emphasizes the aesthetic experience that is related to movement in space and time, the bodily and affective co-presence of actors and spectators (Siegmund, 2006). By involving female movement and, consequently, knowledge, this approach is careful of Pullen's (2006, p. 288) caveat that research 'unknowingly reinforces the feminine as object: gendered research subjects become docile bodies through the agency of the researcher.' *UnternehMENSCHoreographie* performs the 'corporeal practice of multiplicity' (Pullen, 2006, p. 292), presenting ordinary people negotiating empty space and social relations, exerting movements which can be seen as limited, uncomfortable, restrained, using a form of bodily theorizing about identity and relations. Through dance, the 'felt experience' of being within an organizational interaction are explored, to create consciousness of what Ladkin (2013, p. 330) refers to as the invisible, 'bodily based perceptions one feels in leadership relations'. Figure 6 is entitled 'woman fetches a chair or pulls it away', referring to the ambiguous potential in supporting motions that are commonly demanded from female co-workers with their visually 'blurred' identity — issues that a future in-depth analysis of the project will explore. Of importance for this paper is that this situation again is close to the unordered, the 'semiotic' in *écriture féminine*. In line with Merleau-Ponty's (2012 [1946]) phenomenological argument, the perception of dance is in nature complex kinaesthetic, rather than verbal, and consists of multi-layered experiences, involving emotion, visual and aural cues, movement, spatial and dynamic elements, intellectual stimulation and other elements (Starkes *et al.*, 1990). Dance with its rhythm, vision and corporeal perception, generates forms of knowing which involve all our senses and allow dynamic and changing relations, a constant reorganization of the abstract and the concrete (Pakes, 2009).

Dance as a method of presentation can thus be seen as an attempt to deconstruct binary gender relations, practices of gender performativity and the construction of gender through aesthetics that is 'done' and 'undone' in organizations in order to affirm desired meanings (Hancock and Tyler, 2007). Modern choreography explores a multiplicity of juxtaposed movements and breaks, with 'typical' female movements highlighted to expose and challenge performative processes that Butler (1993, p.



Figure 6: Woman fetches a chair or pulls it away
 Courtesy Katrin Kolo, photo: Lisa Schäubli

115) describes as occurring when subjects produce their coherence at the cost of their own complexity. Cultural studies strongly emphasize implications for the construction of female identity through movement. In her pioneering study, *Throwing Like a Girl*, Young (1990) considers the feminine as a set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society with bodily movement patterns as part of the structures and conditions that define, confine and restrict the feminine. Restrained bodily movements and corporeal expression have confined and defined female identity. In this vein, exaggerated gender differences via stylized body image, artificial movement and pre-feminist narrative have, for example, been criticized as an 'unabashed hallmark of classical ballet' (Daly, 1987). For reasons of political resistance, however, modern choreography disrupts narrative and refuses mastery over prescribed movements, processing restrained movements that signify an internal struggle with opposing motivations (Foster, 2013). Body-related expressions were first articulated at the same time as Nancy Spero's *peinture féminine* emerged: Trisha Brown's widely-known choreography *Watermotor*, for example, opposed highly normatized and suppressive female ballet dancing by presenting movements that never co-ordinated the body towards a single action, and mid-range movements showing incompatible components and the potential of body parts to be disconnected (Foster, 2013). Her presentation conveys an 'aesthetic understanding' of a search of the body and identity which is constantly revolving and rotating and is individually and socially constructed and negotiated.

Dance is an aesthetic theorizing of the discursive and performative construction of the female body. Dance as an arts-based form of representation, via the ongoing negotiation of lived experience and materiality and kinaesthetic perception, may unfold a particular potential to expose the dominant, masculine aesthetics of organizations and their studies, and of the space that is allowed for the feminine. In the concluding discussion, I shall develop this idea of resistance by going back to Kristeva's concept of resistance.

Discussion and conclusion

Having explored ideas about the potential of feminine creation to release into academic management discourse the aesthetic experience and the feminine which traditionally are suppressed, I shall now further discuss its resistant potential. Researchers look for ways to challenge the masculine discourse but it has been seen as deplorable that our language 'helps to perpetuate the status quo and, following from this, it is difficult to express or imagine new and radical ideas' (Cooper, 1992, p. 19). It is difficult to imagine new understandings and alternatives without having the language, but an embodied language as feminine creation could indeed convey other forms of aesthetic knowing, opening up meanings, imagining change.

This would be done by disrupting practices of masculine writing, suspending them instead of trying to argue directly against them with the pencil. Feminine creation can be seen as political by being in opposition to the political, in the sense of Kristeva (1977) who finds that the political is subject to the law of the law, it cannot help but posit an order, a rule, a power that is applicable to all, a common measure. This also applies to phallogocentric ('symbolic') public order, the Law of the Father. In contrast, arts-based methods ('semiotic') do not need to be seen as the anti-rule or the anti-power, but as the exception. Höpfl (2000, p. 104) wrote that for Kristeva, 'the attempt to use language against itself is to create an untenable position', so it may be suggested that arts-based forms can be a way to act against written masculine language by not writing. Feminine creation can deconstruct the practice of writing by *not* continuing to write against it, by avoiding masculine phallogocentric thinkable oppositions and binary opposites of right or wrong and thereby addressing masculine fears of letting it go (Cooper, 1992, p. 25), remaining multiple and diffuse.

In this sense, feminine creation complements empiricist feminine research methods that aim to 'set the record straight' (Leckenby, 2007) and other text-based accounts of research. It is also different from attempts to subvert language in order to re-shape and refine oppressive accounts of male and female subjectivity (Fotaki, 2011, p. 51). My interpretation of Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva, with an emphasis on the semiotic and aesthetic, may be another way against the silencing and marginalization of alternative perspectives. Feminine creation goes some way to explore 'new ways of speaking (re-citing) and new ways of knowing' (Pullen, 2006, p. 294) that are deemed necessary for (gender in) management research. Arts-based methods question what organizational researchers are allowed to produce and what their 'readers' are allowed to experience, thereby producing a different form of knowledge (Warren, 2008). Exposing researchers and organizational members to arts-based methods sensitizes them to 'their own embodied responses', attending to the 'invisible' aspects of the research field in order to understand its more materially based dimensions (Ladkin, 2013, p. 331). Arts-based forms of feminine creation, via their production of aesthetic knowing, could oppose what Fotaki (2011, p. 50) called the 'fantasy of the knowledge creation process as a pure product of the (masculine) academic mind without the "contaminating" influence of the body'. The arts-based practice that creates implicit, aesthetic forms of knowing cannot be translated back into the syntax, terminology and logic of the academic discourse. It gives voice to suppressed female (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007) and everybody's aesthetic experiences (Taylor and Hansen, 2005), thereby remaining in the margins and retaining its revolutionary potential (Kristeva, 1977). The aesthetic form resists the masculine discourse by showing that it erects opinion and order, inclusion and exclusion in suppressive ways.

Researchers concerned with feminine writing in organization studies are looking for new forms of expression that not only present an alternative to the masculine, but work through the dialectic between the masculine and feminine (Phillips *et al.*, 2014, p. 327). Arts-based forms seem to be an option here, and their openness in terms of culture is another advantage. When dancing, for example, is referred to as the language of the body, and painting is seen as another embodied form of writing, arts-based methods are a truly intercultural, international and inclusive form of communication and fit well in today's diverse management research community. Bodies of different colours can be involved in non-verbal dancing, and visuals can be more 'colourful' in many other ways too. This also expresses the ongoing concern of feminist research to include a diverse range of women's

experiences (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 18). For all non-native English speakers, academic writing that requires use of a dictionary and proofreading is an alienating experience of language that falters and halts, that resorts to, and unconsciously may reproduce, masculinist and dominating power relations. The collection of *peinture féminine* presented in this paper has shown how textual arguments may be reinforced vividly through watercolours and photographic blur that communicate in other ways than the masculine and English discourse in organization studies, and express and emphasize fluidity, 'cosmic' openness of the mind, the challenge of the body, ambiguity in movements and possibilities for change.

On a broader level, feminine creation may be of interest to all critical management scholars as an alternative, artistic form of resistance. Contemporary artists came to practise actual 'artistic resistance' against capitalism, using paintings, plays and performances with powerful imagery and emotional experiences that are different from and absent in intellectual, written approaches (Biehl-Missal, 2013b). So it may seem logical that scholars should use arts-based methods to bring into question issues of female suppression and persistent forms of 'masculine' writing with its norms of clarity, logic and discipline. Feminist research historically, and in many actual cases, is related to activism (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007) and sociologists have seen the emergence of the academic-activist who is engaged in social opposition (Chatterton, 2008) and, particularly with realist trends in contemporary performance and social theatrical activism (Occupy), this door is open not only to those with artistic abilities but also to those who are willing to assemble works, to co-ordinate an exhibition or to organize a performance.

At this point, it is useful to be mindful of dominant structures and practices that confine a researcher's possibilities. The idea of using arts-based forms is rather new to management scholars but already is used in different contexts following the performative turn in social science (Knowles and Cole, 2008). Academics in the humanities for a long time now have practised projects involving theatre, dance, film, video and television which are submitted alongside traditional writing practices as legitimate research activities and outcomes (Research Excellence Framework, 2011, p. 22). The evaluation of the performative research output is then subject to peer review and assessment panels in institutional audits. Particularly with regard to this issue, the establishment of feminine creation in management studies would need strategic lobbying within the academic world — another topic that needs further discussion. However, arts-based works with their aesthetic expression (semiotic, with regard to Kristeva's dichotomy) may allow authors to contribute beyond the authority of paternal discourse (symbolic) which demands 'submission' to a journal. So I would hope that I have made some inspiring suggestions to all of those who, to use Cixous' comparison, have ever felt like a painter or like an artist when writing and are tempted to develop this idea creatively.

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