# Intellectual quietness: our struggles with researching creativity as a process

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## Introduction

> *"Though the river's current never fails, the water passing, moment by moment, is never the same.  Where the current pools, bubbles form on the surface, bursting and disappearing as others rise to replace them, none lasting long.  In this world, people and their dwelling places are like that, always changing."*
> *Kamo no Chōmei (c. 1200): Hōjōki*

In a recent article published in *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, Stierand, Boje, Glăveanu, Dörfler, Haley and Feuls argue that the creative process is "an embodied experience, a sojourn in not only the social but also in the materiality aspect of creativity" (Stierand et al., 2017, p. 1), frequently appearing superficial and naïve, because "stories of 'having an idea' are often post-factum reconstructions and re-organizations of a much more complex, messy, embodied, and non-linear process" (Stierand et al., 2017, p. 1). The research project underlying this conference paper ambitiously aims to unearth the micro-processes that, together and over time and space, mould the creative process in context. In this particular paper, however, we only intend to discuss some of the most pressing methodological struggles we are currently facing.

As primary conceptual framing of the research project we build on Polányi's (1962, 1966, 1969) notion of 'personal knowledge' and also include facets from the body of knowledge on 'organisational knowledge and learning' (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Davenport & Prusak, 2000; Easterby-Smith, Crossan, & Nicolini, 2000; Tsoukas, 2005), in general, and the creation of new knowledge, in particular (Dörfler, Baracskai, & Velencei, 2010; Stierand & Dörfler, 2015; Stierand, Dörfler, & MacBryde, 2014).

## Researching creativity as a process

The creative process is often more than a pure cognitive exercise and can also involve sensory knowing and play that happens in-between the sociomaterial entanglements that are characteristic of creative work. Ontologically, this means that the creative process cannot be understood in isolation from the social and material micro-processes intra-acting with humans (Barad, 2003, p. 815). These micro-processes consist of qualia that are experienced subjectively (Jackson, 1982; Lewis, 1929; Stierand & Dörfler, 2014). Epistemologically, this means that in order to capture the qualia of the creative micro-processes, we must unearth the material and "relational interactions and patternings that are recursively intimated in the fluxing and transforming of our life-worlds" (Chia, 1995, pp. 581-582). Thus, methodologically, this means that we need to achieve a kind of intellectual quietness that would allow us to dwell in the sociomaterial phenomena unfolding around us and to be able to focus our attention on how the sociomaterial mirco-processes intra-act with the human mind during creative work (Dörfler, Stierand, & Zizka, 2017). This is not to say that entities and structures, which can be regarded as the effects of these micro-processes, cannot appear as stable, only this is not the stability of the rock but of the standing wave. That is, even if an entity appears stable, its attributes are continuously changing, because "reality is deemed to be continuously in flux and transformation and hence unrepresentable in any static sense" (Chia, 1995, p. 579).

## Achieving intellectual quietness

Today, millions of scholars worldwide steadily add new layers of knowledge often without questioning the layers beneath, thereby creating an academic system that almost exclusively believes in a pyramid conception of scientific knowledge (see Baracskai, 2000, p. 42). In such a system, achieving intellectual quietness is difficult if not impossible. This comment "must not be understood as a cynical or nihilistic tendency in contemporary thought but as a subtle and complex attempt at reworking the metaphysical bases of modern knowledge" (Chia, 2003, p. 114). Or, to say it in the words of Prigogine (2004, p. 10): "We cannot have becoming without being, just as we cannot have light without darkness or music without silence." Therefore, Prigogine argues for a science that includes both *being* and *becoming* in its

formulation of the laws of nature and even goes *beyond* these laws. This 'going beyond' can be achieved by introducing chaos as a fundamental concept. Chaos, however, brings *instability* to the being aspect, which means that, instead of infinitely valid permanent laws of nature, we need to think in terms of probabilistic laws. This, in turn, leads to emergence of a spectrum of possibilities, meaning limited (i.e. numerous but not infinite) possible alternatives of becoming, which also depend on the image of the future.

## Towards a process philosophy of creativity

In fields where the phenomenon of interest is inherently linked to understanding the process that *makes* the phenomenon, like in the field of creativity, we need to "seek alternative modes of expression that can allow the ephemeral aspects of process to be more adequately expressed." (Chia, 1995, p. 589) The biggest problem of our academic system is not so much that we try to represent reality, but the "violence done to this emergent and ephemeral reality when we attempt to impose our static organizing codes onto it" (Chia, 1995, p. 590). Not enough, we continue to make it worse by confusing the representations with the reality that they are supposed to represent.

Of course, we cannot completely suspend representations, at least when presenting our findings or results, but we can (at least try to) develop habits of critical reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2009; Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015; Hibbert, Sillince, Diefenbach, & Cunliffe, 2014) that help us delineating our thoughts from reality. We can also practice the use of metaphors and regularly invent new concepts to describe new thoughts, thereby accepting that we also need to be ready to give up concepts as they become obsolete.

Researchers also need to develop what Keats (quoted by Chia & Morgan, 1996, p. 55) called negative capability, i.e. the "capability of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason". Beyond the engagement with reality (and thus data), the negative capability is also important for an achievement of comprehension when we accept that the reality does not play by the management textbooks, and that researchers inevitably have to face a lack of internal consistency in their emerging understanding. Sometimes inconsistencies will disappear during the research project, but often they can

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persist for years. Thus, researchers need to develop an ability to cope with such situation – and they need a framework in which a less then complete internal consistency can be accepted.

Since there are multiple ways of experiencing the same phenomenon and there can be multiple interpretations of the same experience with different conclusions to draw, researchers we need to develop an ability to "stay 'with' the experience and to wallow in the open-endedness and indeterminacy of that experience, soaking it up until we are saturated with its presence and enduring personal insights are attained" (Chia & Morgan, p. ibid).  In addition, the investigated phenomenon, the context, the researcher's experience of the phenomenon in this context as well as the researcher herself/himself all need to be open-ended in a process view.

For that reason we introduce the principle of *research indeterminacy* to represent these characteristics. It is also important to note that accepting the above outlined epistemological stance is incompatible with a hasty collection of data and a rushed analysis that is not uncommon in academia due to the pressure to publish at ever-increasing rate.  It is important to admit that this means that the research process will be longer since, in order to achieve understanding in a process view, researchers need to "estrange themselves from their symbolic universe of discourse" (Chia & Morgan, 1996, p. 55), reach an intellectual quietness in order to be able to immerse themselves in the phenomena unfolding around them, to tune their attention to their sensual as well as mental experiences. We need to combine active interrogation with contemplative listening or what Chia (ibid) refers to as "conceptual 'ground-clearing' or 'de-signing'".

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