



ISPSO 34th Annual Meeting, Copenhagen 3rd - 9th July 2017: Dreams always take place: Spaces, Places, Rooms, and Furniture, inside and around us

## CREATIVE SPACE

Friday 7<sup>th</sup> July

1430-1545

*Susan Kahn:*

### **The Watch: Visions of Work**

Presentation and 'here and now event'

#### **Watching organisational life**

This session examines ways in which our visions of work can be attuned. What we see and what we choose not see, our emotional experience of the workplace, the fantasies and the fears. It outlines the theoretical basis for observing work and then offers participants the opportunity to enact their own psychoanalytic observation. It brings observation techniques to work and applies observational methods to an organizational setting where the work space and the behaviour of interacting groups is the focus of attention and observation. The challenge of observing, of being a gatherer of sense impressions, but not drowning in those impressions is explored (Bion, 1976).

#### **Applying visions of work**

I have chosen a Rembrandt painting (in recognition of our keynote speaker's intimate knowledge of the artist) to give conference members an observation experience. A here and now opportunity to develop their visions of work.

Utilising Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* participants will have the opportunity to conduct their own observation examining what draws us in, what we choose to see and what we are blind to, the light, the shadows and the movement. How do we make sense of what we see in the space around us? Rooted in psychoanalytic observation this exercise will give participants the opportunity to experience the free floating attention of the observer and to consider the presence of other observers and their impact on the landscape of the observed.

Psychoanalytic observation, originally developed by Bick to focus on the intimate relationship of mother and baby (Bick, 1964) is explored as a tool to gain a deep insight into the work spaces we occupy, in essence to take baby to the boardroom (Lazar, 2008). It examines the challenge of staying on the boundary and asks

what haunts the spaces we occupy? What makes the familiar unfamiliar? (Frosh, 2013).

The challenge of observing a work space is examined. From accessing the workplace and being allowed entry to being present but not participating. From observing empty chairs and moving furniture, to visions of disappearing faces and new bodies. The movement of people, spaces and places contrasts with the constancy of the analytic setting. Infant observation offers a clear direction as to the object of attention. In an organisational setting that is much less clear cut, indeed it can be elusive and messy (Armstrong, 2005). A work context is far more complex and is constantly evolving and changing.

Within the organisational context there is a general 'buffeting' of individuals compared with the sheltered, controlled and relatively enduring character of the psychoanalytic situation (Gould, 1991). The self as researcher is central, with the subjectivity of the researcher drawn upon as a research instrument.