

A Volume in
Ideas in Critical Postmodernism

Volume One

**Work and Organization:
The Aesthetic Dimension**

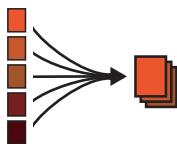
Ideas in Critical Postmodernism
Series Editor: David Boje

- Volume 1: **Work and Organization:
The Aesthetic Dimension**
Adrian Carr and Philip Hancock (eds.)
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- Volume 2: **Discourses & Paradigms**
Susanne M. Fest & Darin A. Arsenault (eds.)
Forthcoming 2009.
- Volume 3: **Management & Goodness**
Heather Hopfl & Ron Beadle (eds.)
Forthcoming 2009.
- Volume 4: **Narrative & Time**
Eric Kramer (eds.)
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Volume One

Work and Organization: The Aesthetic Dimension

Edited by
Adrian Carr & Philip Hancock



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Cover Image: Technospirit by Virginia Maria Romero.

About the artist: Virginia Maria Romero (agzromero@zianet.com) is an award winning artist whose works reflect original contemporary designs that express the distinctive voice of their creator. The style, color and compositions of her acrylics as well as her retablos continue to exhibit her uniqueness and creative quality. To see more of her art, <http://www.artederomero.com/>.

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Series Editor's Introduction to
Ideas in Critical Postmodernism
Volume 1

I am proud and excited to introduce the new series: *Ideas in Critical Postmodernism*. We are exhibiting the best *Tamara: Journal of Critical Organization Inquiry* has to offer.

The cover for our first volume is by world class artist, Virginia Maria Romero, a painting she calls, 'Technospirit.' To see more of her art visit <http://www.artederomero.com>. Virginia Maria and I have joined art and business forces to engage local arts organizations in a critical investigation of our local arts economy, and its aesthetics.

The first volume of the book series is *Work, Aesthetics and Organization* edited by Adrian Carr and Philip Hancock. To continue my storytelling, New Mexico has rather poor arts economies in the southern part of the state, and the more renowned Santa Fe and Taos to the north. Local work and aesthetics and arts organizations exhibit a contestation, a competition to advance and affirm their arts scenes.

The second volume of this book series will be *Discourse and Paradigms* edited by Susanne M. Fest and Darin A. Arsenault. I like storytelling, so here is another verse. There are so many artistic paradigms moving into New Mexico, into Dona Ana County where I live, that a multiplicity of discourses flourish. We have tried various open space and world cafe methods of discourse, but somehow its not the kind of dialogic imagination that inspired Bakhtin. Instead there is a lot of monologue calling itself dialogue, and efforts to enforce or impose consensus hegemony by the powers that be. Nothing dialogical in the herd of discourses, that remain disembodied, disestablished, just so many lines on a flip chart, with most of the good stuff invisible to the process of recording.

The third volume in the book series will be *Management and Goodness* edited by Heather Hopfl and Rod Beadie. To continue my rant. There is an ethics of goodness that those who manage the arts and culture of our county, be they in the public, private or grassroots establishment, can not seem to

sort out. An ethics of goodness is something we would like to meet. It sounds like its Aristotelean, but more to the point its a kind of Bakhtinian answerability (or I would like it to be so). There are these once occurent times in the moment of being where people managing and being managed could chose to act, to intervene in the now, and bring some different 'being' artist about.

The fourth planned volume in the book series is *Narrative and Time* edited by Eric Kramer. Now you now what I will say. That narrative is so established, so retrospective, so whole, so caught up in beginning, middle, and end that it can not recognize other forms of storytelling. To me, those other forms are living story, the nowness of being in the moment, and my telling is in the middle, no ending, no beginning, but I have to tell you this other living story that relates to others' being. And second, there is this 'antenarrative,' bet on the future, a prospective sensemaking, a morph, a changeling that is ever part of emergence, moving disorder into order, finding solace in chaos to bring about something that never was in narrative, something falling out of living story webs.

So there you have it a storytelling introduction to a book series, *Ideas in Critical Postmodernism*. Perhaps I am the last postmodernist still breathing, still using the burned out word. I don't mean every kind of postmodernism, I mean one wed to Critical Theory (capitalized, to represent old school, Frankfurt style, and before that Nietzsche). *Tamara Journal* once had postmodern its its title, but no one reads postmodernism anymore. So we dropped it and I am thankful to Kurt Richardson and ISCE Publishing for rescuing it from the dust bowl of history.

David M. Boje
11 February, 2009
New Mexico

Editorial

Art and Aesthetics at Work: An Overview

Adrian Carr & Philip Hancock

Introduction

Over recent years the field of organization studies has exhibited an increasing interest in the aesthetic dimension of work and its organization. Whilst this interest may have been awakened, more generally, by the publication of such philosophically oriented works as Eagleton's (1990) *The ideology of the aesthetic* and Welsch's (1997) *Undoing aesthetics*, it must also be understood in relation to a series of developments within the field itself over the last three decades or so. The shift from an almost exclusively objectivist approach to the analysis of organizational practice exemplified in Weick's (1969) *The social psychology of organizing* and Silverman's (1970) *The theory of organizations*, for example, signified a significant step along the path towards an acceptance of the relevance of sensuality to understanding the rich tapestry that is organizational life. Of equal, and perhaps greater contemporary importance, has been the groundbreaking work focusing on manifestations of organizational culture and symbolism (Alvesson & Berg, 1992; Turner, 1990) with the *Third international conference on organizational symbolism* (1987) whose theme was 'The symbolics of corporate artifacts', particularly noteworthy, resulting as it did in the publication of a selection of papers (see Gagliardi, 1990) that helped to inform and focus the field of organization studies on the presence of an aesthetic sensibility.

Subsequently, a range of published contributions to the field have been forthcoming, including individual journal articles (Carr, 1997; Carr & Zanetti, 2000; Guillén, 1997; Rustead, 1999) thematic editions of journals (Or-

ganization, 1996), chapters in edited collections (Hancock & Tyler, 2000; Thompson, Warhurst & Callaghan 2000), edited books (Linstead & Höpfl., 2000) and monographs (Strati, 1999), many of which have been characterized by the work and ideas of scholars who draw significantly on a range of radical traditions within the social sciences, including critical theory, post-structuralism and postmodernism. Furthermore, in addition to such academic and critically oriented offerings, more populist management writers are also starting to contribute significantly to the diffusion of aesthetic concepts throughout the business world. For example, building on the work of writers on corporate identity and design such as Olins (1989), the likes of Dickinson and Svensen (2000) have sought in their millennium manifesto, *Beautiful corporations: Corporate style in action*, to argue the case for an organizational aesthetic that expresses beauty and style through everything from physical design to corporate ethics and environmental responsibility.

It is to this embryonic, if albeit increasingly flourishing body of research and literature within management and business studies, which this volume seeks to both, contribute to, and help take beyond its current stage of development.

Rationale

Art and aesthetics at work, while an ambiguous title for a single volume is not one that was deliberately contrived to be so. Initially, it was conceived of simply as a description of the subject matter of the volume. That is, what the various contributors consider to be the role and opportunities that art and aesthetics are increasingly coming to play in the study and practice of work organizations. However, it quickly became clear that an alternative meaning, implicit within the title's semantic construction, also had great relevance for this volume. For, what many of the chapters contained within this collection are at pains to consider is not only the presence of art and aesthetics within the ev-

everyday life of the workplace, but equally, how these are increasingly put to work in the service of a range of organizational aspirations and goals or, alternatively, how they can provide a range of novel and informative insights into the structuring and maintenance of organizational activities, particularly those which rely upon the continued existence of asymmetrical relations of power and control. Aesthetic experience is thus differentially conceptualized at various stages throughout this volume, not only as an outcome of divergent terms of reference or theoretical agendas, but also as a consequence of the positioning and functioning that is ascribed to it within the organizational domain of work.

The existence of ambiguity should not, of course, provide any great surprise for those familiar with the equally ambiguous history of the aesthetic itself. While the origins of the concept can be traced back to antiquity, its contemporary usage remains highly contested. Originally conceived of in the work of Baumgarten (1753/1954), as the systematic study of sensual and affective dimension of human experience the everyday meaning and usage of the term has shifted and changed considerably over the subsequent centuries. Yet today, while it is still more likely to be understood in relation to the categorization and judgment of art, much of Baumgarten's original conception of its nature remains in evidence, particularly in work inspired by the critical interrogation of modernity associated with critical theory and postmodernism. Such a broad engagement with the aesthetic, as the realm of sensual experience, is also, therefore, as important to the work contained within this collection, as is its more traditional association with the realm of art and artistic practice.

Such divergences, ambiguities and contestations are therefore the lifeblood of the aesthetic and, as such it is our hope as the editors that through the mix of international and established writers and scholars, and new or emerging academics within the field of organization and management studies, we have been able to provide a taste

of this. Furthermore, we also anticipate that in doing so we have produced a volume that may yet provide an insightful, eclectic, and perhaps in some cases iconoclastic, overview of the increasing relevance of aesthetics and aesthetic theory for the ongoing development of a critical understanding of contemporary work organizations.

About the Chapters in this Volume

The chapters in this volume owe their origins to a conference held at the University of Manchester in July 2001. This conference, *The second international critical management studies conference*, contained a stream on art and aesthetics which was convened by the editors of this volume. We would like to publicly thank Hugh Willmott and Irena Grugulis for allowing us to use this venue for what turned out to be one of the most well attended streams of the conference and a stream that yielded far too many excellent submissions for presentation. One of the aims of convening the stream was to subsequently put together a group of outstanding papers for a special issue of a journal and to possibly form the nucleus for a major edited work on the same topic. David Boje was extremely supportive of this project and agreed to the development of a special issue of the journal, *TAMARA*, on the topic of art and aesthetics.

The chapters that constitute this volume should be understood as being inter-related, and are clearly focussed upon the topic of art and aesthetics. Notwithstanding, the chapters in this volume can be seen to speak to three major themes which could be broadly described as: Art and aesthetics *as a way of knowing organization*; the organization of work itself is an aesthetically ordered activity; and, *critical engagements with aesthetics at work*.

In the next chapter, *Art as a form of knowledge: The implications for critical management*, Adrian Carr emphasizes how art and aesthetics represents a way of knowing organization. Carr brings a critical theory perspective to the proposition that art is a form of knowledge and as having a language-like character that incites philosophical reflec-

tion. The critical theorists that Carr relies upon to build his case are Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse—all scholars associated with the Institut für Sozialforschung (the Institute for Social Research) which, because of its initial establishment in Frankfurt University, is commonly referred to as ‘the Frankfurt School’. It might be recalled that the scholars associated with the Frankfurt School rejected the logico-rational tradition in which it was presumed that in the social sciences, like the natural sciences, there was an absolute truth capable of discovery through the scientific method. For these scholars, what passes for truth and knowledge in the social sciences could not be detached from the knowing subjects—knowledge always has to be conceived as mediated through society and has a dialectic ‘nature’ in the interplay of the particular and the universal, of the moment and totality (see Carr, 2000). It was in this context that the aforementioned scholars of the Frankfurt School conceived art and aesthetics as not some separate order as such, but instead as having a co-determined link to the ‘otherness’ it putatively sought to escape. The key issue here, for some of these scholars, is that on the one hand, art is mimetic and induces mimetic behavior in the viewer. Art mimics or carries resemblance. On the other hand, there is an enigmatic face to a work of art in as much as it carries discrepancy between projected images and their actuality. It is in this very act of an expression of non-identity with itself that art was considered to induce critical reflection.

The chapter explores the work of the surrealists to highlight the manner in which this critical reflection is induced. The intention of the surrealists was to break the rational ‘language’ of correspondence to induce new associations with the objects and images and to transcend the control, presence and even the overt intention of the ‘author’ of the work. Many of the works of the surrealists, for example, involved producing discomfort or ‘shock’ (an “estrangement-effect”) through the juxtaposition of objects being placed in unfamiliar settings. The produc-

tion of an estrangement-effect is discussed in terms of the dialectic dynamic that was championed by some of the Frankfurt School scholars. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how this work of the Frankfurt School scholars and the exploration of art and aesthetics, in particular, may provide a valuable optic through which the fields of management and organization studies might be reflexively explored—to perhaps ‘see’ anew issues for which we have, at best, had a superficial understanding.

This theme of art and aesthetics as being a way of knowing is also conspicuous in the next chapter which is by Watkins and King. In their chapter, entitled *Organizational performance: A view from the arts*, they tackle the issue of organizational performance, and the utility a more artistic sensibility could have for its evaluation and pursuit. Noting how the mainstream literature concerned with enhancing performance in organizations tends to follow strategies associated with the rule driven scientism of early 20th management thought, they consider how this has generated the illusion that it is through the establishment of regulatory frameworks that the complex and unpredictable reality of organizational life can be geared towards optimizing performance.

In response to what the authors consider to be the inadequacies of this tradition, they provide an engaging re-evaluation of a series of historical breaks within the art world that were themselves brought about by the need to challenge a rule-grounded orthodoxy similar to that alluded to above. Richly illustrating their argument with the work of Cézanne, Picasso, James and Kafka, amongst others, the authors suggest that it was only with the break from the rules of perspectivism and realism that art finally became able to represent reality in all its richness and variation. As a consequence of this observation, they propose that management should perhaps also learn to incorporate a mode of thinking that would facilitate a movement outside of the traditional rule bound structures of organizational evaluation. One that may assist management to

grasp the totality of organizational life in all its diversity and heterogeneity and, in doing so, provide a far more responsive guide to requisite organizational action in the search for appropriate levels of performativity.

The second of the themes or major currents within this volume—the idea that the organization of work itself is an aesthetically ordered activity—can be noted in the next two chapters in this volume. Nick Nissley, Steven S. Taylor and Orville Butler, take us into the sphere of organizational song and a consideration of its structuring effects on the action on both organizational employees and consumers. Reminding us that while the study of organization discourse has been extended to a range of areas, until now that of song—and particularly its lyrical content—has been largely overlooked. However, in their chapter, entitled *The power of organizational song: An organizational discourse and aesthetic expression of organizational culture*, they demonstrate how song can provide significant insights into the relations of meaning that circulate within the workplace.

Focusing particularly on the corporate songs of a major US home appliance manufacturer, the authors present us with what they term an archeological approach to the study of organizational life. That is, they set out to uncover and consider particular fragments of an organization's activities, in this instance its songs, as a means of gaining insight into the culture of the whole. Illustrating extensively their descriptive passages with extracts from a range of songs, they go on to develop a theoretically informed analysis of the ways in which such songs can be understood both to reflect the actuality of the existing organizational culture while, at the same time, function as a technology of organizational power that both enables and constrains its membership and those who came into contact with it. As such, songs can perhaps best be understood as technologies of mediation, operating at the interface between the subjective and objective dimensions of organizational experience.

The idea that the organization of work itself is an aesthetically ordered activity can also be noted in the chapter by Nancy Harding. Harding explores the relationship between aesthetics and the ordering of the human body. This author builds on previous work concerned with what has been referred to as *aesthetic labour* (Hancock & Tyler, 2000; Warhurst & Nickson, in press). Harding takes a particular and unique look at the bodies of organizational managers, and the role aesthetic labour plays in the structuring of their own subordination to the imperatives of capitalist organization. This highly engaging chapter provides an extensive theoretical framework for its subsequent analysis drawing, in particular, on a Foucauldian tradition of critique directed at uncovering the simultaneous process of subjectification/objectification the managerial body experiences as it goes about its everyday organizational activities.

This chapter brings to the foreground the proposition that it is not only the employee's bodies that are sculpted and worked on so as to generate an organizationally appropriate embodied aesthetic, but also managers, who are both subjectified in that they are self-constituted as a symbol of "conformity, rigidity and obedience", while at the same time embodying an objectified organizational aesthetic that is amenable to the gaze of the Other. The embodied process of management is thus itself an aesthetically ordered activity, one that functions both as a symbol of organizational power and a technology of internalized control, acting back onto the manager who is trapped within his/her own corporeal 'iron cage'.

In the final two chapters in this volume, we encounter the authors addressing a similar theme in as much as they both seek to self-consciously critically engage with aesthetics at work. In a chapter concerned with the question of organizational architecture, Karen Dale and Gibson Burrell address critically the relationship between corporate architecture, alienation and identity. Grounded in the emerging field of critical management studies, and

its somewhat eclectic mix of influences, they bring both Benjamin's notion of the *dazzle* and Welsch's particular conceptualization of the process of *anaestheticization* into play as they probe the organizational sensorium, and its relationship to the built environment of experience. Beginning with an interrogation of the polysemetic character of the aesthetic, and drawing out from this the concept of anesthetization, the authors lead us on a journey from the imagery of Huxley's *Brave new world*, via Benjamin's Parisian experience of *phantasmagoria*, to the *dazzling* realm of modernist organizational architecture. Here, they stop to reflect upon the politics of such architecture, noting the political emasculation that the modernist style underwent during its cultural transplantation from the cultural context of European avant-gardism to the rational requirements of American cultural and material mass production.

Nevertheless, in doing so, they expose the functioning of an alternative political agenda, one driven by the urge to simultaneously dazzle, and anesthetize its spatial captives. This can be achieved by the over-stimulation of one sense (most likely the ocular sense) at the cost of the de-sensitization of the accompanying senses, thus limiting the range of the individual human sensorium. However, it is also noted how it is not only those who encounter such organizations that potentially undergo such a desensitization or anesthetization process. Those who labour in, and build and design such places are drawn into relations of economic and political subservience that also anesthetizes their relationship with the world they, in large part, create. Management, the authors note therefore, is not simply concerned with the management of minds and hearts, but equally, the management of the senses—and it is this realization that critical management studies must arrive at if it is to pursue reflexively its challenge to the alienating consequences of contemporary organizational activity.

The final chapter is entitled *Aestheticizing the world of organization—creating beautiful untrue things*

and is written by Philip Hancock. While representing a departure from the theme of architecture found in the previous chapter, it continues the critical tenor reflecting on what the author considers to be the negative implications of the emergence of a highly managerialist genre of texts concerned with the appropriation and management of organizational aesthetics; or as the title of this collection suggests, the act of putting 'aesthetics to work'.

Driven empirically by a critical analysis of several examples of such texts, and theoretically informed by the work of Theodor Adorno, Wolfgang Iser and Srdjan Mestrovic, amongst others, at the heart of this chapter is a spirited defence of what the author considers to be the unique role aesthetic experience and judgment is capable of contributing to the process of human emancipation, and the threat this faces from the subsequent imposition of an organizational logic. Referring to the possible emergence of a condition of post-aestheticism such a concern revolves around a theme similar to that discussed by Dale and Burrell, namely that by adorning the world in corporate imagery, and thus reducing aesthetic experience to "little more than just another repository of mechanically produced, instrumentally oriented codes and symbols", threatens both a process of cultural anesthetization, as well as a neutralization of the critical, and thus emancipatory, potential of aesthetic experience.

The chapter concludes with a clear assertion of distrust of those who champion the incorporation of aesthetic values and practices into the organizational realm. Locating the potential struggle between the non-conceptual nature of aesthetic experience and the rigidly conceptual, and inevitably instrumental, character of managerial planning and activity within the broader struggle between modernist rationality and the sensual, corporeal dynamic of Being, Hancock bemoans such developments as yet a further example of the disenchantment of the modern world. A world that while increasingly spectacular, adorned as it is in its corporate livery, is simultaneously rendered sterile,

as aesthetic experience is reduced to a value identical to that generated through the reception of the standardized and rationalized aesthetics of corporate organization.

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