

Book review. *Aesthetics, Organization, and Humanistic Management*, edited by Monika Kostera and Cezary Woźniak, New York, NY: Routledge, 2021, 254 pp., ISBN: 9780367550073

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The book *Aesthetics, Organization, and Humanistic Management* is a collection of chapters on the theme of aesthetics in organisations, edited by Monika Kostera and Cezary Woźniak. I must admit it is not an easy task to review a book like this, where many and different authors, as management and organisation scholars, philosophers, artists, and art curators, develop different perspectives and use a wide range of theoretical approaches and methodologies. For this reason, the aim of this review is not to offer a comprehensive view of the whole book, but to focus on some relevant issues which could stimulate the curiosity of a possible reader.

The book consists of an editorial introduction, "Understanding organizing and the quest for wholeness," followed by fourteen chapters articulated in four sections: "Reflection" with two contributions, "Imagination" with three chapters, "Practice" with six contributions, and "Expression" with three chapters.

Since the introduction, the reader is clearly warned of what lies ahead. This is a book against reductionism, against those management and organisation studies and approaches (and they are the majority) that adopt the same ideological premises: organisational scholars have to produce knowledge that is useful for managers to effectively reach the main aims of organisations. It is quite evident that this kind of epistemological approach excessively simplifies the complexity that characterises contemporary organisations. It is often taken for granted that organisations are all business corporations, that operate in the best socio-economic system, and that have to be managed through a rationalistic, calculative, and goal-oriented approach. Even organisational scholars are often affected by this kind of epistemology, as their main concern is to provide managers with useful tools, conducting studies whose main concern is to answer the famous (or infamous) "so what" question.

The reader of this book is immersed in a journey through the realm of art and aesthetics, a journey that represents a struggle against reductionism. The use of the philosophy of aesthetics to provide a different epistemological framework for studying organisations is not new (Gagliardi, 1996; Strati, 1999; 2019, Guillet de Monthoux, 2008), but there is still a desperate need to spread out this perspective in the academic and business contexts. In particular, through the chapters of this book we are made aware that art and aesthetics can allow a different understanding of organisations: we can use different notions of value, different notions of performances, different languages, different ways to represent organisational phenomena, all differences that do justice to the complexity, and that give us back the humanity, of organisations.

This approach is fully in tune with the epistemological framework that animates the puntOorg International Research Network; in particular, puntOorg International Journal hosts here its first book review, opening, in this way, a new section of this Journal.

Since the first contribution written by Antonio Strati, we are placed in front of the frescoes that Ambrogio Lorenzetti made to decorate the Sala dei Nove in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena (Italy). The use of the language of the art of painting allows the author to immerse the reader in an aesthetic path, through which he can better understand two themes related to good governance: that of justice and that of the subordination of private interest to the common good. In another chapter, written by Luc Peters and Anke Strauß, we are watching The Hudsucker Proxy together with the authors, reflecting on the relationship between control and non-control, between order and mess, immersed in the organisational life embodied by the actors on the screen.

This aesthetic journey goes on with other artistic experiences, and we are confronting with other artistic languages, through which we can catch a different understanding of organisations. For instance, Matilda Dahl, Pierre Guillet de Monthoux, and Jenny Helin wonder how to write on their research on daydreaming among farm owners, asking if poetry could be the right language to be used (Kostera, 1997). The art of writing, and the use of literature as an organisational language (Czarniawska, 1999; Sicca, 2010), return in other two chapters. Piotr Graczyk discusses the possibility of interpreting literature as a kind of management, and management itself as an activity that produces literature. In this sense, institutions are structurally organised, and the structures have a linguistic shape. Conceiving structures under this perspective can allow us to better understand the relationship between conformity and nonconformity, where the former is the hierarchising side of the language, and the latter is the rebellion against this conformity. In his contribution, Daniel Ericsson uses writing in an impressionist way, going beyond the positivist approach that characterises this activity when it is applied to management and organisation. Drawing upon Karl Weick's (1995) concepts of sensemaking, he engages the reader in a linguistic exercise, offering multiple versions of the same event. Thus, the reader is confronted with the opportunity of writing the plot of this event, depending on her/his own sensemaking.

The aesthetic side of organisational life can be analysed also by studying and interpreting symbols and artifacts (Gagliardi, 1990) that characterise organisations. A clear example of this issue is provided by the monuments erected by organisations, which Marcin Laberschek has examined in Poland. Through the analysis of over 160 monuments, both made on organisations' initiative (such as by the management or the workers) and other people's initiative (such as local authorities or inhabitants), we can understand what norms and values are fundamental to the organisations and why. Being placed in front of this kind of artifacts, the reader is immersed in the history of the organisations, particularly during the communist era; moreover, she/he is made able to understand how these monuments have contributed to the creation and consolidation of the organisational identity (Cornelissen, 2002).

Symbols and artifacts are not just concrete objects, as it is the case of monuments, but also dynamic processes, as artistic interventions or performances. By narrating an artistic intervention project in an organisation, Marja Soila-Wadman brings to life an aesthetic learning process; in this sense, art can help organisational members open their minds, so contributing to create a more collaborative and creative environment. The artistic intervention within organisations may favour the creation of a trustful climate, where individuals are more inclined to share their feelings and experiences about new ideas, products, or work methods.

Another way to apply aesthetics and art is performativity, which is considered one of the more relevant topics of interest in organisational studies (Moriceau, 2016). A clear example is offered by the chapter written by Jean-Luc Moriceau, Philippe Mairesse, and Yannick Fronza, where they narrate a performative artwork made by Tino Sehgal in the Palais de Tokyo. In this case, the reader is placed in front of a living artifact, through which she/he can understand how spacing happens and what role it plays in organising. Using the language of performative arts, we can think differently about organisational space as a place of performativity. The difference is in what we mean by performativity and performance. In this sense, organisational space can be reduced to a place where everything must be efficiently and effectively controlled and optimised for management purposes; or it can be thought as a process of spacing, where everyone acts and moves according to each other, producing different configurations from human movements. Thus, performativity becomes a metaphor for liquid modernity, and for new workspaces, such as flex-offices and open spaces, that originate from it.

In sum, the essays included in the volume give us a precious picture of what an aesthetic approach can offer for a better understanding of organisations. The field of arts can provide organisational scholars with the possibility of a continuous reinterpretation of the lives of organisations, making more sense of their complexity, and avoiding or limiting the reductionism that characterises the majority of studies and theories about them. As we have seen, paintings, music, movies, monuments, literature, etc., provide us with new paths for exploring and interpreting social contexts. Moreover, the call for a humanistic management (Pirson, 2017) passes through the aesthetic perspective, that can enable the emergence of the complexity of organisations by an experienced and experiential narrative of organising (Czarniawska, 2009; 2014).

Organisational scholars can be able to use such approach, but at the same time they have to demonstrate that they can provide managers with new principles, tools, processes, languages, through which organisations can be better understood and managed. And Hugo Letiche, in the last chapter of the book, gives us an interesting and suggestive example by proposing a filmic approach to research; in this sense, the filmic is anti-methodological and anti-reductionist, opening up the researcher to multiple facets, perspectives, and possibilities.

This is not an easy task, but if organisational scholars will succeed, they will contribute to build more responsible and humanistic socio-economic systems. We are convinced that a world where organisations pay attention not only to the rational aspects of their activities, but also to things like sensibility, feelings, emotions, playfulness, creativity, improvisation, would be a better world to live in. And we are sure that the authors of the essays included in the book will succeed in convincing other readers of the same.

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