



*Organizational Aesthetics* 1(1): 1-4

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## **Welcome to *Organizational Aesthetics***

**Steven S. Taylor**

Editor-in-Chief

**Ralph Bathurst**

Arts Section Editor

**Donna Ladkin**

Theory Section Editor

**Stefan Meisiek**

Reviews Section Editor

**Martin Wood**

Practice Section Editor

In a project that started with the Enlightenment, instrumental concerns have become separated from ethical and aesthetic concerns; a situation that has led to the often unexamined assumption that the bottom line of a business is predominant and aesthetic concerns are subordinated to the instrumental master. It is the aim of *Organizational Aesthetics* to provide a place where aesthetic concerns are central. We take art (deliberately notated with a small "a") to be of interest for its own sake. We care about beauty because it enriches our lives, not because it might enrich our bank accounts. We care about the grotesque, the sublime, the comic, the ugly, and the elegant because they are all part of the richness of human existence. And we care about the richness of the human experience and hope that this journal makes a significant contribution to the larger world beyond our areas of immediate interest.

*Organizational Aesthetics* is an online, open-source journal because we wish to be as inclusive as possible. Our hope is to create a place that is widely accessible to all who are interested in the ideas, stories, and conversations that we seek to encourage with the journal. We hope to foster a community where we share our thinking and experiences about the aesthetic side of organizational life as a contribution to advancing the theory and practice of organizational aesthetics.

We say *foster* a community rather than *create* a community in recognition that this community already exists in a variety of forms. It is the community that spun off from the Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism with their own series of conferences in the 1990s. It is the community that came to Pierre Guillet de Monthoux and Antonio Strati's workshops in Sienna and Gattieres in the 2000s. It is the Arts, Aesthetics, Creativity and Organization Research Network. It is the community that comes to the Art of Management and Organization conferences created by Ian King, Ceri Watkins, and Stephen Linstead. It is the community that contributed to and read the all too short-lived journal *Aesthesis: International Journal of Art and Aesthetics* in

*Management and Organizational Life*. It is the Creativity Skills Training Council and the Applied Improv Network. Our hope is that *Organizational Aesthetics* will provide a place for all of these communities (and more) to come together to think, be challenged, and be inspired.

We hope to take full advantage of being an online, open-source journal and exploit the opportunities provided by being unbound by traditional paper-based publishing models. We're not at all sure what this will mean in full, but as one example we will experiment with the very idea of issues. Rather than publishing a set number of issues each year, our intent is to open a general issue for each year and add articles and art work to it as they become available. This will enable us to reduce the long delays between writing and publication that are typical of academic journals. We will also create special issues with special issue editors – let us know if you have an idea for something you'd like to see or do. We are hoping to be challenged and pushed to do interesting and new things.

With that in mind, we say that *Organizational Aesthetics* is about how the five senses and artistry inform business, non-profit, and government organizations. We mean for both terms, *aesthetics* and *organizational*, to be understood broadly to include a range of topics. Examples are the use of arts-based methods in organizations, theoretical accounts of aesthetic phenomena in organizations such as beautiful (or grotesque) leadership, and the art about/in/behind organizations. In fact, we hope that authors and artists will take us to places we haven't even begun to describe or imagine here. We have divided the journal into four sections: Theory, Practice, Art, and Reviews. And again, we hope that contributors challenge us with pieces that don't easily fit in any of those categories.

In this inaugural issue we have pieces in each of our four sections as well as this opening editorial and an essay from a member of our editorial board, Nancy Adler, entitled *Leadership Artistry: Passion and Compassion in Management Practice and Research*. In it, Nancy calls for us to seek beauty. We love this essay not just because it calls for aesthetics to be central to organizational practice and research, but also because it didn't fit into one of our defined sections.

## Theory

The theory section provides a space to explore ideas which inform and enrich our understanding of the aesthetic aspect of organizing and organizations. We realize that the term itself, *Organizational Aesthetics*, lives at the intersection of many different theoretical bodies; including art history, literary criticism, philosophy of aesthetics, art therapy, critical theory, as well as theories associated with art forms such as dance, theatre, music, poetry, fine art and craft. We are particularly interested in the interplay between insights afforded by such theoretical perspectives and the experience of organizational aesthetics, as well as the way our experience of the aesthetic can illuminate theory. Two very different articles open this space. "*The Eye of the Soul*": *Phronesis and the Aesthetics Of Organizing* by Esther Eidinow and Rafael Ramirez uses Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to highlight the often neglected role of aesthetics in the practice of *phronesis*. In contrast, Louise Grisoni's *Poem Houses: An Arts Based Inquiry Into Making a Transitional Artefact to Explore Shifting Understandings and New Insights in Presentational Knowing* demonstrates the way in which theory and practice spark off one another to bring deeper understanding to each through recounting her practice of constructing poem boxes. Both articles offer tantalizing provocations for the possibilities of aesthetic ways of knowing when we take this knowing seriously and attend to it carefully.

## Practice

While the journal's *Theory* section provides a space to explore the theories which inform and enrich our understanding of the aesthetic aspect of organizing and organizations, the *Practice* section creates a space for practitioners to illuminate ways in which the arts are informing organizational life and the act of organizing. In creating these two "themes" our intention is not to further differentiate these two, often dichotomized scholarly. Rather, we hope that a third space of *praxis* might emerge – a space where we can explore the process by which a theory is enacted or practiced. In our launch we have two articles that show something of the range of pieces that might be included in the Practice section. The first, *Artistic Intervention Residencies and Their Intermediaries: A Comparative Analysis* by Ariane Berthoin Antal, offers a comprehensive review of the roles that various organizations across Europe play in connecting artists and organizations in a variety of contexts. The second, *Outlaw Girl: The Challenge of Designing Poetry Exercises for an Organizational Context* by Jane Hilberry is an account of the author's own practice as a poet working in a leadership development program. Ariane offers a broad view of practices while Jane offers a more narrow view of her own practice – both are immensely valuable as windows into the place where art and organizations meet.

## Art

The Art section includes works of art that are informed by organizations including poems, short stories, video, and photo reproductions of works. This might be (but doesn't have to be) thought of as art as research. These submissions need not be aligned directly to formal organizations but may also include community projects and an assessment of the importance of those events or projects to that community. Thus we aim to link art in its widest sense with organizing in all its facets and manifestations. One of the challenges we have faced is how to review submissions for the art section. Rather than following an academic model of asking artists to respond to reviewers' critiques, we have instead chosen to ask reviewers to give us a thumbs up or thumbs down as to whether the work should be published and also to respond to the work with a review that will be published alongside the art. So, here right after Hans Hansen's short story, *Cruel and Most Unusual*, we have a review of the story from Patricia Geist-Martin. After Steve Taylor's play *Cow Going Abstract*, we have reviews of the play from Margot Edwards and Scott Taylor. Although we are launching with text-based art, we hope to receive visual art and are working to be able to include video submission on the website.

## Reviews

In addition to the reviews of the art pieces, we have a Reviews section which will include reviews of books, responses to previously published articles, and commentary on *Organizational Aesthetics*-related conferences and gatherings. We publish reviews on books that deal directly with aesthetics in organizations, as well as those that appear in adjacent fields but that we deem of interest to our readers. Further, we invite responses to the articles that are published in *Organizational Aesthetics*, and to aesthetics-related articles and special issues published elsewhere. Finally, we invite generative descriptions, evaluation, and commentary on conference and seminar activities that deal directly or indirectly with organizational aesthetics. It is our hope that the Reviews section will be a place for finding the unusual and surprising in reflecting the observations, voices and ideas of our readers. We launch this section with Ted Buswick's review of Giovanni Schiuma's *The Value of Arts for Business* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

## Images of organizational aesthetics

Each issue of *Organizational Aesthetics* will include an image on its cover. For this inaugural issue, we have chosen an image of a chair (more specifically, a Miranda chair designed by Bruno Mathsson). Antonio Strati (Strati, 1999) begins his seminal text on organizational aesthetics by describing how he introduces an aesthetic approach to his students by giving them a riddle. The riddle asks:

### Which organizational artifact in the broad sense:

1. is purchased more often than produced
  2. goes beyond organizational boundaries
  3. is simultaneously material and non-material
  4. is individual and belongs to everybody
  5. shows up anyone who does not have one
  6. is constantly sought after
  7. is a metaphor for the hierarchy of organizational levels
  8. if flaunted may provoke criticism and invoke sanctions
  9. if it shifts, may provoke hilarity
  10. homogenizes positions downwards
- ?

The answer of course, is a chair. The riddle is a reminder of the aesthetic potential of something as simple and mundane as a chair. Chairs are ubiquitous in organizations and critically important – imagine a modern organization without any chairs. Chairs are also generally ignored by scholars (Cranz, 1998 is a notable exception). Perhaps, then, it is a fitting image with which to launch *Organizational Aesthetics*, in that it represents our commitment to making visible and discussable the often overlooked, yet ubiquitous role of aesthetics in the human activity of organizing.

Finally the picture of the Miranda chair declares that images matter. As editors of *Organizational Aesthetics* we recognize the limits of text and discursive forms such as the articles in our journal. We recognize that those things that matter most to us are often known through our bodies and hearts and are difficult to write clear, analytic prose about. They are in fact the same things it is difficult to make compelling art about. But to paraphrase John F. Kennedy, we chose organizational aesthetics, not because it is easy, but because it is hard. We chose organizational aesthetics because it takes everything we have to do it well; it takes our scholar selves and our artist selves, and most of all our full human selves. We invite you to join us – not because it is easy, but because it is hard, and because by doing so you have the opportunity to work with what means the most to you, in a way that honors its ineffable, as well as its explicit qualities and possibilities.

## References

- Cranz, Galen. (1998). *The chair: Rethinking culture, body, and design*. New York: w. w. norton and company.
- Strati, Antonio. (1999). *Organization and aesthetics*. London: Sage.