

MANAGER AS ARTIST

Dégot

'APHRODISIAN BLISS'

Chytry

POEM'E'; MANAGING 'ENGAGEMENT'

Guimarães-Costa & Pina e Cunha

PERIPHERAL AWARENESS

Chia & Holt

FUNKY PROJECTS

Garcia and Pérez

AESTHETICS OF EMPTINESS

Biehl

POETRY PLAY

Darmer, Grisoni,

James & Rossi Bouchrara

WORKPLACE PROJECTS

James

DVD DRAMA

Taylor

AVANT GARDE ORGANIZATION

Vickery

AESTHESIS//CREATE

AESTHESIS

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The inspiration for the next few pages started as a result of a discussion about the Arts, Aesthetics, Creativity & Organization Research Network (AACORN) – someone noted [and we've forgotten who it was -- apologies!] that Vincent Dégot's seminal paper, entitled 'Portrait of the Manager as an Artist', was essential reading for those interested in art and organizations. We agreed, but, as someone pointed out, this article was no longer available - many of the original copies of DRAGON, in which it was published, have long since found homes in dusty corners of offices, or fared a much worse fate! Thus, although AACORN did post a copy of Vincent's paper on their web-space, we thought we might extend this facility. We approached Vincent with an invitation to revise his paper and he graciously accepted. Our rationale was simple - we agreed with the sentiments expressed by the discussants from AACORN, that this was an important paper and that a largely new audience could benefit enormously from re-visiting it. However, we also appreciated that he may wish to update or revise his arguments. Unexpectedly, Vincent responded to say that he was unable to revise his paper – rather, he would have to write a completely new one. He was adamant that so many of his views have changed! We are excited by this prospect and look forward to publishing an updated version sometime soon in Aesthesis. To serve as an overture to this forthcoming paper, and either to remind us of, or introduce us to, Vincent's pioneering writing on art and organizations, we are pleased to reprint here 'Portrait of the Manager as an Artist'. In order to capture the spirit of the time we have asked Antonio Strati [his contemporary at DRAGON] to introduce and contextualise the paper. While, in this same spirit we also felt that we should stay close to the original, we have therefore re-produced the paper in it's 1987 typewritten form ...

Introducing Vincent Dégot's 'Portrait of the Manager as an Artist' Antonio Strati

There is a 'touch of nostalgia' in the following words regarding the essay 'Portrait of the Manager as an Artist' that Dégot wrote some twenty years ago, and pioneering, according to my understanding, many of the streams of various debates on organizational aesthetics that followed. "Those were THE days, yes!, those were THE days, yes!" – recites an old pop song: the days when, in the mid-eighties, the 'cultural turn' was transforming and reshaping both organizational theories and management studies.

In 'those days', Vincent Dégot organized the SCOS (Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism) annual Conference in Antibes, South of France, on symbolisms and cultures in organizational contexts. The focus of the Antibes Conference in 1985 was the 'corporate image'. Subjects discussed in the papers presented at the conference therefore involved the images that circulate internally and externally to an organization, the organizational identity graphically conveyed by the logo and the organizational name, the corporate image in the organizational architecture, etc.

In other words, the symbolic construction of organizational life was depicted by focusing on the organization's image, on its brand and logo, on its architecture, on its publicity material, that is, on themes that were of constant reference in several of the organizational aesthetics scholar's debates. Also Dégot presented

a paper at the Antibes SCOS Conference. It was on something slightly different: portraying the manager in a diverse way, that is, as an artist. It was always on a 'corporate image'; but, the focus was displaced from the pathos of the organizational artefact towards the aesthetics of managerial performance.

A couple of years later, Pierre-Jean Benghozi edited the Special Issue of *Dragon* – the Journal of SCOS – (due to Dégot's initiative) on 'Art and Organization'. One may notice that the articles published were less closely tied to the organization as a physical structure; these studies examined the creativity of people at work, like the management, by engaging in art-related activities and everyday organizational practices to do with art. This Special Issue of *Dragon* contained, in particular, three essays that proposed novel styles of studying organizational aesthetics without referring to an organization's physical structures. First was the gathering of knowledge by means of analogies with art: that is the article by Vincent Dégot that I am introducing here. Second, in the form of two other equally influential pieces, the examination of the beauty of the organization as a whole, by Rafael Ramirez, and the study of how aesthetics are negotiated in aesthetic practices, by Brian Rusted.

In such great company, and rich cultural milieu, Vincent Dégot proposes his analogy between the manager and the

artist, suggesting a number of previously unknown management methods which emerge if the researcher examines managerial practices by analogy with artistic styles and genres. The starting-point, Dégot wrote – in *Dragon*, 1987, pp. 23-4 and 26 – is the view that the manager 'is the one who designs the action taken, even if it is on behalf of others and subjected to certain constraints' and that 'must be able to leave his personal imprint' on the outcome, if this outcome is considered 'as a work of managerial art'. This entails a plea to adopt criteria for assessing managerial works 'by relating them to more local or stylistic trends' in order to reveal the suitability of these new approaches, that is, to introduce some changes in the criteria used to assess the managerial performance, since 'management as it has evolved during the last one or two decades' – before the eighties – 'now looks more like an artistic activity than the rationalistic model which business economists have been trying for so long to impose' (1987, pp. 44-5).

However, be careful, Dégot warns. This is an analogy, just an analogy. It must be used with care: management, in fact, and unlike aesthetics, 'does not appear as a permanent activity' of people. It is with this thought at the forefront of your minds that I leave you to read Vincent Dégot's paper.

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PORTRAIT OF THE MANAGER AS AN ARTIST

A long tradition (in terms of the history of industrial capitalism) tells us that business management is to be considered as a proper subject for "scientific" study. One of the reasons supporting this is that management is based on a rationalistic attitude of mind: to achieve optimum use of resources with a view to maximisation of corporate profits. However, a much older tradition teaches us that it would be unwise, from the scientific and rationalistic standpoints, to assume that the business manager is motivated solely, or even essentially, by the goal of maximum profit. To illustrate and define the ideas we shall be developing in the main body of this paper, let us first take a brief look at a rather different field, often known as the "history of art criticism" (1).

Up to about the middle of the 19th Century, and even perhaps beyond, the criterion applied by art critics (including writers of different status, to which we shall return later) as a whole can be described as "naturalism". This meant that the most perfect and most admirable works of art were, in the eyes of the critics, those which best imitated Nature. This tenet, as expressed for example by Winkelman in the early 19th Century (2), explains why classical Greek art and that of the Renaissance were considered to be the archetypes and pinnacles of artistic achievement. During the present Century, however, the works of recognised artists (impressionists, cubists, surrealists, and so on) have brought the critics to ascribe a further purpose to Art. The evolution of "Modern Art" has led to a reappraisal of what went before, and to redefining Art as a particular form of expression of the human mind which must be judged in its own terms - although this is not to say that it is fully independent from social and historical influences.

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If it is not too far-fetched, a parallel with the management field might be discerned here, to the extent that the latter was also for some time identified with a now-outdated tenet - the maximisation and rationalistic one mentioned above. But, for reasons we have discussed elsewhere (3), to which we shall briefly return, the conditions in which business management is exercised have been subject to continual change. In a very rough summary of that evolution, we can say that it consisted in a constant decline in the relative incidence of the profit motive, in step with the emergence of new criteria (worker satisfaction, improved corporate image, etc) and with the gradual shrinking of the arbitrary powers of employers.

These new criteria may, of course, be in some ways linked to the profit motive, just as the various forms of modern art can be linked to a new representation of "Nature". In both cases, however, this evolutionary trend invites reappraisal of the activities concerned. Having already looked at the position of Art, we can go on to say that the "works" of management now represent (as concerns the corporation, at least) an activity referring back to its own specific rules, and that these cannot be reduced to the pursuit of purely economic criteria. From this standpoint, we can postulate that the quality of these "works" must be assessed in relation to the whole body of management acts preceding them. In the same way as was abandoned the naturalistic concept of Art, we should now abandon the economic concept of management; the latter thus acquires a status in its own right, subject to a specific line of approach for which, in the following pages, we will try to lay down a few guidelines, using the history of Art as an example.

If we are to consider management as an art, in the sense given by the Renaissance to this term, we must restore the manager to his place at the centre of things - as due to the author of the acts of management; whereas the rationalistic tradition, considering

that the truly efficient undertaking was that which adapted itself almost automatically to changes in its environment, had pushed him right into the background. This kind of approach of course implies that we must make a clearer distinction than previously between management proper, which requires some degree of imaginative thinking when adjusting the corporation to certain constraints, and day-to-day administration, which consists in applying predetermined procedures and rules (definition of these rules may itself be a management function). As in the artistic field we distinguish between original works, reproductions, copies, imitations, and so on.

But, when we go further along these lines, it becomes clear that the important thing is to define what to include in the mainstream of management "works of art". To that end, we can again draw on the earlier tradition of art research, which brought to bear on the analysis of artists and their work at least three separate disciplines: aesthetics, the history of Art, and Art criticism.

We will now in turn:

- carry a little further along the concept of management as an activity in its own right, whose full purpose goes beyond the purely economic dimension;
- investigate the possibility of defining a specific area for management works (authors, styles, schools, etc) by transposing to it the notions of aesthetics, the history of Art, and Art criticism;
- having covered these two general points, try to determine the basic significance of the notion of a management work (as opposed, for example, to a management decision);

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- see how (given, for instance, that they form part of organisational structures which they must endeavour to manipulate for their own ends) managers can be looked upon as authors;
- determine, in extension of the last two points, the prospects for assessing authors and their works in relation to the whole body of other works, developing a veritable practice of "management criticism".

1 - The Art of Management

Every teacher of business management at University level knows that the science he is trying to impart to students destined to become corporate executives or top managers, can be divided under three headings:

- management techniques belonging to disciplines that are more or less distinct and sophisticated: Finance, Comptrollership, Marketing, and so on, some of which have a wider scope (Marketing), while others are more technical (Industrial Accounting) or of a more routine nature (Business Accounting);
- principles of organisation which coordinate the above and ensure that each contributes to strategies in typical contexts formulated in rather abstract terms;
- considerations on the history of management - most often the history of management research (which is the main repository of past acts of management), underlining the important periods and schools of thought involved.

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A knowledge of some or all of these subjects will no doubt be useful to the manager, but teachers and practitioners realise that it will not guarantee that graduates will become outstanding or efficient managers, whereas some practising managers - who clearly deserve to be regarded as such - have little theoretical knowledge of those subjects. Such techniques are to management what colour mixing, drawing and anatomy are to painting. What makes the artist is his personality and talent. Given that writers on business management are more inclined, as we have seen, to discuss successful businesses (4) than brilliant managers, it is difficult to distinguish the latter. Somewhat paradoxically, it is possible to be an outstanding manager running a company which performs poorly, making the very best of an uphill job; and the very best that can be done for a company in a declining industry may be merely to keep it alive.

Training is thus no substitute for talent, even if the statistics appear to show that there are some schools which teach management better than others, such as Harvard or HEC. The fact is that some business schools, due to their past reputation, are able to provide their graduates with jobs in the most dynamic companies, where greater opportunities are to be found. Thus, success feeds on success and hides the fact that many people from elsewhere are doing outstanding management work in less prominent companies. To quote Braudel: "Louis Dermigny and Christof Glamman have good reason to express doubts about the genius of the Heeren Zeventien - the "Seventeen Gentlemen" - who run the Dutch East India Company. Is it necessary to be a business genius if, in the 17th Century, you had the good fortune to be born a Dutchman and placed at the head of that enormous machine called the Oost Indische Compagnie?" (5). Similarly, the graduates of the most famous business schools enter the firms paying the largest salaries but where difficult management

problems - and thus the need for imaginative solutions - arise less frequently, in their position as market leaders.

How, then, can we build a kind of catalogue, or "museum", of managerial works of art, when many among the most remarkable of them are executed inside small undertakings that are barely known to most people and are struggling to keep alive? This is a deep-seated problem which comes up in different forms in many publications and research papers: is good management synonymous with spectacular results, achieved by the best-known stars of the business world? On this point, I feel that we are being misled by an outdated attitude which was consistent with a long period of expansion in the Western economies, when the quality of management was judged in relation to the bottom line of the balance sheet. The same attitude is familiar to the Art world, where some people - e.g. those who, like Bourdieu (6), reason in terms of "area of production" and "symbolic goods market" - tend, in the absence of other criteria, to suppose that the greatest painters are those whose works fetch the highest prices. As things now stand, it can be said that most "managerial works of art" are lost to us, since their primary aim was not to go down to posterity, but to contribute to the prosperity of the corporation and then be swallowed up in it. In the last few years, however, a change can be observed in this respect, in the wake of the interest in corporate culture and the bringing in of new disciplines (History, Ethnology, etc) to study it. This is leading to an increasing interest of companies in their history: the events and basic decisions which have gradually made the company what it is. In this framework have developed corporate "sagas" research into "mythical" origins and company "heroes", and so on. The researchers who are often called in to perform these investigations could, perhaps, become the custodians of the management heritage - particularly since they often have

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bases of comparison enabling them to discern which are the truly innovative developments.

It still remains that, following the difficulties caused by the economic crisis which started in 1975, we must enhance the role awarded to management talent as such. Only if this is done will companies who are not "stars" in the terms of Peters and Waterman be able to attract outstanding managers, of the kind who will prefer the task of turning round a small company with problems, to that of helping a giant multinational add a fraction to its market share. This is all the more relevant if we subscribe to the idea held by Braudel (8), as well as by most economists, government experts and Trades Unions: that job creation is more effectively achieved by setting up new businesses and encouraging small and medium-sized companies, than by looking to the large corporations. This enhancement of the management function assumes on the part of managers that they take on jobs for the pleasure of being in the driving seat, rather than waste their talents on administering parts of large corporations where they remain relatively anonymous. If this fresh attitude is to be brought about, the Universities and Business Schools, together with the corporate researchers, will have a decisive role to play.

From a different standpoint, it can be considered that this historical trend of management towards becoming an "art", is born of the overall evolution of the corporation in relation to Society which we have discussed at length in other papers (9). As the corporation increasingly becomes the focus of Society, the number and nature of the criteria by which acts of management are judged increases, reducing the relative incidence of purely economic criteria (10), more easily quantified in the short term.

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Given that allowance has to be made for a large number of disparate factors, some of which vary without regard to the business logic of the corporation (industrial disputes, quality of work, etc) and may even be determined by Statute, this constant "juggling" with events can be described as an art requiring a particular kind of talent. Since some of these factors are quasi-permanent and form a kind of back-cloth (the profit motive, although some undertakings run at a loss and are supported by State or other subsidies), whereas others vary more rapidly under the effect of social pressure, or of "fashions" (11), it would seem that managerial works of art respond to styles adopted at different periods. Within each period, if we apply the definition given by such different writers as Panofski, Venturi and Schapiro (12) in connection with painting and architecture, we might consider that the most significant work is that which best represents the characteristics of the style at a given time, or that which marks the greatest innovation as compared with the works going before it.

The execution of such works implies that their authors possessed an acute sense of what was suited to the period, a sense which may be compared to what Schumpeter, in his "History of Economic Analysis" (13), called the "vision" of the entrepreneur. Perception of a requirement is one thing, but its fulfilment calls for other talents, such as the ability to bring a team or a whole undertaking to share the same aims and conclusions (not always based on demonstrable facts, but more on intuition). The manager must also be, therefore, a master of rhetoric - bringing in an art form outside the plastic arts to which we have referred thus far. Deployment of this rhetoric

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may help to obscure the emergence of a management "creation": the manager is first and foremost to achieve a precise purpose, for which he needs the cooperation of others around him, but it is not always necessary for the latter to be given a comprehensive view of everything involved.

To come back to our starting point, it is clear that, while management can benefit from general techniques, applicable in companies of all kinds and themselves reflecting some changes in fashion, it must make allowance for the conditions prevailing within each particular company. This can be done only through experience, given that classroom tuition cannot cover the whole gamut of combinations of factors which have to be handled in practice. This means that a manager may perform brilliantly in one context but poorly in another (in the same way as some painters are at their best with portraits, others with landscapes, and so on). Consequently, one of the talents of the true manager lies in his ability to discover the working environment best suited to his particular gifts.

Having tried to convey the extent to which management henceforth requires talents of a personal nature, not unlike those of the artist, we now go on to examine an approach to the specific management activity as seen in this light.

2 - Disciplines relevant to management research

Here again, to remain consistent with what has just been said, and with a view to advancing more rapidly, we will pursue our analogy with the study of the plastic arts. By

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referring to a number of writers who have taken an interest in this subject over the past few decades (14), we can identify three types of "disciplines" or attitudes to artists and their works:

- aesthetics (or philosophy of Art), which looks at artistic activity as a basic human pursuit, by trying to define the human characteristics which contribute to and shape that activity (imagination, sensitivity, and so on), as well as to define the specific field of Art. It is little concerned with individual artists and works;
- the History of Art, whose purpose is to give a logical account of the way art has developed: the works gradually produced, the influences at work, and the relationships at particular times between artistic activity and Society. In doing this, it distinguishes between groups or periods displaying some similarities, continuous trends and break-away movements. It is also concerned to explain the works and lives of particular artists (significance of this or other subject, etc), in terms of the relationships between their works and the artistic theory of their day, to describe the evolution of techniques, and so on;
- art criticism, which aims to formulate a more subjective assessment of artists and their works, usually those contemporary with the critics themselves. By using his own sensitivity, as well as his special knowledge (of the History of Art, for example), the critic endeavours to understand the aims of other individuals (the artists) and to relate these to the current artistic trend, with a view to evaluating their intrinsic worth.

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The relationships between these three areas comprise some contradictions: the art historian takes in everything that is catalogued as "Art" (e.g. been exhibited or acquired by a museum), whereas the critic can refuse the description of "Art" for works he considers to be pure imitations, with no personal contribution from their authors. Earlier, we came across another problem of this type with the distinction drawn between management and administration (application of rules and "recipes" already widely used). If we try to transpose the three "disciplines" in question to the study of management, we come to:

- the separate identity of the management function. As concerns Aesthetics, there arises the difficulty that management, unlike Art, does not appear as a permanent activity of the human mind (as are also religion, politics, and so on). However, Art itself went through "primitive" phases during which it was not recognised as an activity in its own right (15). Furthermore, analogies must be handled carefully. When we say that an activity is specific or separate in terms of the human mind, we mean primarily that it results in creations which, as such, cannot be attributed to the application, in automatic fashion, of predetermined techniques or rules. In this sense, management is just as different from administration as painting is from photography (albeit some people regard the latter as an Art).

To that extent, even if his action implies - like that of the architect - the participation of many other people, the manager is himself a creative artist, although not necessarily a solitary figure, since he may belong to a school of thought.

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He is the one who designs the action taken, even if it is on behalf of others and subjected to certain constraints (e.g. like the retables of the Italian Quattrocento (16)). For the outcome to be considered as a work of managerial art, the manager must be able to leave his personal imprint on it. This does not mean that formal techniques cannot be deployed to analyse the problem and implement the solution. The essential thing is the basic creative design that can be attributed to one individual.

Seen in this way, management forges a link between its most recent applications (earlier described as those striking a balance between a host of criteria, many of them non-economic) and its very oldest, pre-capitalist, traditions, referring here to the two lowest levels of capitalism as defined by Braudel (16-b).

Just as Aesthetics defines Art as the expression of an emotion using more-or-less symbolic means, management can be considered as the expression of a kind of rationalism translated into effective action. Throughout history, the "good" governments have been those run by good managers who did not appropriate the available wealth to the benefit of a minority. As demonstrated by Dumont (17), politics gradually cast off from religion, then economics from politics, and now, it might be said, management from economics. This means that management has since all time been a latent factor (examples are to be found in the Book of Proverbs).

As concerns the historian, his view of the subject is obviously overshadowed by the period during which the economic concept of management prevailed and is thus limited to the last two

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decades. Of course, the period following the Industrial Revolution, with the proliferation of manufacturing companies and thus of potential management "sites", was bound to lead to a similar proliferation of works of managerial art (as, at certain periods, the foundation of new Churches led to the execution of more and more works of religious art); but it is just as obvious that most corporate executives are nowadays no more than administrators, rather than active managers. This is easy to understand, given that periods of mass production are also periods during which behavioural models emerge (the equivalent, in painting, of iconographic themes), with a consequent tendency to repeat standard forms. It is much easier to justify the creation of a quality circle or the purchase of a computer when all companies are doing the same.

From this standpoint, the history of management - with the exception of a few writers focusing on biographies or on particular theories, such as Chandler (19) - has almost completely neglected the individual and, by searching for common features among a multitude of events, has thus eliminated the personality factor which could have identified some actions as managerial works of art in the true sense. Once again, a misplaced yearning for scientific appearances has led to the elimination of what we consider to be an essential factor. Reinstating the individual manager has nothing to do with some kind of personality cult or theory of social domination: the purpose is to bring together, within a coherent framework, individuals - or their actions - who were practising managers but who attained the status of "artists" by going beyond the boundaries of that profession and putting their whole being into fulfilling an aspiration (see Venturi (18) for analogy with Art and the artist). In this area of historical research, although considerable reference material exists (biographies, corporate histories, etc), virtually everything remains to

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be done from scratch, apart from the work of Chandler, Wren and a few others (19) - even these taking a somewhat different approach, with the role of precisely identified individuals being reduced to carrying out instructions they barely comprehend.

Art criticism constitutes a kind of culmination of the two disciplines just discussed: the critic forms his judgments on the basis of his idea of Aesthetics and knowledge of the History of Art, combined with an acquaintanceship with the artists and their works. Applied to management, the transposition of this approach calls for two observations:

- firstly, the idea of an outstanding managerial work of art must be dissociated from that of economic performance (a result may not be spectacular in itself, but would have been worse without that work);
- secondly, it increases the number of criteria by which managerial works are assessed, by relating them to more local or stylistic trends, etc.

In the field of Art proper, the function of the critic is to draw attention to works he considers outstandingly good: this is meaningful in relation to a certain public and to an established market. In the management area, it could be said that the function of the critic would be, rather, to inform individuals with a bent towards management about the places and conditions in which they could exercise their talents. The role of criticism would thus be to focus on that part of a management action which results not merely from the blind application of rules and procedures, but consists in the

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adaptation of some of the latter to a local context, in a new and successful way meriting the description of a personal creative act. Success is still a factor, although no longer evaluated in economic terms and assessed, rather, in relation to the overall situation of the corporation.

The creative element appears at the junction of several factors or vectors: the corporation and its environment, the status of technology, and the manager himself. Here again, the literature of criticism is sparse, limited to monographs by researchers and teachers (20). Usually, for reasons discussed above and others related to publishing practice for scientific material, especially in the English-speaking world, the presentation of these papers shows a tendency to integrate the subject with a general theoretical framework, so that they fail to recognise the managerial work as such, appearing at a relatively precise moment; it is considered as the outcome of processes advancing in quasi-automatic fashion, which break it down completely and then swallow it up, just as its author also disappears from the scene altogether. The compilation of a body of criticism involves the reconstitution of past works, implying a working method (retrieval and rearrangement of facts, etc), and completely new presentation and publication procedures.

The above sums up possible roads to a management "philosophy", a history of its techniques, of its works and their authors, and a critical review of its achievements. It may prove, in the light of what has been said concerning the new conditions of management, that these approaches are much more relevant - in Europe, at least - than the established "sciences". It will have been seen that this concept places

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at the centre of the research area the creative manager and his works. We will now take a longer look at each of these two essential factors.

3 - The Managerial Work of Art

When we speak of a managerial action or work, the first idea that comes naturally to mind is that of decision-making: where, in relation to this factor which has given birth to many theories and which constitutes a kind of sanctum within the corporation and its theoretical representation, is there a place for our notion of managerial works of art ?

In the first place, it might be said that the work has a more overall dimension than the decision: a decision may form part of a work (just as an iconographic motif may be an integral part of a painting). In that case, we must allow that the decisions are not necessarily of the "hard" type (i.e. based on strict economics), but may be of the "soft" variety we have discussed elsewhere (21). The work comprises perception of the need for something to be done at some point, evaluation of the right decision needed and, finally, implementation of that decision in practical form. There are of course many decision-theories which make due allowance for these three phases, but what we are more particularly concerned with here is the extent to which each phase leaves room for personal initiative; many decisions are reached almost automatically through standard evaluation and selection procedures, as described by March and Simon and many others (22).

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The creative work commences when its author starts to realise, on the basis of random information - chatting in the corridor, a glimpse of a computer print-out, a report by a consultant, something said at a staff meeting, etc -, that a specific action of some kind will be called for in due course. The creative manager -displaying one of his characteristics to which we come back later - feels that possibility in the form of an impulse, a violent desire for action. He then has to convey to other people all or part of his initial "intuition" - assuming, of course, that others will have to be involved. To this end, he may have to adapt his project to suit the corporate culture context, and relevant external trends (fashions) which could help to support it. In practice, this process is not so clear-cut and deliberate as thus expressed. Owing to this adaptation, the project may fit in with a prevailing "style" or reflect a local "taste" (cultural segment). One way in which he displays his personal talent is his skilful use of the factors in presence when mobilising his entourage to make the project feasible. He may, for example, be led to formulate it in rationalistic terms as a means of demonstrating its advantages for the corporation, and this reformulation process may affect his original intention. In the same way, there have been times when external factors (patrons, critics) have affected the composition or the subject of a painting.

At a given point in time, the intention must take on a concrete form; from this standpoint, the decision is to the managerial work as is the canvas to the painting: its manifestation in a visible and identifiable form. In the same way as the artist's imagination, intentions and preliminary sketches come to focus on a flat, rectangular plane (as are most painter's canvases), so the creative manager's project freezes into a

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formal decision which is to be its most visible sign, on which different opinions can be expressed and which may one day find its way into commentaries or text-books.

To become a true work, this decision has to be implemented: corporate restructuring, product price changes, new product introduction, personnel movements, or whatever. Otherwise, it is no more than an architect's drawing which remains in the filing cabinet, a kind of intellectual construction never to be tested in real life.

In this instance, the analogy with the architect is more relevant than the one with the painter who, except in the days when his pigments contained precious elements (lapis lazuli, gold) (23), is not really affected by broad economic constraints (although, at one time, the walls of cathedrals and palaces had to be there to paint). Once the decision has been adopted, this means that there is a managerial consensus in its favour, and the execution of the work seems well on the way. However, the project may involve large numbers of people who were not consulted when the decision was confirmed: the technicians needed to prepare working drawings and specifications, the sales staff who will handle the promotional campaign, the financial specialists responsible for finding the funds, and so on.

It is then important to mobilise all these various energies in such a way that they contribute to executing the work on the lines intended by the project's author. It is this intention which - beyond the decision-making stage - binds the whole work together. At the start, there is just a project, a desire

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to achieve a given final result, which exist only in someone's imagination; in the end, if we are to speak of a personal creative work, there must emerge a sufficiently faithful picture of what the author intended. Many writers (24) would question this account of things, pointing out that fewer and fewer decisions are taken individually, that the scope of a decision can no longer be clearly perceived, and that to talk of a decision as being an identifiable single event within the whole activity of a corporation is meaningless.

In this connection, we have a counter-argument to put forward: the creative instinct of the author of a managerial work is satisfied only when he sees a project being implemented as he originally designed it; and, to achieve that end, it is quite possible - giving a further illustration of his particular talents - that he will choose to employ very devious means, such as giving large numbers of participants the impression that they are personally contributing to a collective design. One of the tasks of the critic or historian is to reconstitute the work from start to finish in a way which focuses on the author. This applies, even, to some achievements which, with hindsight, can be described merely as applications in practice of ideas that were widely current at the time. Just as there are thousands of artistic representations of the Crucifixion or of the Madonna and Child, so may there be thousands of ways of carrying out a decentralisation project or a Corporate Plan; and, in each case, it should be possible to identify the individual in a given corporation who first shaped the general idea into a formal decision.

This does not mean, as already pointed out above, that all and every decision or corporate change are to be considered as managerial works of art: on the contrary, the latter can

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be thought to be very rare, since they imply a personal vision of a project which is carried through to fruition over a given time. Very much more frequent are collectively-decided projects implemented using fairly standard procedures and principles. This is a good thing, as otherwise no company would get through its basic everyday business, just as many people would remain homeless if every house had to be an original architectural design.

This brings us to another way in which creative management differs from what we have called "administration" management. Firstly, it should be observed that the managerial work of art is not essential to the normal conduct of a company's affairs, because it stems from an entirely subjective view of things; the perception by one individual of what would be good for the company. The company in question would benefit from the creative project, but the presence at that time and place of the project's author may be virtually accidental and it can be assumed that, without that presence, the company would continue to survive; its store of accomplishments would be enriched as would - more importantly - the "literature" of creative management actions. By contrast, the principle underlying the standard procedures and techniques employed in routine company administration is that the normal business of the undertaking must not be allowed to depend on the initiatives and imaginations of individuals: most of the time, products are manufactured, distributed and sold, accounts are kept, and promotional efforts maintained, following set procedures which enjoy long periods of stability, subject to minor modifications now and then.

Does this mean that a managerial work of art is something

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which must change the face of a corporation, resulting in profound changes in its structure, financial status and personnel establishment? An easy answer would be that there exist many paintings of all sizes and on all subjects, but this would be avoiding the underlying problem. It is obvious that, for a managerial work of art to exist, it must subsequently be clearly identifiable by its author or by an expert (critic or historian). Its results must thus be sufficiently visible, having mobilised sufficient resources and people to attest that its author was able to deploy a whole range of talents (although it could be allowed that some excel more in some fields than in others: watercolour or oils for the painter, preparation or implementation of decisions for the manager).

It is still too early to attempt a classification of managerial works of art by genre, style or importance, but the criterion of significant change in the corporation is a major factor; significant meaning that the change is both relatively durable and recognisable by many people within (and, perhaps, outside) the corporation concerned. However, it must again be emphasised that not all of the far-reaching changes affecting corporations are the result of managerial works of art.

An "internal" definition of the managerial work of art, based on factors relating to corporate development, rather than to an intellectual activity called "management" and to a body of other works this has produced, is inevitably an approximation and involves the risk of ultimately confusing works with decisions. Clearly, the accent must lie on the personal aspect of the project (thus going beyond any particular company) and its personal implementation by the author (thus going beyond the limits of a mere decision). We will now see what this implies in terms of the author himself.

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4 - The Creative Manager

We have seen that the creative manager is possessed of a personal project in which he invests his full energies and talent, further noting that his vision and talent could not be the fruit of formal training and study alone. This being so, we are faced with the question of how management "vocations" are born. Obviously, historical circumstances, such as the social status of the corporation and the manager, and new areas of teaching, have some influence in forming those vocations (in the Weberian sense of "Beruf") (25).

Limiting our review to modern times, two major factors can be seen: firstly, corporations employ a large proportion of the population; and secondly, awareness of what management involves varies considerably from one social category to another. Some families have been businessmen for generations (not always in family businesses), and writers like Thomas Mann (26) describe how the taste for managing can be acquired - or lost. Most creative managers, whether with or without formal business training, encounter their vocation in contact with the corporation. Also, it can be assumed that increasing media coverage given to the inner workings of corporations during the past fifteen years, as well as to the overall personalities of certain business leaders, has led to wider aspirations in this direction than formerly. It nevertheless remains that most management talent and new ideas are discovered among people already engaged in corporate activity (as in the painters' workshops of old).

It is evident that certain corporations or corporate activities are particularly favourable to the emergence and

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execution of personal management projects. Nowadays, especially in large companies, many functions are so narrowly defined as to make it difficult for any individual, even among the senior executives mainly considered here, to bring in a personal element whose effects he can distinguish among those of the collective effort. The creative manager must have sufficient lee-way for expressing himself and, in large companies, this only exists - if at all - at top management level and in some special positions (contract negotiators, expert advisors). Consequently, creative management aspirations are most easily fulfilled within a smaller firm; and, furthermore, in the least routine-prone sectors, where the corporate activity is sufficiently sensitive to environmental changes as to require frequent reappraisal and adjustment. The latter are not necessarily of a technical or commercial kind, but may involve matters of personnel or organisation.

It is thus hard to foresee which sectors and companies will offer the best opportunities for creative management, but it seems likely that the individual having the true vocation will move around as he sees further possibilities for self-expression in other jobs or companies. For the same reasons, the personal project may be directed in different directions, such as production management, marketing, or finance, without the initial basic creative management "impulse" being affected. Mobility on this individual's part may also be a necessity in that he needs to improve his "technical" proficiency and corporate status in order to be able to push his ideas through, which implies a thorough knowledge of all parts of the corporation and its staff.

Whatever his initial training, the creative manager's talent emerges only after some years of apprenticeship which,

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as with the 19th Century business dynasties who sent their sons to gain experience in trading posts or with their correspondents abroad, is the only way of fully mastering all the implications of a business career.

After these fairly general considerations, it remains to give a more precise definition of the characteristics of the creative manager or, at least, to determine how an overriding project can influence the way he acts and set him apart from the other staff of the company. We can fairly assume that his essential motivation is the "urge to create" rather than, for example, the attraction of a higher status associated with a particular corporate function - although that status may be necessary if the project is to succeed.

Depending on his degree of knowledge of the company, and on his own inclinations and imagination, this creative urge may or may not be connected with a specific project (such as to establish the company in a particular segment of the market). Here, it must be noted that all founders of new companies are not necessarily creative managers, although a higher proportion of the latter may be found among them than elsewhere. This is not such an obvious observation, being rather like saying that artists are more numerous in periods when Art has every licence (as in modern times) than in those where it is governed by strict rules and conventions (Middle Ages and Renaissance).

The urge to create may be found in young people who, on a modest scale, take limited but significant initiatives: local reorganisations, development of new techniques, etc. These

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tentative ventures, often associated with early job mobility enabling the same ideas to be tried out in different contexts, are used by the individual to polish his project, perfect his personal style, and identify the fields best suited to him; on its part, the company finishes by awarding greater freedom of action to the individual concerned (just as the artists of the Renaissance earned increasing patronage as their reputations grew).

To the extent that the accomplishment of managerial works of art depends on obtaining wider responsibilities and more room for initiative, together with competence and corporate legitimacy (to earn greater credibility for projects which, the more ambitious they are, the more they comprise factors not easily reduced to a single dimension for purposes of presentation), the creative manager seeks to further his career. However, in the same way as some painters were at their best in art forms corresponding to their personal temperament (portraits, still lifes, landscapes, etc), our manager must identify his personal destination and, if necessary - despite other offers and pressures - refuse more lucrative positions in which he would be unable to fulfil himself. He thereby follows a personal line of thought, which does not exclude the fact that his action is intended to be in the very best interests of the company. He considers himself to be sole judge of what will work out best in the end.

This is not to say that he remains indifferent to the logic of the company and of its environment. He feels that, as a true manager, he has a more precise idea and understanding of that logic than other people, whatever their corporate status and experience. He may, of course, accept some compromises, unless he feels that to take a firm stand will extend his personal scope for action and improve his chances of carrying

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his project through successfully. There are many instances of engineers and others who resign from a company so as to have more freedom to develop their own ideas.

The creative manager is thus one who seeks constantly to improve the quality of his works, meaning that he brings increasing personal dedication to them and that their results - owing to constant improvement of his own skills - come closer to meeting his initial intentions. He is in a permanent state of endeavour, even if the purpose of that endeavour is seen only by himself. This striving to enhance his own skills causes him to explore more and more widely around his subject, so as to be able to more fully express his personal convictions. On this score, he displays some similarities with the "true professional" type of executive we have described elsewhere. However, there is an essential difference to the extent that the latter is not necessarily inspired by a personal project, other than to perform as effectively as possible each specific task allotted to him. The creative manager is to the true professional as is the artist to the drawing master.

In the matter of management, one question which must always be raised is that of the relevance of the manager to his corporation. We have already noted that the creative manager may in some cases give priority to his personal view of things over that expressed by corporate policy. If this is so, to what extent can the corporation trust him? As part of the answer, we could say that there are "good" and "bad" creative managers, but we will expound on this under our next

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heading, on "criticism". Taking here the case of the "good" example, we might define him as the one whose vision and skills enable him to achieve maximum exploitation of the corporation's potential within its social and economic environment as found. It is this, indeed, which "qualifies" (again in Weberian (29) terms) him as a manager: a very keen perception of what is possible and desirable to develop the corporation in line with its profound nature, by optimum deployment of all its resources. This implies an all-embracing view of things which goes beyond the traditional boundaries (technical, commercial, etc), itself requiring thorough and long experience together with commensurate imagination and skills. In fact, the question posed at the start of this paragraph is almost purely rhetorical: one of the special characteristics and necessary skills of the creative manager is that he must - without making undue compromises - gain the acceptance and trust of all the other people needed to accomplish his ends.

A further question which may arise concerns the possible existence of creative managers in non-corporate undertakings such as consultancy firms or research institutes. At this stage, we incline to the view that - while those institutions may have managers with the skills appropriate to their specific needs - the true creative manager must necessarily work from within his corporation.

5 - Need for a "criticism" function in relation to creative managers and their works

The History of Art, still a recent discipline, teaches us that different schools of artistic persuasion have at

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certain times been in violent opposition. This does not refer to stylistic differences such as those distinguishing the Sienna painters from the Florentines in the 13th Century, but to the virtual war fought by the Academicians against the Romantics, the Realists and the Impressionists throughout the 19th Century (29). Modern critics and public taste have, so to speak, settled the dispute by recognising the latter as the true perpetuators of the painter's art. Constituting a body of expert criticism thus involves formulating reasoned judgements with respect to past or contemporary works, so as to identify those which can truly be considered as works of art, and then to rank these in terms of quality, such as in relation to a particular school or to the complete works of a particular artist.

Unlike a History of Management, which attempts to define objective facts - the structure of an industry at a given time, the propagation of a management technique, and the like - a Management Criticism is a subjective activity involving the critic's own perception of the works and personality of the manager concerned; although, of course, his judgement may be enhanced by a knowledge of some theoretical principles and of the history of the subject. Even if each critic were to base his judgements solely on his personal leanings and tastes, we could seek to set out the general conditions that a serious critic would be expected to fulfil. Here again, it could be rewarding to refer to the History of Art Criticism, which forms an integral part of the History of Art itself, being an account of the opinions expressed by a body of recognised connoisseurs.

A basic idea is that the notion of "progress" cannot be applied either to Art or to Management. A managerial work

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is assessed in terms of its author, the period, the social environment, the state of the management art, and so on, but it cannot be affirmed that a given period produced better management than another, on the grounds, for instance, that it was more rationalistic or more profit-motivated. This idea is all the more important in that the last fifteen to twenty years management has entered into what might be called a phase of regression; in relation, that is to say, to the rationalistic business ethic. Cost-benefit accounting is no longer sacred, and management must increasingly take on board certain sociological and cultural considerations. seen in this light, a "good" managerial work is that which, during each period, takes the best advantage of the degree of freedom, and adapts best to the constraints, inherent in the social, cultural and political environments.

This first very general principle of relative evaluation can be followed up along two lines: that of the corporation and that of the manager:

- the corporate standpoint consists in evaluating the works effectively accomplished in relation to what could ideally have been done in the then situation of the corporation and its environment (resources, skills, structure, technology, products, markets, and so on). The best work is then the one which takes the best advantage of all these factors in a way conducive to eventually improving the position of the corporation;
- however, the above evaluation depends in two ways on the personal factor: some managers are better than

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others because they have a broader vision of what can be done (this takes us back to the point made above), but also because their personal assets (leadership, charisma, skills, persuasiveness, and so on) enable them to achieve more significant results while expending less energy (their own or that of the corporation). Some of a manager's works are better than his others because he succeeded in thoroughly exploiting situations or resources which at other times he had used to lesser advantage.

The personal qualities of the critic, and the depth of his assessments, determine his ability to encompass and understand a lesser or a greater number of the factors which contributed to the manager's own vision, and then reconstitute the latter's approach to them. Criticism is thus also a form of art (significantly, in this respect, Beaudelaire, Fromentin and the Goncourt brothers were among the greatest critics of their time). Nevertheless, criticism is not an entirely subjective exercise: if the critic wishes to retain his credibility, he must obey certain rules.

On the whole, both painters and managers have been little inclined to write about their art, particularly their own ways of practising it - even if in both cases there are some illustrious exceptions (30). Their aim is, in the case of painters, to execute works as the occasion arises (orders from patrons, exhibits for galleries, etc). The purpose of the art critic is to comment on those works, attempting to formulate an original opinion as to what the artist intended to express: what makes a work interesting? what is new about it? how successfully does it achieve its aims? The critic thus forms a kind

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of middle-man between the artist and a less-enlightened public. His authority - derived from long experience and study of his subject - rests mainly on two pillars:

- his ability to compare, from his knowledge of all the notable works in a particular province (genre or period),
- his personal relationships in the circles concerned; for the critic of managerial art, this means familiarity with the characteristics of corporations and, especially, of their managers who, even if they don't write about their activities, are prepared to talk about them.

These two basic qualifications enable him both to reconstitute the creative process behind the work and to award it a place among comparable works. There remains the question as to what can be the function (not to say the usefulness) of a managerial art critic. First of all, we might say he would act as a curator, a role complementary to that of the historian who, as a general rule, works from written records and rarely if ever meets practising managers. Through his writing, independently of any personal interpretations it may contain, the critic would place on record the authors' intentions and problems, the impact of their works, and so on. At all events, he would be alone in his ability to restore effectively the personal and subjective element of management.

However, the critic's role is not restricted to works in fully finished form, at which stage they have been catalogued or assimilated by students. It also covers the current implementation of projects in hand. He alone is able, in timely fashion, to provide the creative manager with a relevant and documented comment on the work in progress, describing the way it is perceived from outside and how it compares with what is being done elsewhere, etc.

The reader will be fully aware of the fact that this managerial arts critic function, derived directly from a vision of management as an art and of the manager as a creator, is virtually inexistant at present. Even those publications aiming to stand half-way between the corporation and corporate research have contributors, whether journalists or researchers, who are much too problem-oriented to fill the gap. Nevertheless, we have seen some definite signs of stirrings in this direction: either because of the changing nature of management practices already noted, taking on board factors not of a strictly economic kind; or because of increasing interest among the media in the inner workings of the corporation. For progress to be made in this matter, however, without trying to define a formal status for recognised practitioners (after all, the first art critics in the 19th Century were not professionals), we need to specify the conditions required for exercising such an activity, mainly:

- the facilities to be granted to certain people, giving them sufficiently regular access to corporations and their managers for them to be able to foster their knowledge of managerial works and their authors;
- the channels - media, form of contributions, etc - through which their critical reviews will be published or otherwise made known.

6 - Conclusions

This paper claims merely to explore the implications of a central idea: that management, as it has evolved during the last one or two decades, now looks more like an artistic

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activity than the rationalistic model which business economists have been trying for so long to impose. In France, the novels of Balzac and Flaubert suggest that, in earlier times, the artistic and business worlds intermingled quite closely (31). By borrowing from the field of Art and its surrounding disciplines, we may better understand and expound some aspects of that central idea: the work of the manager, the concept of managerial creations, and the need for a critical function in respect of these.

In any event, for lack of relevant material systematically compiled, apart from the work of isolated researchers (Chandler again) and the more numerous biographies of famous entrepreneurs (usually not focusing on particular actions, and thus giving few relevant details), it is hard to press the argument much further. So we are left with a kind of rallying call or exercise of style. In this connection, it should further be remembered that writing about the corporation and corporate management is a skill which can be acquired only on the job, in "workshops" known as Research Institutions, and that it also requires a modicum of talent going beyond the mere ability to collect information. Many editors of specialised journals and their copy-readers often overlook this aspect.

It is to be hoped that this article, by its "anti-neoclassic economics" stance, will arouse interest among management practitioners (without causing undue concern among economists who, after all, hardly bother about management matters). After all, managers could well benefit from informed criticism of their action in an available form. For the moment, they have to be content to read journals which discuss management from the "scientific" standpoint.

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To this end, we can imagine a number of approaches and initiatives which would give an initial impetus to such a movement:

- the first would consist in interviewing a number of business leaders (of various kinds) and asking them to give an account of the managerial works of art they think they have executed during their working careers (only after having explained in precise detail what we mean by the term "work of art" in this context);
- the second would be to write (from existing sources or original research) biographies of creative managers, very clearly setting out the grounds for considering them as such. This assumes that managers still exercising that profession will accept the "artistic" qualification applied to management. In a country like France, where most managers are graduates of schools of engineering and thus emphasise the technical aspect, this could be a problem; possibly even in the United States were many of them were trained in schools of "Business Administration";
- the third leads on from the above, concerning the training given to students intending to enter the corporate world. Curriculums are still strongly weighted towards the acquisition of knowledge and techniques claiming to constitute a management science. Teaching methods such as case studies may give the appearance of introducing a personal and subjective dimension, but this might well be only a brief interlude after which the teacher guides the students towards a "solution" - often the one actually adopted by the company which supplied the study material.

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This last point calls for a final comment on the role of talent in management. We live in a society where the yardsticks of performance, both for individuals and for companies, are expressed in quantitative terms: earnings or profits. The "best" executive or manager is generally regarded as being the one who has the most successful career and earns the most money. Earlier in this paper, on the basis of personal research findings (32), we referred to career success as being a means rather than an end: a way of gaining more freedom of action, which brings some advantages but also added risks and obligations, rather than being synonymous with greater security and earnings. Here again, there is a need for in-depth cultural action such as can only be taken, in the medium term, by the business schools or engineering colleges and the corporate personnel departments.

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