How artists can help us perceive organizational dysfunction and broken-ness differently

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This paper considers what organizations might learn from artists and the aesthetic devices they employ in the production of art that deals with dysfunction and broken-ness. By introducing these conditions as central to the redrawing of art's remit following the existential crises and traumas of the 20th and 21st Centuries, it positions them as central to the critical contestation of what defines 'functionality' at an organisational level. From problematising the binarism of (and, consequently, the drawing of the boundary between) dysfunctional|functional and broken|fixed, I offer an organizational alternative as presented by artists. The work of German artist Joseph Beuys (1921–1986) and Venezuelan artist Alejandra Ghersi (1989–) has been selected for the insights they offer to support this task. This paper explores their re-constitution of aesthetic registers (such as harmony, beauty, rhythm, and tone) as an organizational act, and positions the resulting 'transformative dissonance' as metaphor for a condition of post-binary organization. By focusing on each artist's determined non-binarism and the associated aesthetic construct of their respective work, this paper presents approaches to dysfunction and broken-ness that accept dissonance as a natural organizational phenomenon, that then, from this (dis)position of acceptance, avail themselves to the pursuit of organizational transformation.

Keywords: aesthetics; art; binarism; dissonance; organisational dysfunction

We don't have to be any one fixed thing in a nonstop way in order for us to be normal…When something doesn't work, the failure acts as a reminder of the complexity of existence. Perfection is not revolutionary, but change is.

Allejandra Ghersi (Twells, 2020, p. 2)

chaos		order
undetermined		determined
organic	movement	crystalline
warm		cold
expansion		contraction

Joseph Beuys (Tisdall, 1979, p. 44)

Introduction

As long as our conceptualisation of the organization remains tethered to the cultural references of market economics, the catcalling for efficiency, effectiveness and improvement will be heard. Structures infallible, systems and processes humming in silent harmony, employees engaged, happy and productive. Anything other an aberration to be mended, a problem to be solved; aberrations of organizational functionality generating a sub-industry of consultancy that serves, in part, to amplify and perpetuate the dysfunctional|functional or broken|fixed binary (Sorge & Witteloostuijn, 2004). Despite dysfunctionality and broken-ness negatively connoting what is overwhelmingly normal, organizations remain entranced by the myth of an operational ideal.

This paper considers what the organization might learn from the artist and the aesthetic devices they employ in the production of art that deals with dysfunction and broken-ness. Artists have responded to dysfunction and broken-ness, both physical and metaphysical, for as long as the impulse to create has existed. Indeed, it may be argued that great art is borne of this fundamental reckoning with chaos. The global violence, chaos and crises that defined the 20th Century saw the exclusive and refined air of the 19th Century's salons and Royal Colleges of Art, which had for so long enslaved its practitioners within stylistic and aesthetic parameters, made way for art more powerful and penetrating, more inclusive and diverse. By the time the First World War had cleaved Europe apart, Marcel Duchamp had dismissed the importance of "'retinal' art, intended only to please the eye…instead wanting…to put art back in the service of the mind" (Rosenthal, 2004, p. 1). Duchamp's prescience was stark: his readymade sculptures negated the traditional notions of what art should be, replacing them with questions of ontological, epistemological, and institutional importance (Foster et al., 2004). During this period, straddling the metaphysical binary of war and peace, 'art's organizational turn' (Holm & Beyes, 2022) saw it re-order its traditions and institutions, simultaneously contesting historically premised aesthetic descriptors like harmony, beauty, rhythm, and tone.

Organizations, too, were subject to these historical dynamics; however, I argue that the systematising of binarism has left many unable to respond with the same, transformative force. Now, haunted by the spectres of the anthropocentric threat to the global ecosystem and increasing political and socioeconomic polarisation, our shared experience of wide-scale and far-reaching organizational dysfunction and broken-ness makes this review all the more timely. My central aim is to encourage a shift of perception, so as to elicit new questions and dialogue in the face of these conditions. To achieve this, it interrogates this systematising of binarism and how this affects organisational dysfunction and broken-ness, what related phenomena we might observe, and what epistemic insights we might glean from considering these as an artist might; or, in an inversion of Holm's and Beyes' thesis (2022), to facilitate 'organization's artistic turn'.

This approach takes the following steps to fulfil its mission. First, I explain what is particular about organizational dysfunction and broken-ness, why it is important to

delineate these conditions, and how artists might help us understand it better. Second, I offer a critique of the binary thinking that perpetuates the failure to come-to-terms-with organizational dysfunction and broken-ness, thus calling for an alternative perspective from which to review these conditions. In answering this call, I hail aesthetics; less the normative, prescriptive understandings of aesthetics, more those that acknowledge critical organizational scholarship and reflect contemporary conditions. Third, I introduce two artists to support this position – Joseph Beuys and Alejandra Ghersi – and investigate the aesthetic devices they employ to engage (with) dysfunction and broken-ness. Beuys and Ghersi each have distinctive aesthetic and conceptual approaches that appeal to this review for different reasons. For Beuys, portraying his own physical broken-ness, as emblematic of the broken-ness of the post-war German state, generated a lifetime's work demanding a complete dissolution of the binarism that had driven the nation – and the artist – to the brink. For Ghersi (performing under the pseudonym Arca), the dysphoria/dysfunction of gender binarism is reconciled through a body of work that embraces genre and gender hybridity, interrogating the intersection of human and virtual ontologies by discarding of "absolutes and black-and-white thinking, in favour of acknowledging that everyone and everything lives in a constant state of flux" (Moen, 2020, p. 5). While each offer unique insights into organizational thinking, Ghersi's critical subjectivity is foil to Beuys's collectivist impulse. To close, I posit 'transformative dissonance' as a (pre)condition for informing the 'post-binary' organization that views dysfunction and broken-ness differently. In the process, I scrutinise some of these conditions by raising select aesthetic domains and devices Beuys and Ghersi engage to highlight how artists organize, examples of how this might manifest in (an) organization, and what direction future research might take.

Organizational dysfunction and broken-ness

While contesting the idealisation of the functional organization, one must not inadvertently give licence to dangerous organizational behaviours. Granted, dangerous behaviours may co-exist or be correlative, but operational dysfunction or broken-ness must not be conflated with moral dysfunction or broken-ness, manifest in "corruption, abuse…suppression/denial of voice; moral blindness, deafness; workplace bullying and…behaviour such as incivility, aggression, harassment and intimidation" (Pope & Burnes, 2013, p. 678). Beuys and Ghersi have each contested the institutions of art, and yet do not defile or destroy them. Beuys and Ghersi have each outraged their audiences, and yet they do not abuse or hurt them. These other, destructive behaviours demand immediate response and remedy; whereas operational dysfunction and broken-ness comprise conditions that every organization is susceptible to, most of us are familiar with, and do not necessarily elicit action. Granted, the types of moral failing listed above are more likely to take root in an organization that is operationally dysfunctional or broken, but this article does not apply aesthetic sensibility to support the task of addressing these. Perhaps, in distinguishing a tipping point between these conditions, we might engage the lexicon of 'organizational health', and speak of the 'ailing' organization:

> Like people, organizations can get sick and die. They also need to be cured and healed. Yet, like physicians who focus only on their speciality, most consultants operate from the analytic tradition. They fragment complex situations into symptoms, and rarely inquire into the deeper causes of problems: how we learn and act together with a sense of shared inspiration. Consequently, management experts have very little ability to influence organizational health (Kofman & Senge, 1993, p. 8).

While a damning appraisal of consultants, this view also drives the imperative for 'non-analytic' ways of improving organizational health beyond the confines of management and their predilection for engaging corporate consultants. It compels to (re)view organizational function as an artist might; to observe, contemplate and draw creative energy from the dynamism of decline, decay and rebirth, the tension between destructive and creative forces, and the spaces and flux in-between. It aligns with this article's concern about binary thinking and its organizational consequences. It proposes a reset.

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It is tempting to defer to the more recognised scholarly paradigm of *disorganization*, however I have concluded that the notions of dysfunction and broken-ness are better suited to explaining the phenomena that connect art and organization in ways disorganization does not. While dysfunction and broken-ness are not presented in opposition to disorganization, they describe nuanced organizational manifestations that share conditions more consistent with artistic endeavour. To understand these nuances, the scholarship of disorganization does demand some attention, most notably Robert Cooper's (1986) seminal article 'Organization/Disorganization'. Many have interrogated the intersection (or in Cooper's case, the boundary) between these binaries (Parker, 2000; Chia, 1995; Spoelstra, 2005); however, 'Organization/Disorganization' simultaneously serves as both origin for, and bridging point between, a number of this paper's themes. Cooper continues to employ these opposing conditions to frame his theoretical landscape, noting its binarism as 'significant' (Cooper, 1986, p. 302). While Cooper's interrogation of the boundary between organization and disorganization – "conceived not as a static concept, subservient to either term, but as an active process of differentiation which serves systems and environment equally" (p. 303) – has thematic resonance with my review of Beuys's and Ghersi's practice, it presupposes a somewhat different dynamism than their more determined non-binarism. Which is not to say my reading is wholly at odds with Cooper's regarding the fluidity of organizational boundaries and binaries; this 'active process of differentiation' resonates with the premise that our preconceived organizational understandings are not (and cannot remain) static, and the search for alternative, non-analytic methods (in this instance, aesthetics) as central to this task. This is amplified elsewhere: in Cooper's presentation of the rational model of organization as contrary to the 'natural' model (p. 300), and the latter's association with Romanticism's view of "reality as an 'intrinsic vagueness'…" (p. 300). Parallels might be observed in Cooper's presenting the role of information in mediating "between form and matter, order and disorder…" (p. 305) and this paper's proposal that it is the aesthetic, sensory, realm moderating this force in place of the machinations of cognition. Ghersi speaks to this, noting that "…of all the stories that we write and we choose to share as world builders, as storytellers…the ones that are most exciting are the ones that point to a recognition of a boundary" (Ghersi in Herrera, 2021, p. 3).

A more expansive study might detail other fields of organizational scholarship that intersect with the ideas presented herein, notably 'paradox' (Schad, et al., 2016; Berti, et al., 2021) 'wonderland' (McCabe, 2006) and 'the uncanny' (Beyes & Steyaert, 2013). These are each important, and display traces of an existential hope (and, often, humour) that contest efforts to find light in the dark, troubled personae of *the dysfunctional* and *the broken.* For now, these alternative organizational conditions (that are not 'functional' in any understood sense of the word) remain outside this paper's scope in considering dysfunction and broken-ness as peculiar to artistic pursuit.

The ways in which organizational dysfunction and broken-ness share characteristics with artistic process and practice are manifold. Consider organizational dysfunction; variously described in terms related to 'abnormal' or 'unhealthy' functioning that "leads to the inability of the organization to fulfil its purpose" (Huizinga, 2020, p. 13), contraction or decline (Cameron, Whetton & Kim, 1987), accepted crisis (Kersten, 2005), a consequence of misguided, or 'magical' thinking (Conbere & Heorhiadi, 2016), and as a misfit between trust and control (Braswell & Edwards, 2023). Each of these descriptors could serve as entry point to the artistic realm for the parallel political and personal conditions they elicit; conditions that have inspired some of the most recognisable and influential works and cultural movements, including those that both Beuys and Ghersi inhabit. And, while broken-ness is a recurring motif in religious scholarship (Huizinga, 2020; Beates, 2012; DeMoss, 2008; Young, 2007), one can also find reference to the condition as relative to art and craft (Scherb, 2018) and increasingly, gender (Raha, 2017). Each necessarily identifies with broken-ness differently, with gendered broken-ness notable for its association with trauma, especially within the trans community:

> To name the states of our broken-ness: depression, hurt, trauma,
> fatigue/exhaustion, overwork, sadness, loneliness, stress, mental and
> physical tension, isolation; anomie and boredom and discontent;
> unemployment, underemployment, low wages; to be disregarded as a
> sexual subject; surviving abuse and abusive relationships, incarceration,
> violence including sexual violence; anger, Madness, and the labels of
> 'crazy', 'psychotic', 'mentally ill'; the transphobic slurs that are too
> familiar; to be outcast, or the pariah, to be exiled; the disqualification of
> the transfeminine…(Raha, 2017, p. 632)

This paper presents Ghersi's efforts to invert these experiences, perhaps as the Japanese practice of Kintsugi (金継ぎ) seeks to do with broken ceramics, becoming an artform and philosophy unto itself:

> This unique and aesthetically striking way of repairing broken pottery
> was further thought to add additional elements of interest and
> uniqueness to the vessel…instilled with characteristics that are more
> valuable and interesting than it originally was, with the mended parts
> standing as indicators of the vessel's usefulness and history…Because of
> the way these vessels have been repaired, the cracks can no longer be
> viewed as marks of injury, or records of violence or damage, but instead
> as indicators of the value, longevity and provenance contained within it.
> (Scherb, 2018, p. 43)

These descriptors lend weight to the rationale behind specifying these conditions in the context of organization, capturing distinct experiences within broader disorganization, and presenting fractal 'wonderlands' where opposing conditions co-exist. Thus, to re-view disorder as transformation, crisis and despair as opportunity and hope, I present the aesthetic realm; one in which post-binary organization might form.

On binarism, aesthetics, and organization

I have presented binarism as representing a distillation of an analytic, rational understanding of organization, with its contemporary origins in Weber's (1964) notion of 'instrumental rationality' that has dominated organizational activity for over half a century. The pre-eminence of cognitive processing, as expressed in "…planning, analysing, measuring, costing and comparing…" (McCabe, 2016, p. 948) amplifies the primacy of functional and data-driven management approaches. And yet, the human dimension of organizational operation is only partially aligned to these modes, meaning that:

> …when confronting emotionally charged events, individuals, groups, and
> larger collectivities instinctively frame their predicaments in a binary way
> – as a polarity encompassing a dimension of choice with two mutually
> exclusive alternatives. Events are thus construed as dilemmas to be
> resolved in favor of one alternative or the other. (Wood & Petriglieri,
> 2005, p. 31)

In seeking resolution, Wood and Petriglieri maintain that the tension between these binaries "conceals an important developmental opportunity" (2005, p. 31). By holding this tension, we allow "exploration, differentiation, and resolution by a third, 'mediating' element" (Wood & Petriglieri, 2005, p. 31). I ask that we let aesthetics act as this 'mediating element' when thinking about organizational dysfunction and broken-ness, albeit a particular interpretation that applies to the works of Beuys and Ghersi.

If applied literally, or derivatively, from the Greek, *αισθητικός* (*aesthesis*: in relation to things) and *αισθάνομαι* (*aísthomai*: to perceive by the senses, to feel), aesthetics extends to any or all sensory experience, distinct from the historical association with beauty and art. Even the Kantian definition of aesthetics as a "science which treats the conditions of sensuous perception" (Kant, 1790/1987, p. 24) appears to reinforce the derivative interpretation; however, nothing Kant proposed was ever so simple. One distinction matters inasmuch as it helps distinguish between the kinds of 'sense-forming' we find

ourselves participants in. Kant's system demands focus, not on objects, but on judgement *of* or *about* objects; that is, taste. This is a deliberate strategy on Kant's part, so as to avoid the problematic subject-object binary and is further consolidated as a realm of investigation by his determination that this 'space between' (or, to recall Cooper, the 'boundary' determining) the subject and the object generates its own developmental locus – purely aesthetic, not cognitive. Indeed, this is stated in the first paragraph of the first 'moment' of *Critique of Judgment*: "The judgment of taste is not a judgment of cognition, and is consequently not logical but aesthetical…" (Kant, 1790, p. 27). Despite Kant's intimations, adopting an even more sensorially expansive and inclusive definition allows us to shift beyond the more familiar applications to the aesthetic that both Beuys and Ghersi engage. This is increasingly supported by definitions within the scholarship of both contemporary art and organizational aesthetics (Strati, 1999, 2000; Bleeker et al., 2002; Verrips, 2006) where a (re)turn to the etymological origins of the word offer a more encompassing definition, one befitting Duchamp's determination to shift away from simply 'serving the retina' and accept the expansive creative realm:

> *Aisthesis* comprises more than just visual perception; it stands for general perception with the senses, as well as the impression that the perceived leaves on the body. In the original meaning of the concept, tactile and visual perception constitute a whole, and it was not until later (e.g. in the Kantian tradition) that this meaning was reduced to merely an eye that observes, without a body. (Bleeker et al., 2002, p. v)

The importance of organizational aesthetics as a 'sub-discipline' is of course evident in the presence of this, eponymously titled journal *Organizational Aesthetics* (formerly *Aisthesis*) and the body of scholarship committed to the field (Linstead et al., 2000; Strati, 1999, 2019; Wasserman and Frenkel, 2011). Nevertheless, more than two decades since its publication, the introductory text in Antonio Strati's seminal work *Organization and Aesthetics* (1999) remains current:

> In short, one finds in organization theory and management studies the conviction that aesthetics, as a discipline, has nothing to do with organizational life…Organization theory and management studies depicted organizations in idealized form by depriving them of their earthly features of physicality and corporeality. (Strati, 1998, p. 4)

Artists, as purveyors of artefacts that affect aesthetic contemplation, are similarly perceived as 'alien' to the concerns of the organization despite their evident value:

> Artists provide an essential bridge between society and business. Despite this crucial relationship, however, the world of business has clung to the rather romantic notion of art as the revolting or revolutionary avant-garde, and in terms of popular opinion, the arts are still considered an outsider phenomenon. In this mindset, people perceive art as a miraculous flying saucer of colorful dreams that floats into the midst of our grey everyday corporate muddles. (Guillet de Monthoux, 2013, p. 269)

In turns both (arguably) 'revolting' and 'revolutionary', the works of Beuys and Ghersi certainly serve to materialise some of the more radical applications of these theories, however in an effort to progress beyond 'romantic notions', let us now turn to this work, and how it can help us perceive organizational dysfunction and broken-ness differently.

Ghersi, Beuys and the 'organizational turn'

Why, from within the expansive boundaries of art history, employ Alejandra Ghersi and Joseph Beuys to (re)view organizational dysfunction and broken-ness? Beuys, the former Luftwaffe pilot who came to be widely regarded as the most important German artist of the 20th century, appears to sit rather incongruously next to Ghersi, a non-binary trans-

Latina woman[1] who is critically heralded as among the most innovative and uncompromising artists working in contemporary music. And yet, their conceptual and aesthetic connection is forged by some of the most recognisable names of the art world.

Andy Warhol is a notable example; an artist central to the celebrity of Pop Art and its critical dissolution of the high|low art binary, and the cultural landscape Ghersi now inhabits. Following Beuys's exhibition at the New York Guggenheim Museum in 1979 (Buchloh, et al., 1980), he and Warhol developed a mutually admiring relationship – captured in Warhol's 1980 portrait of Beuys – and shared an "almost alchemical ability to transform ordinary objects into valuable art works" (Bourdon, 1989, p. 385). This also marked a period where Beuys directly influenced American art, as evidenced by a new generation of both performance artists and those engaging a 'postmodern grotesque' (Gaylord, 2016).

To Beuys's legacy as a genesis-figure in the art-historical narrative of performance art, observe the work of Marina Abramović, who paid homage to him in a 2005 performance (also at the New York Guggenheim Museum) where she revisited his 1965 *Aktion*[2] 'How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare' (Beuys, 1965; Abramović, 2005). Bridging the generational and cultural divide between Beuys and Ghersi, Abramović's work introduces questions of gender (Lader, 2013), enacting the broken-ness of her own relationships (see *The Lovers*, 1998) and gendered violence (see *Rhythm O*, 1974). Abramović remains active and engaged with the next generation of artists – including Ghersi (a conversation between the artists is quoted in this paper).

Of the latter, consider the grotesque in the work of Mathew Barney, an artist linked to Beuys as the co-subject of a 2006 exhibition at the Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin. In the exhibition catalogue, it was stated that "Matthew Barney's art would not be possible without the work of Joseph Beuys" (Taylor, 2006, p. 107), and yet projecting forward, the aesthetic resonance between Ghersi's hyper-stylised grotesque and Barney's (Herrera, 2021) is striking. Of particular interest, however, are the parallels elicited by reading into their process. The description of Barney's as an act of 'organizational closure' (Maturana, 1975; Steel, 2006) evokes Cooper's mapping of organizational boundaries, reminding us that the artistic process is a contestation of organizational binarism. Ghersi describes this in the context of her song 'Nonbinary':

> I'm asking for recognition that we have multiple selves without denying that there's a singular unit,' she says. '[It's] the difference between the pronoun use of *they* and *it*. It's that I want to have my cake and eat it, too. I want to be seen as an ecosystem of minor self-states without being stripped of the dignity of being a whole. (Moen, 2020, p. 11)

Both Beuys's historical association with Nazism and Ghersi's gender matters since their artistic and personal identities are, by their own making, inseparable. That is, there is no distinction between the personal and the public, between life and work – perhaps their most singular disruption of organizational binarism, and central to 'art's organizational turn' (Holm & Beyes, 2022). The deeply personal (and musical) aspect of Ghersi's work is less easy to pigeonhole in this genealogy, however the physical and narrative presence in her work signifies a confounding of subject and object; perhaps a Sisyphean search for 'organizational closure'. This conflation is a central device in the performed arts; however,

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[1] To avoid misrepresenting Ghersi's identity structure, I have chosen this abbreviated form from the following passage: "I see my gender identity as non-binary, and I identify as a trans-Latina woman, and yet, I don't want to encourage anyone to think that my gayness has been banished. And when I talk about gayness, it's funny because I'm not thinking about who I'm attracted to. It's a form of cultural production that is individual and collective, which I don't ever want to renounce." (Arca in Stamps, 2022: 4)

[2] The German word (and its plural, *Aktionen*) literally meaning 'action', became the preferred descriptor for what would otherwise be described as performance art (Gandy, 1997).

the means by which Ghersi and Beuys respectively engage their audience/the viewer is/was at the vanguard of a practice that transcends genre classification. Beyond the impossibility of definitively compressing their personae or work into classification, we encounter multiple instances of each explicitly contesting boundaries and organizational binarism:

> It is the transformation of substance that is my concern in art, rather than the traditional aesthetic understanding of beautiful appearances. If creativity relates to the transformation, change, and development of substance, then it can be applied to everything in the world, and is no longer restricted to art. (Beuys in Tisdall, 1979, p. 10)

> When I speak about thinking I mean it as form. People have to consider ideas as the artist considers sculpture to seek the forms created by thinking. It's the difference between soft, organic forms and hard, crystallized forms: the search is for a solution between these poles. By this I mean to find the evolutionary step towards a new kind of freedom. (Beuys in Kuoni, 1993, p. 13)

> It's about harmony. The grotesque can suddenly become incredibly beautiful. The sexual can become pure. The feminine and the masculine mix with each other. All these things are Arca. (Ghersi in Isaac, 2020, p. 21)

We must also understand Beuys and Ghersi as having both emotional and psychic crises emerging from their 'assignment' to identities they must challenge: Beuys as a 'Nazi perpetrator' trying to reconcile the trauma of his actions with his art, Ghersi as a young man trying to reconcile the dysphoria of gender with hers.

Having both emerged from these states of dysfunction and broken-ness (perceived or otherwise) using art as remedy, it is unsurprising that they both have a highly stylised and recognisable aesthetic charged with non-binary elements. This work – which Beuys would refer to as Lebenslauf/Werklauf (literally translating as life course/work course [Temkin, 1993]) – was seemingly always undertaken at the intersection of destruction and creation, decay, death and (re)birth (Ebert, 2012; Easton 2020). As we will come to see, in representing this experience of the world in a manner transformative rather than nihilistic, Beuys and Ghersi invert the historically perceived negativity of 'anti-aesthetic' elements like ugliness and the grotesque, atonality and dissonance, arrhythmia and glitch.

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Born in Caracas, Venezuela in 1989, Ghersi lived in a self-described 'bubble' residing in "a gated community, was privately educated and had the luxury of piano lessons" (Hutchinson, 2014, p. 5). The seeds of Ghersi's gender dysphoria were sown from an early age, as she struggled with her sexual identity in the oppressive political and cultural climate of Venezuela:

> I didn't want to accept the fact that I was gay…I hoped that being attracted to men might go away, but what I never ever hoped would go away were the feelings of femininity, and of softness and fragility, that could live inside of a boy. (Ghersi in Hutchinson, 2014, p. 6)

This recognition of the range of gender sensation that could 'live' within a body found its voice in the young Ghersi's musical experimentation, coalescing in her 2013 mixtape *&&&&&.* Following the release of *&&&&&*, Ghersi's career accelerated, with her talent for production bringing her to the studios of acclaimed and globally recognised artists, including Björk (who was once married to Matthew Barney), FKA Twigs and Kanye West (Lockett, 2014; Moen, 2020). In 2014, she released her debut album, *Xen* – the title representing a fictional alter ego, one that Ghersi's long-time artistic collaborator, Jesse Kanda introduces as "…this very sassy, confident, very feminine side of him" (Friedlander,

2014). It comes as no surprise that the release of *Xen*, some four years before her gender transition, sees Ghersi contemplate the boundary between herself and her alter-ego:

> 'Xen is a genderless being. It's about resisting labels and integrating different sides of ourselves. The complicating of one and the other is very fertile, emotionally and creatively,' he explains…the foggy place between the black and white, male and female, and easy and uneasy listening is the most authentic place to be, artistically: 'Maybe the real truth is drawing strength from the grey.' (Hutchinson, 2014, p. 8)

Ghersi's ponderings over the possible importance of 'the grey' hint at the process for conceptualizing the post-binary organization. Despite the maximalism and technicolour of her pseudo-hallucinatory aesthetic, this moment of reflection on the representational force of 'the grey' contests the most illustrative of binaries: that of black, and white. Beuys, too, alluded to this:

> Yes…'why doesn't he work with colour?' But people never think far enough ahead to say: 'well … perhaps he means to evoke a colourful world inside us'…Nobody bothers to ask whether I might not be more interested in evoking a very colourful world. (Beuys in Schellman & Klusner, 1980, p. 13)

Where De Cock and Beyes wonder if "organizational scholarship is afraid of colour, of its sensuousness, vulgarity and queerness" (2017, p. 59), Ghersi and Beuys present the affective force of greyness as a fascinating alternative to the "ambiguity of colour as 'critical organizational affect'" (De Cock & Beyes, 2017, p. 60).

While Ghersi continues to take on production roles on other artists' recordings, it is as Arca that she remains most recognised, releasing a succession of albums[3] that each present shifting conceptual and affective realms. With each release, Xen fades and the pseudonymous agent becomes more empowered, more challenging, to the point where Arca becomes "more than a pseudonym – it's a space…where binary divisions of past and future, reality and construction, truth and imagination melt" (Spratley, 2020, p. 1). There remains much in her work that offers organizational insight, particularly how historical and personal circumstance explicitly demonstrate the force of aesthetic affect. A notable example – in response to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's insufferable live feeds:

> As a form of protest, people would hang out their windows and bang on pots and pans in what is known in South America as a *cacerolazo* until the entire neighbourhood became one massive metallic cacophony. 'It happened so often that I'm sure it left some unconscious mark on me of what it means to protest through sonics.' (Moen, 2020, p. 5)

To experience this aesthetic-affective dimension is to appreciate that it "exists in resonances and rhythms…born in in-between-ness and as a gradient of bodily capacity" (Fotaki & Kenny, 2017, p. 3). This snapshot of the aesthetic affective state Ghersi was exposed to amidst political dysfunction and broken-ness is both "proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1) and the force shaping Ghersi's sonic- and body-politik.

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Beuys was born (Krefeld, 1921), and died (Dusseldorf, 1986), in Germany. His status as among the most important artists working in post-war Europe was built as much upon the ideological dimension of his work as his immense body of sculptural assemblage, collage, drawing, painting and performance. His political activism was constant. Whether agitating for democratic reform via his *Büro der Organization für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Organizational Office for Direct Democracy Through People's

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[3] *Mutant* (2015), *Arca* (2017), *KiCk i* (2020), a collection of remixes *Riquiquí;Bronze-Instances* (1-100) (2020) and *KiCk ii* (2021).

Referendum) or as an early organizational leader (and unsuccessful candidate) of *Die Grünen* (the German Greens Party), Beuys's contribution to the German political landscape was significant, particularly his thoughts on ecological matters (Adams, 1992; Gandy, 1997). During his controversial tenure as Professor of Sculpture at the Düsseldorf Academy, Beuys implemented radical change that continues to fuel pedagogical scholarship to this day (Ulmer, 1985; Wear, 2009; Bishop, 2012; Biesta, 2017; Douglas, 2022). Even Beuys's contemplation on matters of medicinal holism – starting with his 'rehabilitation' at the hands of Tatars in Crimea – has stirred interest among medical scholars (Murken,1979; Barilan, 2004; Wolf, 2000). And finally, to organizational theory, where the first signs of Beuys's potential are emerging, from interest in his theory of Social Sculpture (Beyes, 2022), to his process as a form of "human resource management and strategy" (Guillet de Monthoux, 2016, p. 337).

Beuys, like Ghersi, employs a fierce physicality in his narrative. Consider his 1985 lecture titled 'Talking About One's Own Country: Germany', which opened with the statement: "Once again I should like to start with the wound" (Temkin, 1993, p. 12). Throughout his life, Beuys often referred to the 'wound' as, alternately, the physical and psychological wound of birth, or the wounded German psyche following the Second World War:

> And when I say 'Show it! Show the wound that we have inflicted upon ourselves during the course of our development', it is because the only way to progress and become aware of it is to show it. (Beuys in Borer, 2016, p. 25)

The repeated reference, by both artists, to the physical markings of trauma and of violence feels somewhat removed from the routine of organizational operation; however, these are important origin stories, points of departure from whence their own, personal broken-ness and dysfunction emerged, from whence their aesthetic and creative force was born. States of organizational decay, disorder or dysfunction have their origin stories too: destructive decision-making, financial mismanagement, corruption and scandal – these are the origin stories of reputational damage, cultural toxicity and systemic instability.

The necessarily political dimension of Beuys's work saw him contest the very boundaries of art and its place in social organizing. This expanded defining of art resulted in his theory of 'Social Sculpture'. For Social Sculpture to materialise, the making of art itself needed to be reimagined as a revolutionary, transformative practice, removed from the confines of establishments and institutions. The organizational dynamic Beuys advocated was a pedagogical one in which hierarchies and binaries are dissolved:

> Communication occurs in reciprocity: it must never be a one-way flow from the teacher to the taught. So oscillates – at all times and everywhere, in any conceivable internal and external circumstance, between all degrees of ability, in the work place, institutions, the street, work circles, research groups, schools – the master/pupil, transmitter/receiver, relationship. (Beuys, 1973, p. 48)

For Beuys, the sites of transformation were manifold, but he remained explicit about defining this as 'work' and all that this organizational paradigm offered:

> My understanding of art is strictly related to everybody's work…So organically it is related to the working places of the people. And the element of self-doing, the element of self-determination, self-administration and self-organization is the element of this anthropological type of art. (Beuys in Bjelíc, 2014)

Beyond positioning Beuys at the origin point of the notion of 'art as organization' (Beyes, 2022), his more radically expansive vision can be recontextualised besides commonly prescribed organizational descriptors as 'thinking organizations' (Sims, 1986; Linstead & Linstead, 2005; Anthony, 2012) and 'learning organizations' (Senge, 1990; Garvin, 1993; Griego, Geroy & Wright, 2000). This assignation of human or organic qualities mirrors Beuys's capacity to dissolve distinctions that sustained binaries; a proposition that has

evident application in the organizational setting. These calls were heeded in many seminal works of organizational studies (Mintzberg, 1979; Morgan, 1986). Indeed, any field of organization scholarship that methodologically embraces criticality and/or creativity will necessarily embrace this approach. From contemporary change management (Velikorossov et al., 2020; Mueller, 2017) and distributed leadership theory (Canterino et al., 2020; Spiller et al., 2020; Ali, Wang & Johnson, 2020) to theories concerning organizational design and culture (Hanman & George, 2014) the call for new ways of perceiving organizational dysfunctional and broken-ness remains.

Transformative dissonance and post-binary organization

> The design of the organization itself, besides that of its products, may respond to aesthetic criteria such as proportion and harmony. Organizational processes in their turn may be influenced by a sense of proportion, of rhythm, of flow…(Dean, 1997, p. 479)

These 'pleasant' aesthetic criteria represent an organizational ideal. What representative value, then, might 'unpleasant' aesthetic criteria have? In the context of organizational dysfunction and broken-ness, scaffolded by 'Beuysian' and 'Ghersian' insights, I will now summarise how artists can help us perceive organizational dysfunction and broken-ness differently. By interpreting their aesthetic and method, their engagement with these alternative aesthetic criteria – under the term 'transformative dissonance' – we can offer a novel and helpful ideation of an organizational characteristic that has otherwise been perceived negatively.

What 'unpleasant' aesthetic criteria or devices do both Beuys and Ghersi co-opt? While dissonance is presented as an encompassing criterion, other more specific devices like atonality, arrythmia, ugliness and the grotesque (Johnson-Laird 2012; Rozenkranz, et al., 2015; Wranning & Wetterin, 2021; Chew, 2021) appear frequently within their works. Rather than invoke these as oppositional to harmony, tonality, rhythm, and beauty (after all, this would be forging binaries), Beuys and Ghersi each highlight the creative and critical dimension they open and the language they employ to make sense of broken-ness and dysfunction.

For example, Beuys' regard for atonality an arrythmia is notable in his *Aktionen.* He would often use musical instruments in these, but never as they 'should' be used. Cymbals were crashed, arrhythmically (*Titus/Iphigenie*, 1969) and pianos would be manipulated, and "cease to function, or become muted" (Rosenthal, 2004, p. 37). His accompanying vocalisations could be guttural and sporadic or incessantly monotonal (*Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja, Nee Nee Nee Nee Nee*, 1969) while his collaboration with German "agit-noise collective" (Padua, 2022) *Pissoff* saw the artist make "hand signals like a weird semaphore…a kind of avant-garde jazz hands" (Padua, 2022, p. 2). In Ghersi's work (as Arca), this serendipitous avant-gardism gives way to a more purposeful and coherent aesthetic. There are countless examples across Arca's catalogue; however, one excellent example of her adoption of atonality is in the opening track, *Piel*, from her 2017 self-titled album. Any pleasure gleaned upon hearing the melancholic harmony and rich tonal quality of the opening vocals are almost immediately pierced by competing feedback and distorted frequencies. In the (aforementioned) track *Nonbinary*, from 2020 album *KiCk I*, both atonality *and* arrhythmic beats combine with the lyrics to amplify Ghersi's dysphoric state, where her 'broken-ness' is "a treat" (Ghersi, 2020). Similarly, the aforementioned reference to their respective place in the 'postmodern grotesque' points to a determination to accentuate anti-aesthetic (Foster, 1983) conditions for transformative ends:

> …a special truth seems to reside in traumatic or abject states…the evidentiary basis of important witnessings to truth, of necessary testimonials against power…But is this point of nihility a critical epitome of impoverishment where power cannot penetrate, or is it a place from which power emanates in a strange new form? (Foster, 1996, p. 123)

From their respective trauma both Beuys and Ghersi shape 'strange new forms' that define the character of transformative dissonance. From within, a distinctive non-binarism emerges to extend this reconceptualisation of organization and organizational character. The determined non-binarism of the aesthetic realm, as previously described, is heightened in this descriptor, where the transformational characteristics of 'dissonance' serve to capture an affective domain in which these 'unpleasant' aesthetic modalities are introduced.

While dissonance is etymologically marked as an acoustic, sonic experience we have come to apply it beyond music and its associated theories, to cognitive and cultural states of impaired social connection (Harmon-Jones, 2019; Daenekindt & Roose, 2014). In these conditions it has offered non-binary framing mechanisms, for example, the ability to define "dissonant cultural profiles as the combination of legitimate and illegitimate cultural activities [in contrast with] consonant cultural profiles that exclusively consist of legitimate or illegitimate cultural practices" (Daenekindt & Roose, 2014, p. 83). Extending its reach here is not an exercise in theoretical opportunism; organizational theorists have themselves extended cognitive dissonance theories (Bacharach et al., 1996; Latheef & Werner, 2013; Jun, 2021) to describe a collective condition, one in which "a state of tension…arises from the misalignment of key organizational elements" (Latheef & Werner, 2013, p.1). In this tension we might consider the relationship between the processes of 'organization' and the actualisation of 'the organization' as described in Hernes' (2004) "three-pronged notion of space in relation to organization" (p. 72) where *Physical*, *Social* and *Mental* space each engage elemental realms of, respectively, "tangible structures, social relations and thought" (p. 72). While Hernes' formulation is detailed and comprehensive, its abbreviated form here serves to identify realms within which these aesthetic experiences can manifest organizationally. For example, innovation is posited as a process that demands the 'penetrating of boundaries' (p. 66), while inter- and intra-organizational dynamics necessarily engage "different time-space properties, which provides them with both limitations and potential for acting…" (p. 79). Consider how organizational vernacular adopts atonality and arrythmia to describe organizational dysfunction in the realms Hernes speaks of. Its negative manifestations in 'social relations', for example; references to 'tone-deaf' leadership (McGregor, 2017) are, if not explicitly detailing an aesthetic criterion, at the very least indicating the relationship between action and affect. Similarly, the notion of being 'out of step' with cultural or social norms indicates an organization unable to find itself 'in step' with its employees', customers' or clients' needs, or the expectations of society, more broadly. Where systems and processes are out of sync, growth, progress and efficiency are impacted, as was noted in a recent UNESCO resolution:

> UNESCO's strategic transformation is an ever-present concern for the International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU), which never loses sight of the fact that staff members cannot progress in an organization out of step with the demands of the times. (UNESCO, 2021, p. 10)

While atonality and arrythmia each depart their sonic realms to engage process and performance, the visual essence of ugliness certainly lends itself to describing the 'tangible structures' of an organization, from its structures and artefacts – both virtual and physical (Hernes, 2004; Strati, 1999) – to its colour scheme and branding (Sassoon, 1990; Gagliardi, 1996; Strati, 1999). This plays to an aesthetic-moral binarism that considers the beautiful and chic as good; the ugly and kitsch as bad, sentiment Strati (1999, p. 163) sees manifesting as a familiar organizational refrain: resistance to change. Perhaps it is this aesthetic-moral imperative that defines the post-binary organization. In this instance the work of artists like Beuys and Ghersi becomes even more prescient. They articulate and enact radical change unburdened by the need "protect and defend their aesthetic experience" (Strati, 1999, p. 161) critically engaging movement and flux, over-riding the binaries of the beautiful and the ugly, the tonal and atonal, the rhythmic and the arrhythmic, and the harmonious and the dissonant.

Conclusion

Now consider, anew, the quotes that serve to open this article. For Ghersi and Beuys, these notions – of 'change as revolutionary' and 'movement' as critical, essential – operate beyond representational motifs; they are rallying cries for personal and collective transformation. On this, Ghersi reflects:

> …I like to think of transness not as a pathology, or transitioning as a response to a symptom, but rather the manifestation of an expression. It's not about trying to fix a glitch. It's about an expression that comes from within that you can't shake and you don't know why and the curiosity doesn't disappear and it makes you unhappy not to listen to that. (Ghersi in Abramović, 2020, p. 29)

And Beuys, for whom the agency of 'movement' (*Bewegung*) in his art, extends:

> …art is there to expand the organization of sensory perception, to further develop the creative potential of human beings, to bring it to a higher standard…that the inner creative powers advance the present thinking structures through intuition, inspiration and imagination and don't end with pure intellectual understanding. (Beuys, 1983)

In presenting strategies both artists employ to activate this dynamism (for example, how they engage 'the grey' to map the conceptual and aesthetic terrain between opposing forces) we can reconsider how we become accustomed to 'ensuring harmony', to 'setting the right tone' and to 'keeping in step', and consequently allergic to their opposing force. By engaging these forces, Beuys and Ghersi produce works of art that are not necessarily 'pleasant', yet their cultural significance is evident. Is it unreasonable to speak of organizations in these terms? Perhaps "the elusiveness of organizational aesthetics" (Strati, 1999, p. 109) is compounded by the difficulty in locating pleasantness (or otherwise) within an organization. The collapsing and confounding of competing systems and contrasting metrics (Strati, 1999) means any such effort is bound to encounter both theoretical and practical hurdles. Is measurement or identification of pleasantness (or otherwise) really the answer to identifying the significance or impact of changing our perception of organizational dysfunction and broken-ness?

If at first, some of the ideas presented herein appear impractical or untenable, I would posit certain contemporary organizational initiatives as aligned. Explicitly arts-based initiatives (like artist-in-residence programs) are the easiest fit, albeit with emphasis on the organizational role, rather than the artistic output:

> Although artworks may result from the residency period, this is not the primary objective. The intention is usually to address an issue in the organisation by drawing on artistic sensibilities, explore a core topic of art-based practices, or to encourage a change of perspective and challenge the organisation to try out new approaches. (Bianco, 2023, p. 11)

Of more relevance here is the nuanced revision of commonplace organizational practice re-viewed through the lens of transformative dissonance. Consider the ubiquity of 'Continuous Improvement' and 'Innovation' in the organizational lexicon, and the paradoxical conditions they elicit; the former to "increase successes and reduce failures [and] eliminate waste in all systems and processes of an organization" (Bhuiyan, 2005, p. 761) and the latter posited as an essential characteristic of the successful, modern organization – albeit one that is willing to take risks for the same end (Glor, 2014; Wear, 2020). Though grounded in the commercial imperative for change, these are testing conditions for leaders expected to continuously upset the status quo in the name of transformation. These organizational change initiatives, "which are often continuous, will undermine employees' certain freedoms and volitions, which will arouse negative affective states" (Nesterkin, 2012, p. 589). Where once we might have read these 'negative affective states' as emblematic of organizational dysfunction and broken-ness, I ask the

reader to view them as exemplary of transformative dissonance. Once adopted, this viewpoint affords many opportunities to apply this lens. For example, initiatives that abandon short-term efficiencies for long-term benefits, or initiatives that proactively upend the strategic and cultural organizational legacies. Consider the varied Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) programs that are being routinely implemented as fundamental to the character of the modern organization and, as inherently disruptive to long-held values and operational processes, generate resistance. Such resistance is rooted in fears and prejudices (Velasco & Sansone, 2019) as well as (short-sighted) failings of resourcing and development (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). However, harnessing these negative forces has itself proven effective; 'resistance as resource' (Ford, 2009; Velasco & Sansone, 2019) is a phrase that could come from the mouths of Beuys or Ghersi. Resistance in this setting has been identified as essential to the effective transformation of organizations, using the feedback fomented in discontent to identify underlying fears, and to invite dialogue and educate employees (Velasco & Sansone, 2019). Here, resistance can be viewed as generating transformational dissonance *because of*, not *despite*, its effect on the functionality of organizational order. Perhaps post-binary organization is already forming, as organizations come to engage with discomforting ideas – albeit as a formulaic response to social and cultural change. While promising, an altogether different proposition is presented here – one that proposes ongoing investigation. That is, to observe organizational dysfunction and broken-ness as an artist might: to accept the dissonance that necessarily exists between binaries and seek transformation from within, not problems for consultants to solve.

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