

Philosophy, art, and a glass of red wine

Review of: *Curating Capitalism: How Art Impacts Business, Management, and Economy* by Pierre Guillet de Monthoux. Sternberg Press 2023.

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As I read his latest book, I hear Pierre's voice in my head, and I can feel – even smell – a glass of red wine in my hand. I imagine I am sitting in a comfortable living room, in the very chair where Bruno Latour was sitting the night before and I eagerly absorb what Pierre has to tell me about last night's conversation with Bruno. And the night before that Adorno was in the living room, and the night before that, Pierre was at Andy Warhol's factory in New York, and before that and before that, and the stories, and the ideas wash over me, even more intoxicating than the wine.

The thread that weaves throughout the book is the idea that artists these days, through their art, can curate much of our modern world. There are chapters that argue for an illustrate how art can curate knowledge, ethics, the middle class, luxury, prices, poetics, and even business education. This isn't to say that art actually curates all of this, but rather that some art curates some of it in our world. And in that premise is the hope that artists, through their art, through their art practices, through their curation of our world, can find a better path to a better future. In short, art might be able to show us how to get from the problems that are seemingly endemic to late stage capitalism to a version of capitalism that finally uses the vast resources generated by capitalism to fully enable human flourishing.

Or at least, that's what I take away from the book. You may take away something different. Pierre may be a philosopher, but he writes as a storyteller, an artist, and the message and meaning is never meant to be something simple that can be summarized with a sentence or distilled down to bullet points. There is an aesthetic form to the book that I feel like I get in an embodied, visceral way, and that I have real trouble articulating in a straight-forward, intellectual way. And just to be clear, I see that as a strength in the writing. Perhaps, I am just indulging my old-man tendencies, but I am tired of straight forward, overly simple descriptions and solutions.

I must also admit to a certain discomfort with the book. As I read it, I know that I am not on a first name basis with the philosophers and artists of our time. I read Pierre's stories and his recounting of different philosophic positions and experience with various artists and I feel somewhat inadequate as a scholar in this world. And it's not just that I wasn't there. Pierre tells us about a small conference in Gattieres in the south of France in 2003 and I was there – but I couldn't possibly tell the story of that conference that he tells. I scan the pictures and

remember being there, but in some important way, I wasn't really there until Pierre tells me his story of the conference. All of which is a long way round to saying that I think we need to Pierre to tell us his version of the past forty years. It may seem that he is some sort of art and business Zelig, showing up everywhere, but that is perhaps only a result of his own modesty in speaking about his own part when he is telling these stories. I know that Pierre was one of the primary organizers of that conference in Gattieres, even though he doesn't tell us that in the book.

It's an important story to tell. In the intersection of business and arts, we have seen various art forms, from theater (e.g. Goffman, 1959) to dance (e.g. Denhardt & Denhardt, 2006) to jazz (e.g. Barrett, 2000; DePree, 1992; Weick, 1998), used as metaphors for different aspects of business. We have seen these same art-forms used in various instrumental ways, often showing us the ways in which specific skills and insights from these art forms could be useful within the business world (cf Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). But there has been very little about curation. Perhaps this because curation is often not included in our lists of the arts, although I think it only takes a small experience of curation to recognize that it is an art in itself. And most importantly, Pierre isn't using curation as a metaphor, he is talking very directly about processes that can best be understood as actual curation.

This idea that we could curate our socio-economic systems in the way that curators have traditionally gathered together and displayed various art works to create a whole that speaks to us, is incredibly intriguing for me. Pierre doesn't offer us the specifics on how we might do this, or even who might be best suited to do this. I think that as an artist and scholar of organizations, perhaps I am one of the best people to do this. Perhaps you are. I don't know, but I do know that after reading his book, I plan on curating things going forward. I don't know what things, to what end, or even who the audience might be. I don't know that it will be anything as ambitious as capitalism, but damnit, I want to curate something. So, thanks for that, Pierre.

References

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About the Author

Steve Taylor is a professor of leadership and creativity at the WPI Business School. His research is focused in two areas: organizational aesthetics and reflective practice. Taylor is the author of the books: *Leadership Craft*, *Leadership Art*; *You're a Genius*; *Staging Organization*; *Becoming the Leader You Want to Be*; and *Confessions of a Reluctant Leader and other musings from Organizational Aesthetics*. Steve is also a playwright, whose plays have been performed in England, France, Poland, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, Italy, Australia, and the United States.