

## **A helping handover. Opening Editorial.**

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Editor-in-Chief

In taking up my role as Editor in Chief of *Organizational Aesthetics* (OA) I am reminded of some notions that shape who I am professionally and contribute to my interpretation of the role and the work ahead. They focus on ritual, evaluation, spirals, the object and metaphor of the chair.

There's an experiential activity in learning the systems psychodynamics of beginning and ending that we include in some of the organisational and leadership development programmes I am involved in. The multiplicity of endings and beginnings are familiar yet commonly not worked through experiences of our times. An anthropologist colleague used to remind groups of the non-linearity of these processes and offered the co-existence of womb and tomb as a helpful and containing metaphor for living through change. In the activity the groups design some sort of ceremony which acknowledges a tradition they want to say goodbye to whilst simultaneously opening up the space for a new identity to emerge for themselves and for the group or organisation they belong to. The resulting rituals usually emerge quite spontaneously and are often participative, performative and aesthetic. For their ritual, a group of senior nurses formed a circle of chairs around which they performed an embodied 'archive' to safely put away aspects of their culture that did not work for them anymore. They first performed inwards to the chairs, their bodies cowering and diminutive to authority figures. Having done this they turned and surged energetically, upwards and outwards and away from the chairs and what they represented.

This reflection on practice informs me as I take on the role of editor-in-chief to this exciting journal. It locates me in the organisational aesthetic of this journal system and in the people and purpose that have built and developed it with the political ambitions of exploring and illuminating an attentive sensibility in the space of organisation and management. In doing this I recognise the importance of giving attention to contributors past, present and future through a period of introductions to people and processes for which I am extremely grateful for Steve Taylor's assistance in facilitating. Along the way I have encountered the chairs that bedazzle the front cover of every journal issue and have been reminded that Antonio Strati spent time at the Tavistock Institute and attended the Leicester Conference, the gratitude and appreciation expressed by members of the editorial board towards Steve and those others who were part of the founding of the journal.

The 'chair and how to sit on it' (Kelly, 2018) is an important artefact of the experiential learning tradition at the Institute. The chair is most often designed for male bodies. Laid out in a spiral, questions of positionality can be worked with and alongside the unconscious

of who is put where by the group and the wider system. Louise Bourgeois was well aware of the spiral as a physical form that contains the paradoxes of experience and within the flat surface it gives compositional structure and the mathematics of the golden section.

“The spiral is an attempt at controlling the chaos. It has two directions. Where do you place yourself; at the periphery or at the vortex?” ( Louise Bourgeois ).

It is this close dialogue between the aesthetic with the psychosocial system that interests me in my practice. I’ve been privileged over the last few years to have been enabled to bring my artistic identity as a printmaker working with still life into my work as an organisational consultant, educator and leader. I now prefer to say I am an artist with a social practice working in an organisation that has always valued multi disciplinarity and is now further stretching that to the arts and to developing and holding multiple disciplines within oneself. This is a transdisciplinary approach, part of the contemporary interpretation of the Tavistock Institute’s action research tradition which continues to be problem focused whilst being present with the unfolding field. My hope is that colleagues with similar profiles and experience will find in the journal one of their most relevant “ports of call” for sharing their work and their experience.

This is the interest that resulted in a partnership with the Art of Management and Organisation on hosting and editing the Organizational Aesthetics journal. Along with some shared history there are strong foundations in place for us to build upon in the liminal, spiraling space of these beginnings, to name a few:

- The Institute’s long-standing reputation as owner of the Human Relations journal, a journal that began its life to document the innovative social science practice and application at the time.
- The Tavistock practice traditions of supporting the ethical imagination (Armstrong 2017) of human systems i.e. in working with and alongside groups as the architects and designers of their own change. The skill of the organisational consultant being in the practice and nuance of containment and working with unconscious processes. This makes consultancy an art rather than a precise science.
- The fast growing recent stream of work arts and organisation that spans artistic practices and research through organisational interventions, curated events, exhibitions, performances and learning programmes and new practices that are emerging from the field.
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As we enter this anniversary year for the Art of Management and Organisation conference, the stream Antonio Sama and I will be convening is concerned, for example, with a reevaluation of organisation like the radical reevaluation of museum spaces. Opening it up as an action research enquiry we compare the dominant ideology of globalisation and Western hegemonies as akin to museum spaces which offer(ed) a safe and indistinguishable totality, held and contained stable identities and guided our actions. We examine what is emerging in the shattering and fragmentation of these long-held ideologies as this is experienced at the individual, group, organisational and societal levels and their objects and artefacts. Traditional knowledge systems are being challenged and held to account and modes of activism coming to the fore. This too can offer a frame for the future direction and thinking of the journal – an expanding and reevaluating space with new communities of practice joining.

The spiral refigures, expansion and reevaluation as the different directions towards and away from the vortex and as it symbolised the womb in ancient burial monuments where death, birth and rebirth coexisted (Bridger et al. 2022).

*With thanks to Professor Steve Taylor for patiently supporting me through this process; Dr Eliat Aram who artfully holds the balance of complexity and creativity in her leadership of the Institute and I hope will challenge me in bringing this to the OA journal; and Antonio Sama who has been a long terms collaborator on archive, art, organisation, action research.*

## **References**

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