

“States-of-the-Arts” in Organization & Leadership Practices: A Poly-logue in Three Parts*:

Part II Status of art and aesthetics in organization and leadership

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Abstract

In the following, you can continue to listen and participate into a crossdisciplinary dia- or polylogue¹ between different voices, and what they stand for, including philosophers, organizational and leadership scholars, practitioners and artists. In the same spirit as it has been alive in the first part, this experimental, polyphonic practice invites you to experience different expressions of ideas, arguments, values and critical responses, and with them also emerging affects and feelings or intuitive musings.

In terms of contents, this conversation will address the status of art and aesthetics in organization and leadership. There will be discussions about critical, utopian, and pragmatic dimensions of art and the transformational potential of a living embodied aesthetics in organization and beyond. One specific focus will be on the inter-connection between leadership and embodied aesthetic processes as professional artistry, the role of envisioning and imagination and interpretations on the art of leadership and performance and critical performativity. In addition to some debates about the potential and actualities of improvisation, a few practical implications and perspectives are outlined.

Keywords: Merleau-Ponty, body, embodiment, imagination, art, aesthetics, leadership, organization, critical performativity, improvisation

* Part I was published in 2017 (Vol 6(1)) at <https://digitalcommons.wpi.edu/oa/vol6/iss1/13/>

Part II - Status of art and aesthetics in organization and leadership

(Stage: The "dramatis personæ" - are gathering again at a round table on which the sun is hinging, but also some shadows are cast, creating a fascinating twilight. As usual, an ongoing informal chatting is hearable, as participants are interrelating with each other. Slowly their bodies move to their place around the round table, while again the facilitator chimes a mindfulness bell and calls all to part-icipants to take part in this next round.)

Facilitator: Dear Participants! Dear Reader or Listener! Welcome back to our next round. Many thanks for participating in this second part of our dialogue! Today, we continue our series of a living dialogue between philosophers, organizational and leadership scholars, practitioners and artists. I see there are some old and some new faces present.

Like last time, we enter a conversational process where various voices make their points and move, while arguing in an open debate together also against each other and to gather meanings and understandings. And as in our previous conversation, again there will be some more generic characters like Organizational- and Leadership Researcher or Practitioner and Artist. As before, also here these represent the presence of types that are more general, complementing the chosen referenced voices.

In our last gathering we have discussed critically and controversially the role of sense and sense-making in organizing and leadership. This time the focus will be on critical, utopian, and pragmatic dimensions of art as well as the transformational potential of a living embodied aesthetics in leadership, organization, and beyond. We will hear about possible inter-connection between leadership and embodied aesthetic processes as professional artistry. Especially the role of envisioning and imagination and what an "art" of leadership and performance and critical performativity means and implies. One special illustrating theme will be the potential and actualities of improvisation. Finally, some implications and perspectives will emerge out of this conversation, calling then for being continued.

So let us enter the next round of our spiralling cycle of conversation. Let us start with the status and relevance of art and aesthetics in organization and leadership. What role might these complex qualities, dimensions or potentials and its role for practice play? Who would like to begin?

Practitioner: Well, speaking about the role for practice, for me art and aesthetics seem incompatible with the corporate situations and relationships, I face on a daily basis. There appear to be unbridgeable differences between your interpretation of aesthetic and those economic modes of thinking and acting I have to deal with. Where I can consider art is by giving it a subordinate or economically functional role. For example, our company invests in works-of-art as a lucrative asset and perhaps to impress employees and customers or stakeholders. In this way, it can become part of our business and its necessarily calculating logic.

Organisational Researcher: Yes, I agree with this practitioner: Emphasizing subjective experiences of art and aesthetics do not fit into the economic imperatives of an objective-ridden rationality, with its orientation toward control and its goal of maximizing profit. Following a dominant rationality in conventional understanding of organization and leadership theory and practice, aesthetic realities, expressions and effects appear as irrational, thus irrelevant for everyday-life. For the conventional

understanding art and aesthetics represent something foreign (the “other”) of those functional, rational, and utility-oriented economical reasoning and leadership acting by which organizations are operating.

Practitioner: I agree, there seems to be no place for this airy-faery stuff in organisations, so much constrained nowadays!

Zaleznik: My dear researchers and practitioners of organization, I have one question: Doesn't there exist under the surface of these apparently opposite worlds you construct here also some genuine similarities, especially if you dare to go beyond the problematic “managerial” orientation? Don't you, as an enterprising and organizational actor, particularly as a business leader, have more in common with artists, scientists and other creative people than you just might admit (1992)? Let us look behind what I call the “Managerial Mystique” and rediscover imaginative leaders and leadership (1989).

De Pree: While probably much of conventional operational management is instrumental and purpose-driven, can't organizing and leading be interpreted as an art form, in and of itself (1989; (*Vaill nodding in agreement* (1991)))? Isn't the factual practice characterized as much by its artfulness as its skills and technical sites?

Organisational Researcher: To gain such insights require that we overcome the separation and push the limits of aesthetics by looking at the intersection of art and daily (business) life. Then perhaps we can consider more adequately the role that art and enacted aesthetics play (practically) in the performed lives of members of organizations and their performance. Probably by this we can see how aesthetically rich experiences are present and relevant for organizations and leadership. Beyond the use of art as artifact or metaphor for different aspects of corporate life, participation in and interpretation of artistic practices can then be investigated and interpreted in a variety of contexts. This may include analyses of organizational skills, creation of narratives, cultivation of intuition, strategizing as creative action, improvisation, and innovation etc.

Merleau-Ponty: Yes, with such perspective on creative practice, art and aesthetic experiences can be discovered as a part and source of potential (added or surplus) value for everyday organizational life, in both work settings and leadership practice. However, for this, it will be important to understand aesthetic in a phenomenological sense.

Organisational Researcher & Practitioner: What do you mean by that?

Merleau-Ponty: Well, already etymologically deriving from the Greek *aisthesis*, (the Greek verb *aisthanomai* denotes the capacity to perceive with the senses) aesthetics comprises expressions that designate embodied sensation and perception that have to be taken as a whole, prior to the assignment of any cognitive or artistic meaning.

Artist: That sounds convincing to me!

Bateson: Actually, this is what I have tried to say, a long time ago: Having an aesthetic experience and communication means *being responsive to the pattern that connects*, giving the subject a feeling of wholeness and of belonging to an expanded reality in sensu of an ecological aesthetics (1972, 1979).

Artist: Patterns in Patterns in Patterns, pattern that matter!

Kagan: Indeed, especially in the domain of the search for cultures of complexity and sustainability, we need transdisciplinarity that calls forward an “artscience” as part of an autoecopoiesis (2011: 339).

Merleau-Ponty: For me the joy of art lies in its showing how something takes or opens up to meaning ... by temporal and spatial arrangement of elements (1964: 58). With Heidegger, I would describe the task of *art as the act of bringing truth into being*!

Artist: wonderful and full of wonder!

Merleau-Ponty: And this particularly is realized and mediated through sensual relationships! Like phenomenology, describing the living meaning as it emerges, art presents a pre-

object world, and allows access to pre-reflective embodied dimensions. It is making us aware of our inhering in the world and potentials for immanently transcending it ...

Phenomenologically, art and aesthetics are constituted by embodied-perceptual, emotional-responsive, and communicative relationships. Aesthetic experiences and knowing come from embodied and perceptive faculties that are those of hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste. Thus, aesthetics requires full engagement and refinement of sensibilities in support of human perception.

Artist: This is exactly expressing what I feel and know intuitively!

Merleau-Ponty: Implicitly, then, aesthetics relates to *experiential, expressive* that is not representational, but presentational *and transformative processes and living meaning*. This implies that the essence and value of art are not in artifacts per se. Rather, they are emerging in the dynamic and developing experiential processes through which those artifacts are co-created and perceived. For example, films and novels with their narrative structures or visual and musical forms are having a "temporal gestalt" (1964: 54). In these holistic configurations meaning of parts are understood in relation to a structured whole, a theme or plot that develops unfoldingly over time.

Dewey: Actually, this corresponds to my pragmatist interpretation according to which aesthetic experience simultaneously engages body, mind, and sensibility, thereby connecting reason and emotion in a synthetic way (1958).

Merleau-Ponty: I welcome your pragmatic interpretation dear John! Vraiment, we should discuss our joint understanding with regard to your refined pragmatism and my advanced phenomenology and explore possibilities of a corresponding practice. But this would be a story of its own

Shusterman: ... which could also link to what I call "somaesthetics" (2004; 2008).

Merleau-Ponty: Importantly, for having an aesthetic experience, one need to have an *aesthetic attitude*, which can be qualified as one of openness and attentiveness to experiencing an object or process aesthetically. Accordingly, there is a certain way to look, hear, feel and perhaps imagine an object or process that lends itself to a more profound experience. But, this attitude that is following an aesthetic perception is qualitatively one of *detachment from purpose*.

Artist: Admittedly not easy to practice in our purpose-driven world, even and particularly for an artist!

Merleau-Ponty: Thus, to experience an object or process truly aesthetically, is to experience it for its own sake, and not for any practical or ulterior motive or extrinsic utility. The aesthetic attitude is thus characterized by disinterestedness and distance from any instrumental relation to the object or process. In other words, an aesthetic experience has a value in itself and not only as a means for some other purpose or experience.

Practitioner: Such kind of quasi-romantic ideal of appreciating art for art's sake, seems to ignore who we are as practitioner situated in an increasingly demanding purpose-driven world of facts and figures, and functional pressuring realities. Sorry for being the devil's advocate here, but this is just to warn you not to get lost in ivory-shining ideals, dwelling beyond what is realistically feasible or operational.

Artist (shouting): Nonsense! Really, this does not make sense to me ...

Organisational Researcher: In the same vein goes my question: Can not art also be experienced simultaneously for its social, moral, and intellectual value, and not just for its own sake?

Merleau-Ponty: Yes, of course, but an aesthetic lens simply *shifts the attention* to that which is sensuous in an object or process. This is a focus that does not deny or exclude other valid aspects of perception and its life-worldly and social embedment. Importantly, the form and content of aesthetic experiences are *response-dependent*, qualitative, or expressive dimensions of the object or process. Being responsive refers to all those realities you rightly demanded to be considered.

Aesthetic responses can then be followed by aesthetic interpretations, aesthetic judgments, and aesthetic communication, manifesting a transformational potential and reconfiguring purpose and practices.

Critical, Utopian, and Pragmatic Dimensions of Art and Transformational Potential of Aesthetics

Organisational Researcher: I am interested in what you call transformational potential of aesthetic processes. What would that refer to or imply?

Practitioner: Yes me too! Could you please elaborate on that potential more and give some examples?

Merleau-Ponty: Well this potential is related to both a (critical and creative) creation and reception, that is to its capacity to call into question our sense of what is real and its ability to offer a sense of what is possible. Critically, artistic and aesthetic processes and experiences are *productive irritants*. In a utopian sense they offer a *vision of what could be*. Furthermore, with that vision and its enactment you might get pragmatically access to creative changes that can lead to a different design and realization of your very practice.

Artist: Indeed! What everyone, including organizational members and leaders can learn from art is that reality extends beyond conscious or even bounded rationality. Art's *a-rational elements* mediate the power to go beyond instrumental orders or regimes with its rational dominance; which you seem to be trapped in. By using the creative and imaginative qualities of art, members of organizations may reveal unrecognized assumptions and neglected visions.

You see (sic!), in this way art can help you to *see beyond your taken-for-granted meanings* of things. Art's critical dimension makes it possible for you to get out of the established internalized principles and scopes of (your) limited reality.

Organisational Researcher: Do you mean that the encounter with art and aesthetic experiences makes perceptible, audible, visible and expressible that which is no longer, or not yet, perceived, heard, seen or said in our everyday life?

Merleau-Ponty: Yes, and even more, by doing so, art can make us aware of new and different perspectives on familiar or novel phenomena. *Art can be a medium for de-familiarization*, dis-placing, dis-turbing or even dis-ruption and de-automising of habitual modes of perception: It allows recovering and reviving the sensation of life and possible lives and imaginations. It does so by calling forth that which normally is fading out of our field of awareness. However, it demands the experiencer to recognize an "Otherness" (including one in herself). The power of art is most evident when it manages to throw our image of the world out of focus, to distance the dimensions of our experience and pull them toward a new meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 1973: 91).

Brecht: This is what I have called the "*estrangement effect*" of art, as integrated in my plays, which free human beings from ordinary ways of thinking that can blind them to the strangeness of the familiar. By breaking the habits of organized routine this deranging quality can make it possible to see the world anew.

Artist: Indeed, that is my daily work and play

Eliot: Remember not to cease from exploration, and the end of all this exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time ...

Organisational Researcher: I see what you mean; art and aesthetic process provides a *sense of new possibilities*. This seems to be particularly relevant when conventional approaches or old solutions are no longer effective, which we face more and more in our organizing and managing.

Practitioner: We need that! In addition to problem-solving, this becomes relevant for being

innovative also to develop competitive advantages etc. and to strategically reconfigure our company in its changing socio-cultural and economic context!

Organisational Researcher: So you there is a kind of utopian potential, by which aesthetic experiences provide those involved with qualities of experience and processes that are typically not accessible or available in corporate contexts. This even more as they are dominated by exchange-value and instrumental reason, the profit motive, and the performance principle? By being "unreal" it seems that art and aesthetics awakens members in organization to contingencies, the possibility that things and realities could be otherwise, that they could be different.

Merleau-Ponty: Yes, those kind of processes provides a, shall I dare to say an *emancipatory opportunity* to play and innovation, giving the mind's eye and embodied sensibilities and imaginations free rein. Importantly, an aesthetic experience allows relating and exploring particulars and intricacies without the pressure to classify or appropriate them under a general concept or pre-determined purpose.

Artist: ... and thereby become particularly valuable!

For example, when you use metaphors and imagination as tools to explore in the mood of "possibilising" the realms of as if they are existing, it becomes imaginable to probe the particular for its possible meanings.

Then you can develop alternatives, and open yourself to diverse passing otherwise neglected sensations; rather than being preoccupied with the effort to corral the experience under a single determinate concept, for example that of instrumental reasons.

Vaihinger: Yes, this is what I tried to develop in what I call the philosophy of *as if* (1911/1952). We can feel free to act *as if* our constructions are true, all the while realizing that they are merely tentative hypotheses, a provisional stance that can be revised or discarded at any time. Following the principle of Fictionalism and critical tolerance for ambiguity and deviant ideas whose theoretical untruth or incorrectness, and there-with its falsity, is admitted is not for that reason practically valueless and useless. This is because for such an idea, in spite of its theoretical nullity, may expedient and have great practical importance. Let us accept patently false fictions and fictive judgements as a pragmatic non-rational solution to problems that have no rational answers.

Kelly: Yeah, that is the base for what I call personal construct psychology (1955) that allows viewing things within the realm of possibility. In this way the hypothesis is our ticket to develop ideas and constructions that may be pursued, tested, abandoned, or reconsidered at a later time (1969: 149).

Practitioner: I like this idea somehow. Actually accepting falsehoods or fictions helps me in my daily life, in order to live peacefully or at least to make life livable in an irrational world, with its mazes of contradictions and messiness.

Nietzsche: But be aware that all your fictionalism is itself also a fiction! The question remains: what difference does your fiction make for your present and future life. In other words, what do those fictions serve, where do they guide you towards? How to move from affective fictionalism to an effective 'factualism' which requires and leads to a trans-valuation of all values towards life. Transvaluation would mean the exaltation of life rather than the exaltation of suffering, and an acceptance of every instinct or lust as organic and therefore valid. By this I mean life-affirming practices as a refined art of living. Because only as an aesthetic phenomenon is existence and the world eternally justified (1872, §5, 1999). Life becomes meaningful as a creative *schöpferisches* one!

Adler: Let us develop a future-oriented striving towards fictional final goals for allowing other final causes to influence our behavior patterns to the better in a more life-affirming way (1956),

Hillmann: ... thus serving as a healing fiction (1983).

Adler: But, importantly, for this to happen all fictionalizing need to be connected to communal life and social interest (1938) as we need the mediation force of social enactment and perspectivising with other in creating reality; a social aesthetics in action!

Chia: Yes this is all about to turn the given into a question and the familiar into the unfamiliar in order to challenge our modernist cognitive and metaphysical stance that takes things for granted (1995: 597). Or to paraphrase Garfinkel (1967) perceiving and reinterpreting what is seen, but unnoticed.

Organisational Researcher & Practitioner: We get to understand more and more what you are aspiring and reaching for: Being valuable intrinsically, aesthetic experiences and deployed imagination offer a relative freedom from the governance of concepts, principles and from predetermined interests, whether moral, practical, financial, or other, which direct (not only) us practitioners, in academic, corporations or other organisations.

Practitioner: Practically, we can realise this in simulations or scenario workshops of our strategy meetings for developing visions and strategies! But it needs to be operationalized to put it into practice!

Organisational Researcher: Yes, and we can investigate those as a kind of art of "strategy as practice".

Leadership and Aesthetic Processes

Facilitator: Speaking about strategy, how do you see leadership in relation to those issues discussed?

Organisational Researcher & Practitioner: Yes, how can leadership be linked to aesthetics? Can leadership even be interpreted as an aesthetic process?

Leadership Researcher: To respond to this important question, let us first think about what leadership comprises of: Leadership is typically defined today as non-coercive, accepted influence, that is leadership is the exercise of interpersonal influence in a given situation, directed toward the attainment of goals or objectives. To accomplish extraordinary things, leadership challenges accepted organizational processes by searching for opportunities, experimenting, and taking risks. Leaders inspire a shared vision by envisioning the future and enlisting others; they enable others to act by strengthening them and by fostering collaboration. Furthermore, leaders set a good example, plan small wins, and encourage their followers by recognizing contributions and celebrating accomplishments.

For most of these leadership activities art or aesthetic processes seems to be relevant. Seen as a perceptual practice, aesthetic processes pervade the fabric of organizations and everyday leadership activities, experiences, responses, judgments, and communications.

Merleau-Ponty: Yes, and as an embodied and emotional interaction aesthetic processes imply evocative processes, which always concerns the interweaving with prior experiences and sensory faculties of aesthetic understanding. Therefore, aesthetic experience includes a form of sensory knowing and embodied knowledge. It entails a form of aesthetic interpretation and expressive action, which seem to be also part of an artful leadership.

Leadership Researcher: Indeed! For example, artistic forms of leadership often involve attempts to envision organizational life differently, and that vision may lead to

alternative practice. Therefore, aesthetic processes of leadership need to be considered as transformative forces, capable of reshaping people, structures, and whole worlds in an ongoing process of interrelating and creation.

Sinclair: As leadership is not only a cognitive, but also a "bodily practice", whose accomplishment is often "*highly dramatic and full-bodied*" (2005: 387). Indeed, we need integrating "subjective tacit knowledge and aesthetic sensibilities".

Hansen et al: (*nodding in agreement ...* (2007: 551)). For example, significant clues of leader's motives like demeanor, facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice are all important aspects in the leader follower performance. They are particular significant as they create an *affective aesthetic* experience and explain "split-moment apprehensions of a leader's authenticity".

Ladkin: Even more, only by authentic embodiment of the leader's intended message they can "*lead beautifully*" and incorporate mastery, coherence and purpose (2008: 33). In an embodied leadership the somatic sense (of the true self) contributes to the felt sense of authenticity (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010). Such approach helps also for a much needed new look and rethinking of leadership (2010), envisioning and imagining a different way of what leading and following may mean altogether.

Envisioning and Imagination

Practitioner: Speaking about envisioning, in addition to reconceptualising, one important task of what we leaders undertake is to offer and instill visions, describing concepts and ideas through exciting images. From my own practice, I know that pictures fill in the conceptual void when words fail to express what I am trying to relate, particularly in these times of change and crisis. Maybe, they can serve to arrest attention of the listener or audience and inspire the imagination and creative expression, with many possible positive ramifications for the organization, may be ... But how does it work?

Merleau-Ponty: Central practices for envisioning and imagination are first of all creative perception that is sensing and seeing things differently. This then can be followed by learning how emergent patterns can inform future possibilities. Finally, this may lead to being in the presence, and thus accessing inner sources of creativity as well as a sense of the possible.

Practitioner: But, to be effective the resulting vision of the future must permeate decisions and actions, energising, aligning, and empowering all organization members to make the vision real. Do I understand you correctly, are you saying that with an artistic sense of imagination, we leaders can empower ourselves and our followers to feel wonder and awe thus discovering something that is not yet real or present, possibilities and also moveable paths-ways towards it?

Merleau-Ponty: Yes, but for reaching to that empowering and transforming level, you need to use your embodied emotions, think metaphorically, and read life experiences for their meanings. Imaging calls for a facility with all kinds of images, metaphors, visions and stories to make sense of experiences, knowledge and also to communicate effectively. It is imagination that organises the vast array of embodied experiences into schemata and structures. These then enable you to achieve coherent, and meaningful (re-)presentations of the world in and around you. Thus, imagination provides the basis for deep and creative explorations and is an essential element for any embodied sense-making.

I am very much convinced that integrating emotional and cognitive capacities, imagination helps you, not only to find patterns and connections, and solve problems, but problematizing conventional solutions and yielding perspectives. Importantly, all theorizing is an embodied practice!

Weick: Resonating with these ideas, I would like highlight imagination as crucial for theory construction, broadening up the tools and tactics of theoretical practice. Let us to set out for more playful and imaginative theorizing, a form of theorizing that engages in widening what can be considered the tools of thinking, representing and selecting. Acknowledging the paradoxical character of theorizing what we need is a disciplined imagination that is giving form to a view that conceives theory construction as involving imagination disciplined by the processes of artificial selection.

How do we state problems, how do we carry out thought trials, imaginative journeys and what selection criteria are comprised in such undertakings? (1998).

The Art of Leadership Performance

Leadership Researcher & Practitioner: What does all of this means for the organizational and my and our performance?

Organisational Researcher: Yes, and in particular if we understand performance beyond the narrow view of a monitoring and controlling performance management and its quantifying measurement; as if what is key in performance are not its supposed objective indicators, which are bound to a functional rationality!

Merleau-Ponty: My question would be: Inhowfar are performances embodied, experiential processes or body-mediated creative (inter-)actions and spontaneous behavior and social responsive, thus cultural practices in organizations?

Leadership Researcher: In an extended sense, performance can be understood as learned, learning, and re-created constitutive acting and achieving of all kinds. If we think of organizations and leadership practice as a form of performance art and drama, we can undertake a significant study of the stage upon which is enacted this performing the plot, settings, themes, constructions of characters and roles, and interactions, failures, and conflicts we can and do experience in daily organizational life.

Merleau-Ponty: Being a dramaturgical enactment performance can be conceptualised as a medium of intentions, responding and a staging for dramaturgical expressions and meanings.

Linstead & Höpfl: Indeed, so let us see organisations and leadership through a dramaturgical lens (2000).

Goffman: (*makes a silent approving gesture, indicating a framed interaction ritual* (1959, 1967, 1974).)

Mangham and Overington: Yes in this regard employees, leaders are actors, who play roles and characters with what we call a theatrical consciousness (1987: 221) in the theater of organizations. But, this theater, in which the drama unfolds is not an a-contextual play but fundamentally influenced by the organization's history and culture as well as the situated realities and relationship at work.

Leadership Researcher: Yes, and that is why performed action can actually mean different things at different times and to various agents as figures in diverse configurations.

Pitcher: Perhaps here my conceptualisation of three types of leaders might be useful here. I differentiate between: *artists*, who are people-oriented, open-minded, intuitive, and visionary; *craftsmen*, to whom the adjectives humane, dedicated, and wise best apply; and *technocrats*, who are detail-oriented, rigid, methodical, self-centered. When left in control, the latter pose a serious threat to corporate life and competitiveness. As I have found out, the power-struggles between these types are dramas that are being played out in companies everywhere. Importantly, whether this drama has a happy or an unhappy ending depends entirely upon which type gets top billing (1997).

Spicer et al.: But for overcoming the anti-performative character of critique beyond cynicism and negativity, we need to conceive performativity critically. This is important also for reworking discourses and subversive interventions in practices. For this we can use

possible tactics of critical affirmation, ethics of circumspect care, a progressive pragmatism orientation, and a focus on potentialities and normative emancipatory stance (2009: 545-554).

Koopman: Performativity is not only related to instrumentality, i.e. "technical" efficiency-oriented performance.² As a critical one, it also concerns how ontological ties, interpersonal and sociological accounts can help to enact specific realities rather than others and to develop alternative ways constructively (2005).

Improvisation

Practitioner: Speaking about alternative ways; what role does improvisation play in this context?

Leadership Researcher: Thanks for this important question, because improvisation is an aesthetic competency that is becoming more and more important in the current business world full of complexities and ambiguities and requirements for flexible responding internally as well as to needs of customers and stakeholders.

Organisational Researcher: Let us first define what is meant and what we mean by improvising?

Leybourne: Organizational improvisation seems to be an oxymoron and paradox: As an unrestrained use of creativity and intuition within an environment constrained by limited resources, it seems that improvisation is antithetical with planning-based orientations and concepts of control inherent within both the organization and its management. How can improvisation be a legitimate way of achieving something in organizations (2007)?

Crossan: Well, basically, for me improvisation is that kind of a *situational and relational process*, inventive competence, and responsive, performing action, which takes place in a spontaneous and intuitive fashion in specific circumstances and contexts. Thus, improvised practices as individual and social interaction and inter-passions in real-time are always *embedded* within specific materially, structurally and culturally as well as embodied con-texts of relationships (1998).

Pinnington et al.: This implies that creative practices of relationally embedded improvising agents are informed, constrained, and possibly also codetermined by the social structure of the performance thus of social inhabitations (2003).

Practitioner: Well in practical terms, I improvise when something unexpected happens or I need to flexibly respond to special needs of my followers or customers or while developing a new product and service at short notice. Furthermore, in my daily dealings in working life, I use improvisation when I am overwhelmed or forced to read and response to various demands in a creative way. This happens in this messy day-to-day life we are facing increasingly. We are operating more and more under pressures exerted by those dynamic markets and volatile environments in which old ways of doing things do not work anymore.

You know what I mean, all those unforeseeable, unexpected issues or non-routine problems that need to be solved within shrinking short time horizons. Yes, actually time pressure forces me to "impro" time and again, almost all the time. Well you know, I just have to do it; not only by and for myself, but mostly together with my colleagues and in relation to our employees.

Merleau-Ponty: This describes actually how you relate and make use of your own embodied tacit knowing as a source that assists you in the resolution of organizational problems.

Küpers: tacit and implicit knowing, highly relevant for organisations and leadership (2005).

Organisational Researcher: In this way improvising is indeed a flexible practice that is highly *contingent* upon emerging circumstances and action or ways of interpretation.

Improvisation stresses the importance of adapting and “reflecting”, while acting, rather than just following plans, scripts, routines, standard processes and so on.

Practitioner: I call this thinking on my own feet! performing without a script! Actually, most improvisation and tinkering happens, as part of “simply getting the job done” although it is also influenced by a certain mood or attunement. I have to react to what is happening, while doing it.

Artist: Same for me ... indeed, calling for various experimentations!

Practitioner: But what are the requirements for being a good improviser?

Organisational Researcher: As during improvisation, composition and execution converge, and it requires *mindfulness and responsiveness* for unfolding opportunities and problems in real time. This implies that improvisers or improvising agents for example individuals, groups or entire organization (Miner et al., 2001), develop their improvisational response while acting on situated problems or opportunities.

Practitioner: So you are saying improvisation depends on my ability to go with the flow of the situation? This is not as easy in our large organization which is clumsy, inflexible, and unable to handle sudden new challenges. As an improviser, I then have to make the best use of the issues and realities present at the time; instead of imposing control, right?

Merleau-Ponty: Oh yes, and this is also because, improvisation is an *ecstatic experience*, an interruption or irruption, which is characterized by a sense of immediacy, suddenness, surprise and transgression of predetermined plans and predictability. Thus, impulses as they emerge in improvisation can be creative by being de(con)structive, innovative, or seemingly foolish-types or a-rational forms of action.

Weick: This is why improvisation is part of the practice of what I call an aesthetics of imperfection (1995).

Practitioner: That is difficult for me to understand. Can improvisation be learned?

Crossan et al: Improvisation seems to be a kind of disciplined craft for which skills can be learned through continual practice, study and applied then as needed (1996: 25)?

Kao: Yes, improvisation is a blend of *discipline and art*, that entails being able to move *between* that which is established and that which is new, between form and openness, between the security of the familiar (standards) and innovation (experimentation), and between expertise and freshness.

Artist: Exactly! That is what I experience and enact all the time I am improvising!

Organisational Researcher: As a discipline improvisation requires also being related to practical, patterned contexts in which we, as embodied beings can continually operate, that is with *habits*, also in relation to Bourdieu environmental and social habitus.

Practitioner: I agree it is habits and routines that offer the spontaneity of improvisation permanence, also in my organization.

Merleau-Ponty: Exactly, it needs for a continued and sustained existence!

Artist: I would be lost otherwise!

Practitioner: Establishing perspectives and giving a temporal continuity for the lived body and life in the practical world of our organizations.

Organisational Researcher: For example, habits as manifested in structures, yes also hierarchies, as they are forms, which are essential for team and organizational learning in large organizations. Particularly they are indispensable for processing and storing important knowledge and learning result.

Kant: It seems, in a kind of admittedly daring variation of another statement by me - thoughts or concept without percept or intuitions are empty, and percepts or intuitions without thoughts or concepts are blind - that also improvisation without habit is empty, i.e. of enduring commitment, while habit without improvisation is blind, i.e. without orientation to new situations and futures. These two powers, or capacities, cannot exchange their functions. (Kant, 1781/1999. A50–51/B74–76)

Merleau-Ponty: Yes, I agree also in my view, possibilities of improvisation are born of habit (2012: 238), or through body and senses a habitual knowledge (2012: 247: 238), created between being experienced and experiencing the situating environment as a "body-mind".

Artist: Good that you mentioned the body, as for me improvisation is a bodily affair through and through!

Practitioner: But what are then *effects* of improvisation? Can it itself or its effectiveness be *measured*? You know this question of assessment and evaluation is important for me (and us practitioners) because what cannot be measured cannot be managed

Lord Kelvin: To measure is to know and if you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it.

Artist: Non-Sense! Instead of reductive metrics as a purely quantitative value determined by an instrument (*métron*), we need to re-learn from Greek wisdom about *métrion*, as a formal and dynamic balance. This vibrant sense of balance is due to and resonant with the harmony of the totality of the living; a proportional sense of beauty. In this sense: *Pan metrion ariston*: All in good measure and moderation! Accordingly, metrion-oriented approaches would develop and use aesthetic criteria in responsive and responsible processes of improvisation and for corresponding purposes, beyond an ideology of progress.

Organisational Researcher: Yes, the artist is right! Dear Lord Kelvin and all followers of yours, it seems that your ideas of measurement as base for management implies an understanding of reality, which is very limited and can be misleading.

Bourne et al: Well, at least, we need to ask under what circumstances performance measurement positively impact on organizational and improvisational performance (2005: 374).

Organisational Researcher: Even more, could it be that measuring and managing performance approaches miss what improvisational performing as embodied, experiential processes is all about? Could performance measuring even cause undermining influences or un-intended impacts on body-mediated creative (inter)actions and spontaneous behavior and social responsive practices in organizations?

Austin: That is an important issued indeed! What for example about the case that performance improvement management methods lead to stressing people in the pursuit of excellence and by this trim down their factual or potential "productivity"? What if supposed measurable evidence itself leads to a deterioration of performance (1996)?

Merleau-Ponty: I agree, an one-sided focus on strains' of pre-diction can be constraining in that it dictates straight into a pre-dicament.

Wouters & Wilderom: We can only warn about a too strict top-down, mandated performance measurement initiatives, as these insufficiently reflect local organizational contexts, experiences and the unique expertise of employees and suggest a more experimentation and enabling approach tailored and localized (2008).

Organisational Researcher: The implicit embodied, irruptive and responsive character of improvising implies that it defies measurement and systematic objectifying approaches and methods. Correspondingly, the *subversive power* of improvisation can be found in that it challenges the prevailing, objectivist and cognitive representational and constructionist paradigm, which govern your organization practices and also our theorizing.

Likewise, to improvise demands to abandon the neat, but artificial world of models, structures and univocal meanings, certain research aspects enter the messy world of ambiguous experiences in the everyday life of organizations.

Practitioner: During improvisation, as creative practitioner, I can come authentically to the fore, become able to read and enact my world in a novel way, make swift and resolute

choices and engage, which is a truly entrepreneurial action. But let me tell you there are straining constraints and powerful *counter-forces* restricting such kind of improvisational acting in the actual organizational world. The pervasive thirst for predictability, functionalism, hierarchical stability and governance in our modern organizations, may undermine your wonderfully and programmatically described creative potential of improvisation. You will experience this immediately when you are not conforming to written or ordered rules, plans, ideals, blueprints, or rational problem-solving methods. Most of my colleagues and also our system do not acknowledge the art of improvisation when it comes to practical responses to errors of reach, failures, flaws, dissonance, and all those conflicts we have on a daily base

Artist: Truly an art!

Practitioner: Here is a practical question to you: How can improvisation be *purposefully prepared and triggered*? And doesn't it have qualities which are quite oppositional to normal forms of organizing?

Organisational Researcher: Having moments of anarchy, improvisation is a situated practice that cannot be planned or controlled. However, there are facilitating possibilities: For realising embodied, improvised, thus creative practices improvisers need to have access and draw on available material, cognitive, emotion-related and social resources --- interjectingly **Cunha et al.** *s (w)inging together*: Yes, indeed! Our saying (1999) --- and organization need to incorporate practical requirements³

Organisational Researcher: Concerning your question about being oppositional or organising, yes as emergent improvisational practices are unforeseeable and realising an a-rational experimentation they are *disturbing* the harmony or normal organising. But what do you call *normal*?

Clegg et al.: Actually, improvisation is a practiced form of *dis-organising*, as it is disruptive by moving into the *in-between* of ordered and non-ordered or not yet ordered, transgressing existing boundaries, like those between learning/becoming (2005).

Artist: Yeah!!!

Deleuze: to improvise is to deconstruct, deterritorialise and reverse existing practices that frame the possibilities of organization and leadership. It invites and implies a playfulness to *experiment* with the taken-for-granted order of the organization. And by the way even repetition of improvisation is an event of difference! (1994).

Artist: I love it, not only related of those orders in organisations!

Practitioner: All good and well, but what does this mean concretely?

Organisational Researcher: As a practice of art, improvisation plays into chaos while needs to return to and be related with a renovated order. The re-evolutionary power of improvisational art is to take an actualised set of forms and relations and open the potential for other formations and relationships that is liberating for other forms of perceptions, sensations, affections and thoughts.

Artist: Did I hear revolution?

Organisational Researcher: No it was re-evolution, bringing evolution and revolution together!

Weick: Moving from the known and established to the new and as yet unknown, improvisation varies existing patterns and looks for emerging new themes and ventures? Improvisation in organization seems to require "to maintain the images of order and control that are central to organizational theory and simultaneously introduce images of innovation and autonomy" (1998: 548).

Berliner: Thus improvisation "involves reworking pre-composed material and designs in relation to unanticipated ideas conceived, shaped, and transformed under the special conditions of performance, thereby adding unique features to value every creation" (Berliner, quoted in Weick, 1998: 544).

Organisational Researcher: With all this, the art of improvisation seems to be a kind of re-organising form of disorganizing preparing a more integral form of dealing with

ambiguous realities of chaos and order or “*chaorders*” in the “*chaosmos*” of our realities.

Practitioner: Before we are getting too chaosmic here, let us now then turn to some possible fields for its application? How to make it feasible? And what effects are generated? And how to assess it?

Organisational Researcher: Improvisation as a practice has been suggested as a model for more-spontaneous strategic decision-making and change management. It would also be an effective means of circumventing dealing with intra- and inter-organizational political resistance in situations of time pressure, change, and uncertainty. This is relevant, particularly when the optimal information and resources are not available.

Practitioner: ... which is always the case in reality!

Organisational Researcher: Furthermore, the act of improvisation lets you learn from real events and test imagined solutions on the spot. In this way, improvisation facilitates the synthesis of learning and imagining.

Vendelø: There is an urgent need for more empirical studies of improvisation and its links to learning in organization (2009). And dance is an incorporating example of enacted improvisation and more! But this would be a different conversation!

Practical Implications

Practitioner: All right, so far I have learned that art-ful and aesthetic processes, such as performance as well as improvisation, can contribute beneficially to the practice of organizing and leading. But how can I enhance my doing and aesthetic capacities through artistry practically? What does it take to support artistic processes in artless organization and its constrained every-day life?

Organisational Researcher: To practice artistic forms of leadership requires special encouragement and enabling. With all its incalculable trajectories, creativity and risk-taking must be valued, uncertainty tolerated, and operational flexibility supported. But I must warn you, generally, there are no ready-made recipes for building practices for artful and creative leadership and organizations.

What you can do as a leader or organizational member is that you become a facilitator of more artful and aesthetic processes by adopting such practices as considerate and supportive engagements as well as the provision of complex, challenging jobs or projects that offer high levels of personal satisfaction. For example, you can encourage involvement, give positive feedback, and support skill development and experiential learning. But as research on motivation and demotivation has shown, we need to be cautious with rewards structures, as these can undermine intrinsic motivation! On an organization-wide level, we can help to create a more art-friendly environment

Pinchot & Pinchot: e.g. by supporting an intrapreneural culture (1999).

Organisational Researcher and Practitioner: For yourself you can learn from and cultivate an artist’s facility for finding fascination, allure, and attractiveness and being entranced in everyday events and things.

Institutionally, leadership education and further education, in addition to teaching specialized skills and providing knowledge, may help to develop potential leaders’ and employees (as potential leaders) artistic capacities and aesthetic competencies too. Integrating art, artist and artistic processes into training can serve as sensual, visual or conceptual media and catalysts for educating future leaders.

Koppet: For enhancing creativity in leadership, and referring back to what we have discussed before, practical improvisational theater techniques (2001).

Artist: ... and artistic excursions or experimental work-play-shops to experience dance, music, theater, poetry and literary arts, or visual arts and architecture are “valuable”

and able to add value. Aesthetic competencies can be developed by engagement of the senses or by experimenting with physically making artifacts (pottery, drawing, photography), as well as through mindful use of games, storytelling, and forms of collaborative inquiry. Artistic oriented leadership education and organizational trainings may stimulate learning –

Quinn: (*heckling*): that is what I call deep learning (1996) – in concert with innovative or generative learning, and contrived experiences, for instance simulations and role-plays.

Smith: As for leadership development, art and leadership are close in actual practice (2001)

Palus & Horth: (*nodding approval* (1996).)

DeRue, et al.: Yes, especially if this practice integrates, as suggested by our PREPARE framework for more relational, shared and collective forms of “syncing” leadership development different components (2014). These include, besides (1) Purpose, (2) Result, (3) Experience, (4) Point of Intervention, (5) Architecture, (6) Reinforcement, always also (7) Engagement. A living experience here need to be seen as a developmental and practice-related one as already Aristotle’s stated “... for the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.” (2014: 843). And engagement refers to the ways in which individuals and collectives enter, go through, and reflect on the leadership development process (2014: 836).

Küpers: Yes, going through, and that implies moving with all their bodies in an embodied organisation and like wise “bodied” leadership practice (2015).

Leadership Researcher: But, it will be imperative that opportunities for actually aesthetic experiential learning, alongside with reflective and discursive practices, are provided and employed for (re-)activating and developing the unfoldment and enactment of concrete creative capacities.

Berthoin Antal: One idea would be inviting an artist in residence, organizing play-shops where all these dimensions can be experimented with? This requires knowing about managing artistic interventions in organizations (2011, 2012; Johansson et al. 2016).

Artist: Yes I am open for that ...

Practitioner: I will inquire about possibilities for such experiment in our organization!

Organisational Researcher: And then I am happy to pursue some empirical research related to such a project!

Facilitator: That’s wonderful, although there is much more to say about theoretical, methodological and also practical and political implications with regard to your suggestions and of what we have discussed here, but I am afraid we have to come to an preliminary end here now. In a subsequent final part III we will enter into some implications that will probably also provide some complications. We will also come back to what we have processed and going forward, opening up some perspectives and conclusions. In particular it would be enriching to connect all then to forms of artful making, professional artistry, serious play, and of course to the vital role of an “*in-(ter)between*” in all of the discussed dimensions and practices.

Hopefully, like you, I am very much looking forward to those debates we will have and what might emerge cocreatively then ...!

All participants: ... verbally and non-verbally expressing their agreement

Facilitator: Many thanks again for our engaged participation in this dialogue. As we spoke so much about performative practice, can I invite you all now to the announced artistic performance of a theatre piece created by Steve Taylor ...? Afterward there will then be the cool culinary event of enjoying together an artfull dinner....

(All participants go in small groups, still discussing to the performance venue.)

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Wendelin Küpers is an Associate Professor at ICN ARTEM, Nancy, France. Subsequent to working in the business world and a PhD at Witten/Herdecke University (Germany) and post-doctoral studies at St. Gallen University (Switzerland), he has been affiliated with various universities in Europe and New Zealand. Combining a phenomenological and cross-disciplinary orientation, his research focuses on embodied, emotional, creative and transformational dimensions in relation to more responsible, and sustainable forms of organising and managing. Furthermore, his research focuses on design, integrating artful and aesthetic qualities as well as practical wisdom into leadership/management and organization theory and practice.

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¹ For more background information about the chosen in-between mode of speaking and also writing modality of an expressive dia- or poly- & metalogue, and its qualities and advantages as a revealing art and *aesthetics of (re)presentation*, please see the introduction to the first part. Kuepers, W. 2017. States-of-the-Arts in Organization & Leadership Practices that “make sense” A Poly-logue in Three Parts: Part I - Embodied Senses and its making in Organizations, *Organizational Aesthetics* 6(1): 135-154.

Like before, you are invited to participate yourself as an active listener and/or engaged and responsive readers of this event of an embodied relational enacting of an “inter-practice” in praxis (Küpers, 2011)

Please be open and sensitive also for those enigmatic meanings and indirect sage messages *between* lines or by alluded hints, that are revealing other ways of being and becoming. As previously, please share your responses, reflections or imaginations by writing, dabbling, drawing or expressing them and, if you like, forward them to the author for cocreating a hyper-contextual repository. You can contact the author via: wendelin.kuepers@icn-artem.com. As mentioned before the idea would be to set up a web forum or blogging space on-line, where all comments will be gathered, as a forwarding feedback and continuation of an ongoing inter-involving conversation ...

²As Koopman (2005) suggests, performativity refers to the drive for the achievement of goals in increasingly efficient and instrumental ways, thus fitting “the means–ends scheme of goal directed action” (ibid: 129) which goes some way to supporting understanding of performativity, not only in organizational, but also within both the arts and educational contexts: “The forces of performativity are inimical to activities that do not fit the means–ends scheme of goal directed action” (p. 129). And this is clearly illustrated by the arts being perceived to be add-on luxuries to the core subjects of literacy and numeracy. Lyotard (1984), uses performativity to represent political and bureaucratic mechanisms of control. According to him performativity represents the attitude of valuing the “effective” and the “efficient” in systems where the least “input” produces the greatest “output”. This leads to the consequence that those aspects of education or creativity that cannot easily be measured and do not readily fit into the performative system can be ignored or denied. For reasons of control, efficiency and accountability, governments and business have overreached themselves, and in the process, jeopardizes transformative practices. With this appropriation for Lyotard performativity characterises a condition in which effectiveness has usurped Enlightenment narratives of truth and justice and ultimately comes to shape our understanding of the world. On this view, target culture is not the whole of performativity, but merely a symptom or manifestation of it. In a Lyotardian sense, Performativity functions like a grand narrative: “If a form of knowledge could not be translated into bits of information, it was bound to become more and more invisible to the system...” (Lyotard, 1984: 231). Consequently, performativity provides just as overwhelming and brutal a systematic horizon as any grand narrative that preceded it. “Openness” and “diversity” are the order of the day but are only deemed acceptable when read against this horizon. While othering that which is outside of performativity: “an absent hinterland of different performative realities” (Sage et al. 2013) the imperative of performativity is not only threatening transformation, but excludes integrating embodied performing as materio-socio-cultural practices (Küpers, 2017).

³ As “... improvisation has no existence outside of its practice” (Bailey, 1992, x) and with its experiential, dynamic and provisional status the described forms and transformational qualities of creative practice, defy control and elude a straight manageability. As a given, stable or manageable, fixed entity of creative practice does not exist, it cannot be simply organised, managed or manipulated. Instead of being designed directly, creative practices and particularly improvisations can only be designed for, that is allowed and encouraged. Part of this challenge is to prepare and create favourable circumstances and supporting contexts and relationships that engender more integral ways by which creative inter-practices can flourish. Required for the unfolding of creative practices and interpracting are those

enabling possibilities for developing or upgrading more fulfilling embodied forms and realities of creative processes and relationships in every-day work-life. These comprise particular, targeted facilitations, creating enabling conditions and processes for each embodied, also collective “pheno-practical” spheres of practice, in relation to habits but also on a situation-specific basis, and in an integrative way (Küpers, 2009, 2011).