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The Genesis of Organisational Aesthetics

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# **THE GENESIS OF ORGANISATIONAL AESTHETICS**

## **ABSTRACT**

Organisational aesthetics is a burgeoning field with a growing community of scholars engaged in arts-based approaches to research. Recent developments in this field have their origins in the works of early Enlightenment writers such as Vico, Baumgarten and Kant. This paper examines the contributions of these three philosophers and in particular focuses on Vico's awareness of history and myth; Baumgarten's notion of sensation and its relationship to rationality; and Kant's investigations into form and content. By drawing on these ideas, the contemporary aesthetic researcher is informed by qualities such as an alert imagination, comfort with the chaotic, backward thinking, and attention to inner sensations and perceptions, which all work together to provide a coherent view of the organisation as a gestalt.

A study of aesthetics within the business environment involves a strange juxtaposition. Perceptions of beauty and the appreciation of art seem at odds with the instrumental goals of efficiency and profit making. And yet aesthetics is becoming an increasingly important means of organisational analysis. In this regard, Pierre Guillet de Monthoux makes the assertion that, 'If the German artist Joseph Beuys ... was right in claiming that art is tomorrow's capital it seems reasonable to consider aesthetics its new organisation theory' (Guillet de Monthoux, 2000, p. 35).

This rise of aesthetic awareness in organisational studies is rooted in the existential question posed by Michel Foucault who asked: 'Couldn't everyone's *life* become a work of art?' (Foucault, 1991, p. 350 emphasis added). Therefore, if life itself is to be lived artfully, could this notion be extended beyond the individual to the corporate? Could we ask along with Paul Willis: 'What happens if we understand the raw materials of everyday lived *cultures* as if they were living art forms?' (Willis, 2000, p.ix, emphasis added). These questions form the assumptions of this paper: that organisations are cultural products, which can be approached and interacted with in the same ways as works of art. And further, that aesthetic inquiry provides the tools for social action leading to the revitalisation of organisational life.

These lofty ideals have spawned a growing coterie of champions who deploy arts-based tools such as dance and photography (Picart & Gergen, 2004), drama (Taylor, 2003), and model-making (Barry, 1996), as ways of theorising about organisational life. Signs of this quiet revolution in management studies research go back to 1985 with Mintzberg and Westley's short but provocative paper entitled 'Spinning on symbolism: Imagining strategy'. Here they take the notion of strategy beyond its scientific roots and postulate an aesthetic perspective – strategy as an *experience*. Profundity, they suggest, is not found in the rigorous application of concepts and principles, but rather through imagination. In making this claim they ask: 'Can we say that organisations rich in tangible imagery are more inclined to pursue more profound, creative, individualistic strategies, while those poor in such imagery will pursue superficial banal strategies?' (Mintzberg & Westley, 1985, p. 63).

Underpinning Mintzberg's disquiet is that the instrumental focus has its limitations and that strategy is as much an art as a science (Mintzberg, 1987). He argues that traditional approaches of producing so-called *hard* data, distorts strategic thinking by removing 'random noise, gossip, inference, impression, and fact' (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 258) from the frame. Mintzberg presents a view of organisations that is, albeit unwittingly,

grounded in aesthetic analysis and that is now part of a larger critique of technical rationality providing intellectual support for this developing field.

Almost two decades after their symbolism article, Mintzberg and Westley produced another piece in like vein that advocates an artistic approach to planning. In this article, they argue that the artistry of '*seeing* first' and the craft of '*doing* first' are preferred options over the rationality of '*thinking* first', especially where managers confront complex situations (Mintzberg & Westley, 2001). This kind of intuitive approach to organisational leadership is finding an audience in the academy that now sees intuition as an important compliment to rationality (Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2004).

But how does the organisational researcher discover these elements of tacit knowledge, gut feel, flashes of insight, and leaps of faith? In this paper I propose that the aesthetics lens offers the research community a way forward in theory development. I argue that by returning to the early Enlightenment it is possible to examine the antecedents of contemporary aesthetics, and to use these ideas as a means of animating and informing today's organisational aestheticians.

In particular I concentrate on three scholars: Vico, called by some the father of aesthetics; Baumgarten whose two-volume treatise *Aesthetica* was the first in-depth study of aesthetics; and Kant, who has become a touch-stone for inquiry into the nature of beauty. Each presents ideas that provide the beginnings for a contemporary organisational aesthetic. Furthermore these early 18th Century philosophers searched for an aesthetic view in the midst of the shifting sands of thought that the emergence of the Enlightenment produced.

## **THE PHILOSOPHICAL HERITAGE**

Over time the Enlightenment has come to be associated with the 'rationalist belief in a single coherent body of logically deduced conclusions, arrived at by universally valid principles of thought and founded upon carefully sifted data of observation or experiment' (Berlin, 2003, n.p.). However, the transformation was not sudden, with ideas being contested in the form of a 'confused *mêlée*, [with] each protagonist lashing out at his particular opponent' (Hampson, 1968/1990, p. 31), rather than as a unified and reasoned shift.

Further, Richard Rorty (1989) claims that the work of the later Romantic artists, and poets in particular, contested the scientific positivism that Enlightenment thinking privileged. He argues that Schiller and later, Nietzsche, explored notions of truth that eschewed a unitary

and rational view of the world. Central to this contestation are questions surrounding the nature of knowledge: is it *out there* waiting to be discovered and described through the astute application of scientific method, or is it continually being constructed and reconstructed out of an enlivened imagination? Rorty notes that as a result of the flowering of 18th and 19th Century Romanticism, the initial Enlightenment struggle between ‘science and religion, reason and unreason’ has now evolved into ‘a struggle between reason and all the forces within culture which think of truth as *made* rather than *found*’ (Rorty, 1989, p. 3, emphasis added).

For Rorty this philosophical split circumscribes a crucial distinction. Scientific positivism sees the truth as an external reality waiting to be discovered, with the purpose of language being to simply describe that reality (and by implication, language which is parsimonious and sparse). The alternative, however, is to locate the truth internally and subjectively; that the search for knowledge is a quest for new forms of description and in so doing ‘gradually bringing Spirit to self-consciousness’ (Rorty, 1989, p. 19). Here the purpose of language is to find ways of continually re-describing what is seen. In this latter case, language becomes ‘expansionist’ relying on the author’s imagination to conjure metaphors that are ‘strange, mystic and wonderful’ (Rorty, 1989, p. 19). It is not surprising, then, that Rorty sees the arts and aesthetics as the means through which truth can be explored and ‘re-contextualized’ (Rorty, 1991, p. 110) thereby continually enlarging our awareness of the world in which we live and work.

Underpinning Rorty’s view is that a person’s existence is poetic rather than an objective list of achievements and accomplishments; and contends that ‘culture as a whole can be “poeticized” rather than the Enlightenment hope that it can be “rationalized” or “scientized”’ (Rorty, 1989, p. 53). Therefore the roots of contemporary aesthetic inquiry are found in the philosophical tradition that sought for alternative ways of knowing, that sit alongside the scientific and universalising modes of thought ultimately privileged by the Enlightenment (Pappe, 2003).

Returning to the 18th Century is predicated by 20th Century critiques of the Enlightenment, which acknowledge the benefits to humanity of the scientific turn, but question the resulting hubris. In this regard, E. F. Schumacher writes of the *failure* of the 300-year ‘modern experiment’, because with one hand it gave scientific and technological advancement but with the other took an alert imagination that affirmed the metaphysical. Schumacher argues that it is these latter qualities that define what it means to be human:

More and more people are beginning to realize that ‘the modern experiment’ has failed. It received its early impetus by what I have called the Cartesian revolution, which, with implacable logic, separated man from those Higher Levels that alone can maintain his humanity (Schumacher, 1977, p. 153).

Contemporary critics of the Enlightenment, though, do not advocate the repudiation of scientific method, but rather argue for the rediscovery of a ‘creative imagination’ (Berlin, 2000, p. 19) and with it the ability to speak of the ephemeral and sensate. They claim that art offers a language with which to address these issues and it is aesthetics, according to Berlin, that provides the tools for thinking beyond the rational. He notes that

... such attributes as ‘profound’ and ‘shallow’, ‘plausible’ and ‘implausible’, ‘living’ and ‘lifeless’, ‘authentic’ and ‘unreal’, ‘rounded’ and ‘flat’ and the like are not often ascribed to the achievements of logic or epistemology or scientific method but are more often used to characterize the arts and works of scholarship, which require a capacity for insight, responsiveness, understanding of what men are and can be, of their inner lives, perception of the meaning and implications, and not only of the appearances, of their observable gestures (Berlin, 2000, p. 19).

Here Berlin’s list includes a number of features requiring an aesthetically attuned approach that seeks to look behind observable phenomena. For instance, to extend one of Berlin’s metaphors, the sensation of *flatness* relies on our experiences of roundness and sharpness for comparison, and our ability to describe these sensations poetically. It is, then, this underlying belief that life experiences can be informed by the ways we engage with the symbolic (art in particular), and that art conveys existential meaning beyond the rarefied atmosphere of the gallery or concert chamber, that lies at the heart of organisational aesthetics.

This line of inquiry, of finding ways of re-describing truth imaginatively and provocatively, is the focus of aesthetic research. The issues discussed by Vico, Baumgarten and Kant are discourses that belong to this quest, and represent a genesis of thought that informs the current evolving field of organisational aesthetics. These philosophers and the rich aesthetic language that they have created, form the basis for this study. They showed that although ‘scientific knowledge deals ... with the external appearance of things’ (Hampson, 1968/1990, p. 235) it fails to examine the meanings behind that appearance. Their insights provide for an examination of existential meaning-making by discussing the nature of aesthetic experience.

So by returning to the early Enlightenment, we can observe the development of aesthetic thinking. In particular, discussions on the relationship between works of art and the human journey; the ability of the past, especially the mythological, to inform the present; questions of the meaning attributable to sensate response, framed in notions of taste; and the relationship between form and content; are the bases of this thinking.

Discussions on these ideas were not limited to these three philosophers, however. For example, in the English speaking world the Scottish lawyer, minister and academic, Archibald Alison (1792–1867) maintained in his *Essays on the nature and principles of taste* (1790) that works of art trigger ideas and images beyond the works themselves, and that enjoyment of art means indulging in the stream of these perceptions. According to Alison, art provides the stimulus for connections to be made between a specific art work and the reflexive examination of life. Hence, for Alison, aesthetic engagement ‘almost involuntarily extend[s] ... to analogies with the life of man, and bring[s] before us those images of hope or fear, which, according to our particular situations, have dominion of our hearts!’ (Alison, 1790/1968, p. 10). It is this translation of aesthetic perception into lived experience that underpins the following discussion of Vico, Baumgarten and Kant.

### **VICO: THE PRESENT INFORMED BY THE PAST**

**Giambattista Vico (1668–1744)** has been called the ‘real “father of modern aesthetics”’ (Dorfles, 1969, p. 577), even though he did not use the term. His 1744 work *New science: Principles of the new science concerning the common nature of nations* focuses primarily on the notion that, unlike the natural world which is ‘incommensurable’ (Janik, 1983, p. 40), we humans have created our own cultures which can be known through the analysis of the myths and fables of bygone eras.

Vico went back to what he called ‘pagan’ history – Egyptian history in particular – and saw what he thought were three ages. According to Vico, Herodotus’ division of Egyptian history into the age of gods, followed by the age of heroes and finally the age of men, corresponded to three kinds of language spoken by the Egyptians during these ages. These languages in sequence were ‘(1) a *hieroglyphic* language using sacred characters; (2) a *symbolic* language, using heroic characters; and (3) an *epistolary* language, using characters agreed on by the people’ (Vico, 1744/1999, p. 44, emphases in the original). These three divisions further correspond to Varro’s historical divisions of a dark age, a mythical age and



the historical age. Thus Vico considered past ages to be loaded with significance and could not be discounted simply on the basis of their supposed irrationality. For, as Hampson summarises, Vico's philology was a quest for 'the story of the past, [that] instead of being an educative manual, in which reason struggled with ignorance and superstition ... was an account whose meaning lay within itself, in which any period was as significant as any other' (Hampson, 1968/1990, p. 236).

For Vico, to reject or even discount the past is to fail to see the wealth of ideas and values that shed light on the human story. Therefore the age of heroes, symbolic language and myth, represent the ground for aesthetic theory, as it is these artefacts that reveal the essence of human identity. Hence mythical awareness, as a counterpoint to the Cartesian epistemology of causality, relies on a creative imagination that pauses to tease out meanings inherent within narratives. Consequently:

In the myth, the traditional enemy of intelligible science, is the original power of the image upon which the capabilities of humanistic *fantasia* rest. Any theory of knowledge, and any theory of the humanities, must be founded on a theory of mythical consciousness (Verene, 1976, p. 34 emphasis in the original).

So, for Vico, aesthetics embraces more than an appreciation of fine art; rather, it includes the whole of human endeavour. Aesthetic language engages primarily with the affective domain, and 'postulates a cleavage between emotional and referential meaning' (Dorfles, 1969, p. 579). This privileging of emotional language over the linearity of mathematical logic set him at odds with Cartesian thought that reduced human experience to universal theorems. Vico held that knowledge derived from mathematics was 'not a knowledge of reality but only of unreal and arbitrary constructions' (Manson, 1969, p. 12).

Instead, Vico proffers that theorising on human behaviour can be accomplished with *immaginazione*, an ability to think backwards 'even across long periods of time' (Janik, 1983, p. 41), in the belief that 'human action belongs to the sphere of the variable, of *becoming* rather than being' (Janik, 1983, p. 42, emphasis added). Therefore aesthetic inquiry through the exploration of myth, heroic poetry and language offers a process of discovery that sees human existence as fluid and continually unfolding.

In summary, Vico claims that ideas spring from the senses, stating 'there is nothing in the intellect which is not first in a sense' (cited in Vaughan, 1972, p. 7) and it is this ability to think imaginatively, poetically and metaphorically (Nerlich & Clarke, 2001) that forms the basis for reasoning.

Before man can perform universals, says Vico, he forms imaginary ideas. Before he reflects with a clear mind (i.e. before he reached the ability to philosophize) he apprehends with confused and disturbed faculties. Before he articulates, he sings; before he speaks in prose, he speaks in poetry; before using technical terms, he uses metaphors (Vaughan, 1972, p. 7).

It is this ability to consider the past as providing valuable insights on the present, and to think flexibly and imaginatively, that captures Vico's contribution to contemporary organisational aesthetics. The aesthetic researcher takes cognisance that the use of rituals, cultural artefacts, rites of passage and heroic stories access mythological thought. Furthermore, Strati (1998), relying on Vico's work, argues that a metaphysical transformation occurs with myth-making in that 'people use myth and mythical thinking to identify themselves with the things that they do, transforming or translating themselves into these things' (Strati, 1998, p.1389). Myth making can enable people to deal with contradiction and anxiety within their lives. For, as Strati provocatively maintains:

The mythical thought described by Vico, therefore, is fantasy, metaphor and image. It is a way of seeing and knowing the world that has nothing to do with analysis, explanation or reason. Instead, it involves the construction of civil society through the 'translation' of people into it, and through its adequate understanding 'from within' (Strati, 1999, p. 153).

This latter claim provides the key to Vico's philology, namely, that as we engage with the past by examining myths, fables and symbols, we derive the tools of knowing *and* becoming. Further, the resulting personal and social transformation, achieved through aesthetic perception, is firstly internal, leading to the external and systemic.

However, what is missing from this schema is a more precise analysis of the nature of aesthetic knowledge. Baumgarten's writings, exploring sensation as an aesthetic response, enhance Vico's philology.

## **BAUMGARTEN: SENSATION AS THE GROUND OF KNOWLEDGE**

**Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762)** was the first post-Renaissance philosopher to use the term *aesthetic* (Williams, 1988) and his contribution to the literature is his focus on sensation as the ground of knowledge. In two volumes entitled *Aesthetica* published between 1750 and 1758 Baumgarten 'defined beauty as phenomenal perfection. . . plac[ing] a predominant stress on apprehension through the *senses*' (Williams, 1988, p. 31, emphasis in the original). Baumgarten's perspective is summed up in the phrase:

Aestheticis finis est perfectio cognitionis sensitivae, qua talis. [The aim of aesthetics as a discipline is the development and improvement of the *sensitive* knowledge] (cited in Gross, 2002, p. 410, emphasis added).

The implication here is that knowledge gained through the senses augments ‘cognition meditated by the intellect’ (Osborne, 1970, p. 175). Thus Baumgarten applied the term *gnoseologia inferior* (Cassirer, 1944, p. 137) or ‘inferior cognition’ to this acquisition. ‘Inferior’ here is not to be considered as something lesser; rather it is knowledge that is discovered beneath, or below, that which is immediately available to the intellect through logical reasoning – *gnoseologia superior*. For Baumgarten, it is art that links the visible with the ineffable thereby allowing for existential meaning to be made by the perceiver. According to Ernst Cassirer, Baumgarten conceived of art

as an allegory, a figurative expression which under its sensuous form concealed an ethical sense ... a subordinate and subservient means pointing to some higher end (Cassirer, 1944, p. 137).

The challenge, therefore, is for the perceiver to work with immediate sensation (an *inferior cognition*) and to reflexively connect that with wider human values and behaviour (*superior cognition*).

Although his focus was primarily on literature, Baumgarten conceived that aesthetic inquiry was relevant to ‘all the liberal arts and the practical activities of daily life’ (Makkreel, 1994, p. 66). He therefore rejected the idea that the search for knowledge is reducible to either a rational or a sensual quest. For Baumgarten, human beings are primarily aesthetic beings – *felix aestheticus* (Gross, 2002, p.404) – who are comfortable with complexity, able to accommodate ‘a great number of sometimes conflicting or contradictory faculties, forces, and poietic powers, a great number of different aims, some of them incommensurable with each other’ (Gross, 2002, p. 404).

This ability to save complexity is observed in works of art which are replete with *ubertas* (richness) – a multiplicity of ideas infused into a single creation. Baumgarten’s intention was not to think in terms of generalisations but to allow complexity to speak to individual situations. Rather than being anarchic or confusing, form is established around the fecundity of content, and as ‘more characteristics are compressed into a single representation it becomes more suggestive of order’ (Makkreel, 1994, p. 66).

Therefore to become a sensitive thinker, alert to both the noble and the mundane, Baumgarten claims that a perceiver must be responsive to the object and all its attendant elements and contributing parts. Consequently the perceiver is ‘in a continual process of

developing all his powers and senses, and exploring them in all possible directions' (Gross, 2002, p. 412) constantly trying to find new angles to view an object.

Paradoxically even though Baumgarten's ideas explore non-rationality they also resonate with Enlightenment empiricism. He held that aesthetic reception (sensation) is grounded in the material world and 'postulates that the more sensate determination there is in the artistic form, the more *actualizable* is the aesthetic realm as a site of human activity' (Singer, 2003, p. 14 emphasis in the original).

Aesthetic research involves becoming sensitive to richness and complexity, with the view to transformation at individual and societal levels. This sensitivity may include putting aside firmly held beliefs about the way the world operates. Rather, the aesthetic researcher's task is to become comfortable with the chaotic and disorderly and not necessarily attempt to resolve these into currently accepted theory. In this way, even contradictory elements are considered so that beauty and order is embraced along with the ugly and confused.

Further, this comfort with disorder and changeability presents the nub of the Enlightenment question, namely, are we dealing only with what we can see and measure or are there elements beyond the visible? In this regard Strati writing about Baumgarten notes: 'As such, as art is analogue to reason, it raises a metaphysical-baroque challenge against the analytical rationality that seeks after the truth' (Strati, 2000, p. 15). It is this relationship between the determinate and the indescribable, changeable and chaotic, which contextualises Kant's discussion on form and content.

## KANT: FORM AND CONTENT

**Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)** in his work *Critique of judgment* (1790) examines the phenomena of beauty and taste and claims that aesthetic knowledge links phenomena with the noumenal, an idea first explored in his *Critique of pure reason* (1781). Robert Solomon (2001) writes of Kant's perspective by noting that aesthetic experience involves a continual movement between cognition and imagination with each 'enlivening one another' (Solomon, 2001, p. 668). Therefore imagination and understanding interact together in free play to give meaning to phenomena.

Kant illustrates this with the problem of measurement, which is both a mathematical as well as an imaginary act (Kant, 1790/2000, § 26). For instance, the estimated height of a tree is compared to the height of a man, which in turn becomes the standard against which a

mountain's height can be ascertained. Here there is an interplay between imagination and reason; with imagination being able to conceive of limitless possibilities, and reason providing the tools of conceptualisation.

It is through this interaction between imagination and reason that a form emerges, thus achieving harmonisation between the two. Kant writes that 'the aesthetical Judgment in judging the Beautiful refers to the Imagination in its free play to the *Understanding*, in order to harmonise it with the *concepts* of the latter in general' (Kant, 1790/2000, § 26 italics in the original). The issue Kant grapples with here is how to systematise imagination, which, by its nature is continually changing, into formal and universal concepts. He solves this by posing a fluid relationship between perception and our ability to create formal concepts based on those perceptions. 'Therefore, unlike judgments of agreeableness and goodness, an aesthetic response arises neither from cognition nor sense, but from an ineffable combination of the two, what Kant calls "a universal rule incapable of formation"' (Lucas, 2001, para. 5).

Ineffability is mitigated through concepts of structure and form. When we perceive beauty in something, we are examining its form or shape, a process Kant termed as *Form der Zweckmässigkeit* or, the *Form of Finality*. According to McCloskey's reading of Kant, it is this capacity to perceive form that lies at the heart of aesthetic engagement (McCloskey, 1987).

Thus Kant's contribution to the development of aesthetic understanding is to perceive form in the chaotic, thereby deriving meaning from sensate information. His schema entails a development from idiosyncratic, disinterested intuitions, to symbol-formation, and then to establishing universal criteria with which to judge those symbols (Kant, 1790/2000, § 59). Hence there is a continual move from intuition to symbolisation; an interplay between content and form. For Kant, individual taste operates at the intuitive level, but symbolisation involves creating 'concepts and laws' around intuitions and then holding them up for critique (Rueger & Evren, 2005, p. 233).

Therefore 'the satisfaction in an object, on account of which we call it beautiful, cannot rest on the representation of its utility' (Kant, 1790/2000, § 15) but rather our subjective appreciation of it. However subjective appreciation alone does not suffice. Instead, this is accompanied and 'mediated' by an objective judgment (Adorno, 1997, p. 163) based on our formal perceptions.

Therefore, what matters for Kant is not the object itself but our contemplation of it. Underpinning this thoughtful act is the detection of generic forms. In this regard, Cassirer comments on this element of Kant's philosophy:

If the work of art were nothing but the freak and frenzy of an individual artist it would not possess ... universal communicability. The imagination of the artist does not arbitrarily invent the forms of things. It shows us these forms in their true shape, making them visible and recognizable (Cassirer, 1944, p. 145).

It is, then, the form that individual intuitions assume that resonate with perceivers.

Here the beginnings of a rationale for organisational aesthetics are extended by our ability as humans to make sense of symbols and other media that are ever present in our work-life. As organisational actors we construct our perceptions around structures that go beyond the personal and idiosyncratic, thereby making sense to a wider community of participants. In this way particular sensations give way to generic forms which 'impose an interpersonal and public pattern upon sensation' (McCloskey, 1987, p. 61).

## **THE BEGINNINGS OF AESTHETIC RESEARCH**

In summary, all three philosophers, Vico, Baumgarten and Kant sought to articulate epistemologies about both the *here and now*, and the *beyond*. Their agendas were to find ways of describing present experience, to make meaning of that experience, and provide frameworks to articulate the ineffable and ephemeral.

Vico integrated the past with the present seeing meaning behind ancient myths and practices. This ability to think symbolically not only enables organisational theorists to examine the artefacts of the past, it also facilitates a transformation of identity through an enlivened imagination by allowing the past to inform the present. This transformation grows firstly from internal change and then beyond, to the external world.

Baumgarten's search was for a way of understanding what lies beneath the surface that is not immediately accessible through cognition. He thought in terms of richness and multiple readings of phenomena. Sensation is the door through which rational thinking can precede, requiring a flexible aesthetician who is able to respond intuitively and to be open to new directions that unfolding phenomena may imply.

Kant sought for ways of universalising notions of taste, holding that through the propensity to create forms and structures around the chaotic, we are able to engage in

meaning-making activities that identify the essence of the *thing-in-itself* as well as its appearance. Once form is established around sensation then aesthetic researchers are able to make judgments and develop generic concepts on those sensations.

The ideas canvassed by these early Enlightenment aestheticians set the scene for the search for contemporary organisational aesthetic research practice. Considerations of the relationship between the parts to the whole, the present with the past, sensation and perception, background the works of Vico, Baumgarten and Kant. Underpinning their inquiries was the belief that humans have a unique capacity to think multi-dimensionally, and, as *felix aestheticus* the human personality is a fertile ground for this multiplicity to be nurtured.

For the contemporary organisational aesthetician, the overarching concern is the nature of *appearance* – elements that are immediately accessible through our five senses of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. But does aesthetic inquiry deal only with these phenomenal facets or are there other considerations beyond appearance that we use to attribute meaning to that appearance? This is an important question because the assumptions aestheticians make concerning appearance will determine the shape of future aesthetic methodologies.

I began this paper by claiming that underlying Mintzberg and Westley's paper on symbolism is an aesthetic view. Evidences of this turn can also be seen in Mintzberg's seminal 1979 work *The structuring of organizations: A synthesis of the research*. Here Mintzberg presents a view of organisations that examines appearance while at the same time attributes metaphysical meaning to that appearance.

He takes multiple manifestations of organisational structures and synthesises them into a generic model of five zones which include the *operating core*, *middle line*, *technostructure*, *support staff* and the *strategic apex*. Mintzberg achieves this synthesis by shuttling between the *real* (scientific view) and the *ideal* (abstract view); beginning with the real and then creating an ideal paradigm from those examples. But then, paradoxically, he adroitly reverses the process by turning the ideal back onto the real and uses the ideal as a means of analysing particular enterprises. Therefore, Mintzberg's process of synthesising involves continually shifting from the idiosyncratic structures of particular organisations (the real) to a model with 'five basic parts' (the ideal) (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 20) and back again.

Performing these acts of analysis and synthesis which oscillate between the real and ideal, is a peculiarly aesthetic undertaking, a process which Mintzberg appears to have

stumbled on by chance. Furthermore, he achieves this swing between poles through mythologizing the number five. Mintzberg encourages his readers to think on two levels at one time: the *concrete* and *mythological*, by offering a shape around which organisations can be analysed, and providing a mythological reason for that form to take on generic proportions. In this regard Mintzberg writes:

Five is, of course, no ordinary digit. 'It is the sign of union, the nuptial number according to the Pythagoreans; also the number of the center, of harmony and of equilibrium.' *The Dictionnaire des Symboles* goes on to tell us that five is the 'symbol of man ... likewise of the universe ... the symbol of divine will that seeks only order and perfection.' ... Our modest contribution to this impressive list is five structural configurations. These have appeared repeatedly in our discussion; they are the ones described most frequently in the literature of organizational theory (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 300).

The aesthetic engagement that accidentally underpins Mintsberg's structural analyses involves a *both-and* approach that resiles from the polarities of *either-or* binary positions. However, the problem with this approach is that it is contradictory. For instance, how can something be *both* real *and* ideal; concrete *and* mythological?

The works of Vico, Baumgarten and Kant contain the seeds of a resolution. In the work of each is an inherent oscillation between what is immediately evident and imagination. Schiller called this the 'play impulse' (Schiller, 1795/1965, p. 74), which is a quality of perception that moves back and forth between the two poles of form and content, an impulse that is in a continual state of *schwung* (Guillet de Monthoux, 2000). Hence the 'paradoxical co-presence' (Hepburn, 2002, p. 27) of elements like present and past, sensation and reason, form and content, are not seen by the aesthetician as binary opposites but rather existing in a dynamic relationship.

Aesthetic research, then, concerns the nature of sensation and perception and how these open up our awareness of world in which we live and work. Vico, Baumgarten and Kant offer insights into this by elevating rather than suppressing the imagination. Further, it is the ability to interact at a symbolic and mythological level that assists the research process. Therefore aesthetics seeks to make sense of complex and ambiguous environments, where divergence and disunity are the bases of shared experience rather than 'striving for the end goal of unity' (Cairns, 2002, p. 817).

For the aesthetician-researcher, an alert imagination; comfort with the chaotic; backwards and forward thinking; and attention to inner sensations and perceptions, all work together to provide a coherent view of the organisation as a gestalt. Furthermore, how these



lead to symbol creation and myth-making and then ultimately to organisational revitalisation are distillations that draw on this philosophical heritage established by Vico, Baumgarten and Kant.

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