

## Aesthetics and design

### An epistemology of the unseen

Antonio Strati

Writings on aesthetics and design in organizational life have extended the boundaries of organizational theory and management studies by envisaging a highly specific approach whereby aesthetics and design become part of the way in which organizational life is understood and managed.

They range across a broad array of references to philosophical, anthropological, psychological, semiotic, sociological and cultural studies, and theories of art. They share the general feature of conducting an epistemological polemic against the dominant image conveyed by the rationalist paradigm, according to which it is only analytical-scientific thinking that provides a valid description of organization.

Since the end of the 1980s, this manner of understanding and describing organizational phenomena has lost its aura of universality and objectivity. This has been due to both critical reflections within the paradigm itself and the emergence of new ways to conduct organizational analysis, which, each in a specific manner, have given rise to the so-called *Cultural Turn* in organization theory and management studies.

One of these new approaches is the aesthetic study of the organization, which holds that art and science cannot be kept separate if the intention is to understand everyday routine in organizations. It has been driven by the cultural-symbolist debates of the 1980s on the image of organization, aesthetics and organizational skills, and the *pallos* of organizational artefacts. At that time there appeared the first publications on aesthetics and design in organizational life, especially influential among which were the Special Issue on 'Art and Organization' of *Dygon* (1987) and the collected volume *Symbols and Artifacts* (Gaggiardi, 1990).

There followed the shift from the symbolic study of the aesthetic dimension of the organization to the aesthetic approach (Strati, 1992). Closer attention was paid to aesthetic philosophy, philosophy of art, and theories of art, as evidenced by collective publications like the Special Issue of the international journal *Organization* (1996), and two books, *Organization and Aesthetics* (Strati, 1999) and *The Art Firm* (Guillet de Monthoux, 2004).

The novel feature of all these works was that, from the earliest of them onwards, aesthetics, design, and art were considered to be, not the mere embellishment of everyday routine in organizations, but rather a fundamental dimension of such routine which had hitherto remained

unnoticed and unstudied (Jinstead and Höpfl, 2000). The novelty also extended to the philosophy and social theory researched and debated through critical reflections on the use made in organizational aesthetics research of the categories of aesthetics, on the one hand, and art on the other (Chyry, 2008).

Thus incorporated into the organizational debate were philosophies which hitherto had not been considered – as I shall show in this chapter by considering first, in the next section, the relationship between aesthetic philosophy and organizational citizenship, and then the co-presence of three main philosophical sensibilities, *hermeneutic, aesthetic and performative*.

### Aesthetics and organizational citizenship

There is no philosopher who has not been immersed in aesthetic experience – or put otherwise, who has not been an active subject of the knowledge and interaction that passes through sensory perception and the sensory-aesthetic judgement. This is the thesis put forward between 1735 and 1750 by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in his philosophical treatises devoted to sensory intelligence (*ty aisthetel*) and its disjunction and autonomy from cognitive intelligence.

After Baumgarten, numerous philosophers dealt with aesthetics, also giving it new facets. The first was Immanuel Kant, whose writings have been particularly influential until the present day. The term 'aesthetics', which originated in ancient Greek, highlights the crucial importance of activating the perceptive faculties of sensory-aesthetic judgement. It became mixed with that of 'art' (from Latin), which denotes the transformation of raw material with skill and intelligence. This is a mixture whereby 'aesthetic' and 'art' evoke each other but remain distinct. Above all, both 'aesthetics' and 'art' highlight, on the one hand, the proactive nature of sensitive intelligence and artistry, and on the other, their 'an-aesthetic' nature when the sensory faculties and aesthetic judgement are manipulated in order to soothe and dull the mind.

Almost two and a half centuries later, arguments similar to Baumgarten's were put forward in organizational studies:

- There is no manager, worker, technician, or administrator that does not use the perceptive-sensory faculties and aesthetic judgement in his/her work, because the participants in organizational life 'are craftpersons and aesthetes' (Jones *et al.*, 1988: 160–1).
- There is no organization that does not exercise influence and control at the pre-cognitive stage on the individuals and groups with which it works and interacts, because of the *pathos* of the artifacts that it produces and with which it is surrounded (Gagliardi, 1990).
- There is no organizational scholar that does not undergo aesthetic experience, either when conducting field research or when processing and communicating the results of that research through texts, lessons and lectures, even if they then do not know how to express that experience for research purposes (Strati, 1992).

What happened to induce some scholars to interest themselves in the aesthetic dimension of the organization? It was the above-mentioned cultural turn of the 1980s, in the course of which, on the one hand, the dominance of the positivist and functionalist paradigm was disputed and, on the other, new ways to study organizations and new themes to consider were conceived. Postmodernism, poststructuralism, de-constructionism, feminist studies, interpretationism and symbolic understanding resonated in organizational research and likewise in the aesthetic study of organizations.

The aesthetic discourse on organizations made its own theoretical contribution by conducting an epistemological critique of the cognitive interpretation of organizational phenomena which still pervaded the new approaches:

- 1 Although the cognitive level of intelligence is still important, a great deal of organizational life eludes it, and is instead grasped by another form of intelligence, namely sensory intelligence.
- 2 The places in which people work, the technologies that they use, the rhythms and times of their activities, their relationships with other workers, managerial strategies and organizational decisions result from aesthetic choices and arouse aesthetic feelings ranging from pleasure to disgust.
- 3 Everyday work routine in organizations consists of the interactions between corporealities that belong to individuals, groups and collectives, and those that belong to physical, intangible or virtual artefacts. These interactions are not mere mental constructs, nor semiotic concepts, but concrete relationships with a *pathos* that gives rise to the complex aesthetic world of the organization.
- 4 The aesthetic materiality of organizational life gives salience to the finite nature of the organization, i.e. that it is a down-to-earth sensible experience rather than an objective reality that transcends the intersubjectivities that embody it.
- 5 In organizational contexts, people are immersed in the aesthetic experience, both as organizational actors and as organization scholars.

The epistemological critique of cognitivism also concerns the issue of logic. Besides analytical-rational logic, there is the 'poetic logic' proposed – again in the first half of the eighteenth century – by another founder of aesthetics, the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico. In 1725, Vico published *The New Science*, in which he attacked the theories of Descartes. The interactions among individuals and between individuals and their world, he wrote, do not follow the abstract principles of Cartesian rationality. If one considers historical processes and the dynamics of social life (*mondo civile*), one sees that 'mythical thinking', evocation, and metaphor are fundamental. People use gestures, they resort to images, and invent metaphors to express themselves; they communicate through signs that are as cryptic as hieroglyphics; they invent myths and rituals; they recount stories and fairytales; and through them they seek to identify with the world and with things. They relate to the surrounding world through the imagination of which their senses and passions are capable.

Organizational aesthetics research philosophically examines this aesthetic invention of both the person and his/her relationship with the civilized world. It is in this eighteenth-century revolution of the conception of the person that aesthetic research finds assonance with that particular form of organizational citizenship – 'aesthetic citizenship' – which it investigates. In this citizenship, it is the 'taste' of people that assumes importance and centrality, as stressed by a third founder of aesthetics, Joseph Addison, in the eleven instalments devoted to the pleasures of the imagination published by the English cultural magazine *The Spectator* in 1712.

Taste, sensory perception, aesthetic judgement, and poetic logic are the foundations of the individual's 'aesthetic' invention. Art contributed greatly to this profound change in the concept of the person that occurred in the eighteenth century. An outright revolution came about in painting, music and literature. Art eschewed the sacred, aristocratic and grandiose, depicting instead the quotidian world of the sentiments. In other words, everyday life was to be represented in and of itself, detached from the divine or aristocratic.



But this was only one aspect of the change. The other was that mundane life became increasingly aestheticized. This was particularly evident at the end of the twentieth century, when philosophers themselves spoke of a veritable 'aesthetic turn':

We are without doubt currently experiencing an aesthetic boom. It extends from individual styling, urban design and the economy through to theory. More and more elements of reality are being aesthetically mandated, and reality as a whole is coming increasingly to count as an aesthetic construction to us. (Welsch, 1996: 1)

The organizational experience is 'designed', pleasure and dependence invite one to forget the problematic sides of working life, and the focus of design moves from the object-artefact to experience as a designed organizational artefact (*Figures de l'art*, 2013). However, it was aesthetic reflection that constituted this process of 'aestheticization which in truth is tantamount to an anaestheticization' (Welsch, 1996: 18). Aesthetic sentiments collected during empirical research in organizations often highlighted the dark side of organizational life:

working in that organization is ugly. Buildings are ugly, people are ugly, everything's ugly, and we grow more and more ugly as the days pass. (Srati, 1999: 104)

And the contribution of aesthetic and artistic theories to improving the quality of organizational life and management styles was critically analysed (*Human Relations*, 2002; Meisiek and Barry, 2014). The contribution of aesthetic research to organizational theories consists, in fact, in critical analysis of the aestheticization of society and the managerial manipulation of the organization's aesthetic dimension:

Opposing alienating and manipulative processes, an aesthetic approach is critical of positivist perspectives, challenging the distinction between the value of research and the pleasure of doing it. Critical also of managerial standpoints, aesthetic research is concerned with emancipation and the exercise of aesthetic judgement. (Buchanan and Bryman, 2009: xxxi)

These considerations conclude this section devoted to aesthetic citizenship of the organization. The next section discusses the *hermeneutic, aesthetic and performative* standpoints that are the philosophical and sociological referents of the four approaches into which the aesthetic discourse on the organization divides.

### Hermeneutics, aesthetics and performativity

The philosophical and sociological standpoints of the aesthetic study of organizations stem mainly from three 'philosophical sensibilities' which still profoundly influence organizational aesthetics research:

- 1 the *Hermeneutic Sensibility*, which both links with the symbolic approach to the study of organizations and detaches itself from it;
- 2 the *Aesthetic Sensibility*, which gives a definitive shape to the set of contributions on organizational aesthetics;
- 3 the *Performative Sensibility*, which although always present in aesthetic research on the organization, assumed distinctive features at the turn of this century.

These three philosophical sensibilities are generally present throughout the aesthetic discourse on the organization, but their emphases differ according to each of the four approaches that make up the aesthetic study of organizations (Srati, 2009). These approaches, in fact, focus on theoretical-methodological issues, ranges of action, and specific themes. Hence those who adopt the *archaeological approach* consider organizational aesthetics in order to grasp cultures and symbols that distinguish organizations as if they were studying some form of civilization. Those who adopt the *empiric-logical approach* focus on the aesthetic and pre-cognitive influence of the organizational artefacts that constitute, together with individuals, the organization's symbolic landscape – the purpose also being to identify the forms of organizational control enacted. Those who adopt the *aesthetic approach* study the forms of constant collective and social negotiation of organizational aesthetics in routine work. And those who adopt the *artistic approach* investigate artistic experience in order to obtain information about the management of organizational processes.

#### Hermeneutic sensibility

Like aesthetics, also hermeneutics arose as a branch of philosophy in the eighteenth century. It is a philosophical theory that considers understanding to be an interpretative process. Schlegel and Schleiermacher discerned this process in all linguistic activity, Heidegger maintained that it is the foundation of human life, rather than being a mere cognitive attitude. Gadamer tied it to aesthetics: art transforms those involved with it, so that it is an authentic experience of truth which concentrates on the self and at the same time expresses the symbolic character which, from the hermeneutic point of view, distinguishes the individual.

Organizational aesthetics research has often drawn on hermeneutics in order to refine its organizational analyses. Hans-Georg Gadamer was one of its foremost proponents, but also the Italian school, first with Luigi Pareyson (1954) who tied hermeneutics to existentialism, and then with his pupil Umberto Eco who has investigated also the limits of interpretation: the hermeneutic process must regard the 'sign' as resulting from complex operations which involve different modes of production and recognition, and not take signs to be the minimal units on the basis of which to create the typologies that reproduce the centuries-long debate on the differences among verbal, iconic or gestural language.

For organizational aesthetics, the user has equal importance with the creator of the work. This is a crucial aspect whereby the aesthetic-hermeneutic experience transcends the protagonists while involving them and is a constantly open and unconcluded event.

This was well illustrated by Roland Barthes (1989) when, reflecting on the Eiffel Tower, he expressed astonishment that Paris had taken so long to have its own symbol. This symbol, he pointed out, was born amid negotiations, conflicts, disputes and conflicts involving, among others, the community of Parisian artists and the art world. The Eiffel Tower's architecture does not participate in the sacredness of art, but merely exalts science and positivism. It is therefore surprising that the Eiffel Tower has become the symbol of Paris. But on closer consideration, one notes that it refers directly to all Paris, rather than the monarchy as does the Louvre, or the empire as does the Arc de Triomphe. On visiting it, one visits Paris: one deconstructs the city. And if one visits Paris, one sees the tower from almost everywhere: a pure sign, virtually empty, based on simple lines that join, mythically, earth and heaven.

This movement between the creation of meaning and its interpretation in the context of organizational life is important for all the approaches of organizational aesthetics research, but it is particularly studied by the artistic approach. It is by means of the performance that, for example, the choreographer shows whether s/he has really mastered the hermeneutics of the



representation. In other words, the 'aesthetic method', which is otherwise so closely related to hermeneutics that we can call it a hermeneutics of action, creates rather than interprets' (Guiliet de Monhroux, 2007: 139).

### *Aesthetic sensibility*

The aesthetic sensibility concerns philosophical reflection on contemporary design and aesthetic philosophies centred on ordinary beauty (Przychodzen *et al.*, 2010), on collectively constructed and socially negotiated action, on the sensory intelligence that makes one individual different from another but at the same time equal to him/her, on what makes a way of working or an organizational setting beautiful or unpleasant, and on the organizational creativity that appeals because of the unusual and uncommon experience that it furnishes.

The theory draws from and reflects on different aesthetic philosophies, most notably Immanuel Kant's modern aesthetics, Friedrich Schiller's romantic aesthetics, Arthur Schopenhauer's and Friedrich Nietzsche's aesthetics of the crisis of rationalism, Walter Benjamin's and Theodor Adorno's neo-Marxist aesthetics, Edmund Husserl's and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological aesthetics, Martin Heidegger's and Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic aesthetics, the hermeneutic-existentialist aesthetics of Luigi Pareyson, the aesthetics of John Dewey's pragmatic-naturalist theory, Susanne Langer's post-Vico aesthetics, Jean-François Lyotard's postmodernism and Georg Simmel's sociology.

This, therefore, is a highly diversified array of theories in which the aesthetic philosophy of the first half of the nineteenth century, on which the aesthetic approach has mainly drawn, has become an essential and almost ritualistic reference for organizational aesthetics research. Constructed upon it have been some theoretical mainstays of the aesthetic discourse on organizations.

- a Aesthetics concerns the world of sensible knowledge, the thinking of the body that remains imprisoned within the body (Légros, 2005: 159). Aesthetics is not art, therefore, but rather the sensory world in which individuals are immersed since birth, and by virtue of which they act and interact in both their everyday work and private lives (Merleau-Ponty, 1947).
- b Art nevertheless pertains to aesthetics because of its sensible, concrete, and maternal nature. Indeed, in the West, art arose together with aesthetics because, until two and a half centuries ago, there was art of every kind except art for its own sake – the art directed to its own excellence as such. This was a profound change in the forms of sensory experience, in perceptions of it and in the modes of understanding it (Rancière, 2011). The art with which organizational aesthetics research is most concerned is art as experience, according to the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, who wrote, in 1934, that aesthetic experience should not be restricted to the relationship with works of art alone, and according to Pareyson, who maintained that there is something artistic in every human action and that works in every field are due to the activity of formativeness which, while producing them invents how to do so.
- c Design is the most obvious manifestation of this aesthetic and artistic process tied to industrial mass production. At the beginning of the last century, with the promotion of *Machinensstil* by the Deutscher Werkbund of Munich and of rationalism by the Bauhaus, there arose two important contexts in which to consider the aestheticization of everyday objects and environments. Design's contemporary features make it a phenomenon at the same time industrial and artisanal, with products either at low prices, such as cell phones or kitchen utensils, or astronomical ones like Ferrari cars. This is not the so-called 'art world', but the

one in which art is combined with technique, and beauty with utility, to the point that during the second half of the last century design became the conceptualization of manufacturing methods and corporate management processes (Sudjic, 2008).

### *Performative sensibility*

Performative sensibility characterizes all four approaches to the study of organizational aesthetics, but with different nuances and objects of inquiry. While for the archaeological approach performative sensibility represents awareness of a general kind, it is the main feature of the artistic approach because of the image of organizational interaction as artistic performance. It is Marina Abramovic's art and theories on the art of performance, which is investigated and discussed in order to draw insights for the management of work processes in the organization. It is the creative use of unconventional materials in the art world in order to expand art in existential experience. Joseph Beuys's experimental research on plastic transformations, or the 'poor art' of Michelangelo Pistoletto and his project for socially useful art, are explored in terms of artistic and organizational management in order to gain insights useful for management theories. Performative sensibility is Robert Wilson's art and his theatrical innovations designed to capture the ways in which creative capacity combines with an equal globalized organizational capacity and draws stimuli useful for organizational leadership in the age of globalization.

In the empathic-logical approach, performative sensibility regards the symbolic artefacts that constitute the organizational landscape as agents able to convey and stimulate aesthetic feelings and to exercise pre-cognitive organizational control. The focus is therefore on the hidden dimension of organizational dynamics. This dimension consists of interactions which often go unexplored because they are difficult to observe and investigate, and because they operate without conscious awareness of them.

The performative sensibility of the aesthetic approach is directed to give a language – poetic logic – to the tacit dimension of knowledge that is essential for social practice in organizations. It was the Hungarian philosopher of science Michael Polanyi (1958) who introduced the distinction between the tacit and explicit dimensions of knowledge on the basis of empirical research, and who described how the tacit dimension is constitutive of people's personal knowledge and expertise. The skill of a surgeon performing a heart operation is generally not the same as that of his colleague, even if they have received the same training and therefore have had access to the same explicit knowledge. Likewise, the talent of a pianist is not the same as that of a fellow student. Sidney Pollack (2005) investigated with tact and delicacy this subtle relationship among aesthetics, the tacit dimension of knowledge, and design in his documentary film on Frank Gehry's architectural work. This applies to all the forms of expert knowledge at the basis of the social practices of work in organizations, as the wide-ranging debate on the aesthetic dimension of practice in organizational studies illustrates (Gherardi and Strati, 2012). The performative sensibility of the aesthetic approach thus focuses on micro-organizational practices, i.e. the elementary relationships that underpin social interaction in societies and which, at the beginning of the last century, the sociologist Georg Simmel identified in sensory and aesthetic interaction.

### **Towards a greater philosophical awareness**

In this chapter I have referred mostly to collective publications. I have done so because they give better account of the collective work of research, theory and debate on which the study of aesthetics and design in organizations was originally founded, and thereafter the aesthetic



understanding of organizational life. These are collections of papers, special issues devoted to organizational aesthetics by leading international journals specialized in organizational topics, the journal devoted to aesthetics and organizational design *Aesthesis: International Journal of Art and Aesthetics in Management and Organizational Life*, and the online journal *Organizational Aesthetics*. The debate sometimes extends beyond the confines of organizational theory to illustrate the philosophical implications of organizational aesthetics, and the research methods used to investigate embodiment, creativity and design (King and Vickery, 2013). Nevertheless, much of the debate still remains within those confines, while philosophy and social theory frequently receive dutiful but only fleeting reference.

I envisage, therefore, two main scenarios for the future development of the study of aesthetics and design in organizations.

The first relates to the field of organizational studies. An important future direction, in fact, is the spread among scholars of organizational aesthetics and design of greater awareness that it is necessary not only to know but also to engage with the themes and issues debated in the philosophy of aesthetics, theories of art, and social theory more generally, on the basis of the experience gained through research practices.

The second scenario concerns so-called 'disciplinary studies', namely philosophy, art history, semiotics, sociology and many others. Except for the theories of art developed in the past decade, very rare, though valuable, are cases in which attention is paid to the debate on aesthetics and design in the world of work and organizational management. One of them is the collected volume *L'esthétique du beau ordinaire dans une perspective transdisciplinaire* (Przychodzen et al., 2010), which, drawing on aesthetic philosophy, ranges from the anthropology of everyday aesthetics to the aesthetic study of organizations. Another one is *Aesthetic Capitalism* (Murphy and de La Fuente, 2014), a collected volume which discusses the aesthetic dimension of capitalism by 'investigating the aesthetics' of financial speculation, fiscal policies, organizational life, architecture and art.

## References (key texts in bold)

- Barthes, R. (1989). *La Tour Eiffel*. Paris: Seuil (partial English trans.: *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).
- Buchanan, D. and Bryman, A. (eds) (2009). *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods*. London: Sage.
- Chytrý, J. (2008). Organizational aesthetics: the artful firm and the aesthetic moment in contemporary business and management theory. *Aesthesis: International Journal of Art and Aesthetics in Management and Organizational Life*, 2(2): 60–72. <http://digitalcommons.wpi.edu/aesthesis/23>.
- Diagon, the Journal of SCOS (1987). Special Issue on 'Art and organization', 2 (4). Edited by P.-J. Benghozi. *Figures de l'art* (2013). Special Issue on 'Philosophie du design', 25. Edited by B. Lafargue and S. Cardoso. Gagliardi, P. (ed.) (1990). *Symbols and Antijets: news of the corporate landscape*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Gherardi, S. and Strati, A. (2012). *Learning and Knowing in Practice-based Studies*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Guillet de Monthoux, P. (2004). *The Art Firm: aesthetic management and metaphysical marketing from Wagner to Wilson*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books.
- Guillet de Monthoux, P. (2007). Aesthetic perspective: hermeneutics of action, in Gustavsson, B. (ed.), *The Principles of Knowledge Creation: research methods in the social sciences*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 131–46.
- Human Relations (2002). Special Issue on 'Organising aesthetics', 55 (7). Edited by A. Strati and P. Guillet de Monthoux.
- Jones, M.O., Moore, M.D. and Snyder, R.C. (eds) (1988). *Inside Organizations. Understanding the Human Dimension*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- King, I.W. and Vickery, J. (eds) (2013). *Experiencing Organizations: new aesthetic perspectives*. Farnington: Libri Publishing.
- Legros, R. (2005). La naissance de l'individu moderne, in Focroulle, B., Legros, R. and Todorov, T. (eds), *La naissance de l'individu dans l'art*. Paris: Grasset, pp. 121–200.
- Linneea, S. and Höpfl, H. (eds) (2000). *The Aesthetic of Organization*. London: Sage.
- Meleau-Ponty, M. (1947). *Le Primat de la perception et ses conséquences philosophiques*. Grenoble: Cynara (English trans.: *The Primacy of Perception, and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964).
- Meisiek, S. and Barry, D. (2014). The science of making management an art, *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 30(1): 134–41.
- Murphy, P. and de La Fuente, E. (eds) (2014). *Aesthetic Capitalism*. Leiden: Brill.
- Organization (1996). Special Issue on 'Essays on aesthetics and organization', 3 (2). Edited by E. Ottensmeyer.
- Pareyson, L. (1954). *Estetica. Teoria della formatività*. Torino: Edizioni di "Filosofia". Reprinted 1988, Milano: Bompiani.
- Polanyi, M. (1958). *Personal Knowledge: towards a post-critical philosophy*. Second edn. 1962. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Pollack, S. (2005). *Sketches of Frank Gehry, Documentary Film, USA, 83'*.
- Przychodzen, J., Boucher, F.-E. and David, S. (eds) (2010). *L'esthétique du beau ordinaire dans une perspective transdisciplinaire*. Ni du gouffre ni du ciel, Paris: l'Harmattan.
- Rancière, J. (2011). *Aisthesis. Scènes du régime esthétique de l'art*. Paris: Éditions Galilée (English trans.: *Aisthesis: scenes from the aesthetic regime of art*. Trans. Zakir Paul. London: Verso, 2013).
- Strati, A. (1992). Aesthetic understanding of organizational life. *Academy of Management Review*, 17(3): 568–81.
- Strati, A. (1999). *Organization and Aesthetics*. London: Sage.
- Strati, A. (2009). 'Do you do beautiful things?': aesthetics and art in qualitative methods of organization studies, in Buchanan, D. and Bryman, A. (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods*. London: Sage, pp. 230–45.
- Stüdt, D. (2008). *The Language of Things*. London: Penguin.
- Welsch, W. (1996). Aestheticization processes. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 13(1): 1–24.



## ROUTLEDGE COMPANIONS

'...is an inspired collection that revitalizes and re-imagines philosophical engagement in organization studies. I would challenge anyone to come away from reading it without being surprised, challenged, stimulated.'

**Andrew Crane**, *George R. Gardiner Professor of Business Ethics, York University, Canada*

Willmott and Greenwood have assembled leading scholars to provide a much needed in-depth exploration of the philosophical foundations of organization studies. It is an essential read for students and academics who want to understand how philosophy is elemental to the field.'

**La Nkomo**, *University of Pretoria, South Africa*

...one might ask why philosophy should play any role in conducting research in organization studies. This new beautifully orchestrated collection reflects most facets of organizational life, and includes topics ranging from the philosophical foundations of organizational studies to the reality of inequality in organizations. As one is through the collection, however, one understands why the question could never be whether philosophy should play a role, but given the many roles it does play, covertly and overtly, whether those roles deserve recognition. The talented and well-respected editors of this volume make clear that the answer is "yes."

**Thomas Donaldson**, *University of Pennsylvania, USA*

*Routledge Companion to Philosophy in Organization Studies* provides a wide-ranging overview of the significance of philosophy in organizations. The volume brings together a veritable 'who's-who' of scholars that are acclaimed international experts in their specialist subject within organizational studies philosophy.

...contributions to this collection are grouped into three distinct sections:

**Foundations** – exploring philosophical building blocks with which organizational researchers need to become familiar.

**Theories** – representing some of the dominant traditions in organizational studies, and how they are dealt with philosophically.

**Topics** – examining the issues, themes and topics relevant to understanding how philosophy infuses organization studies.

...nearly aimed at students and academics associated with business schools and organizational research, *a Routledge Companion to Philosophy in Organization Studies* is a valuable reference source for anyone engaged in this field.

**Raza Mir** is Professor of Management at William Paterson University, USA. He currently serves as the Chair of the Critical Management Studies Division of the Academy of Management.

**Hugh Willmott** is Professor of Management at Cass Business School, City University, London and Research Professor of Organization Studies at Cardiff Business School, UK. He is currently an Associate Editor of *Academy of Management Review*.

**Michelle Greenwood** is Senior Lecturer in Business Ethics at Monash University, Australia. She currently serves as an Associate Editor at *Business & Society* and *Journal of Business Ethics*.

### BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Illustrations: © Mark Gering Meyer, MAK – Australian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art

ROUTLEDGE business

ISBN 978-0-415-70286-7



9 780415 702867

**ROUTLEDGE**  
Taylor & Francis Group

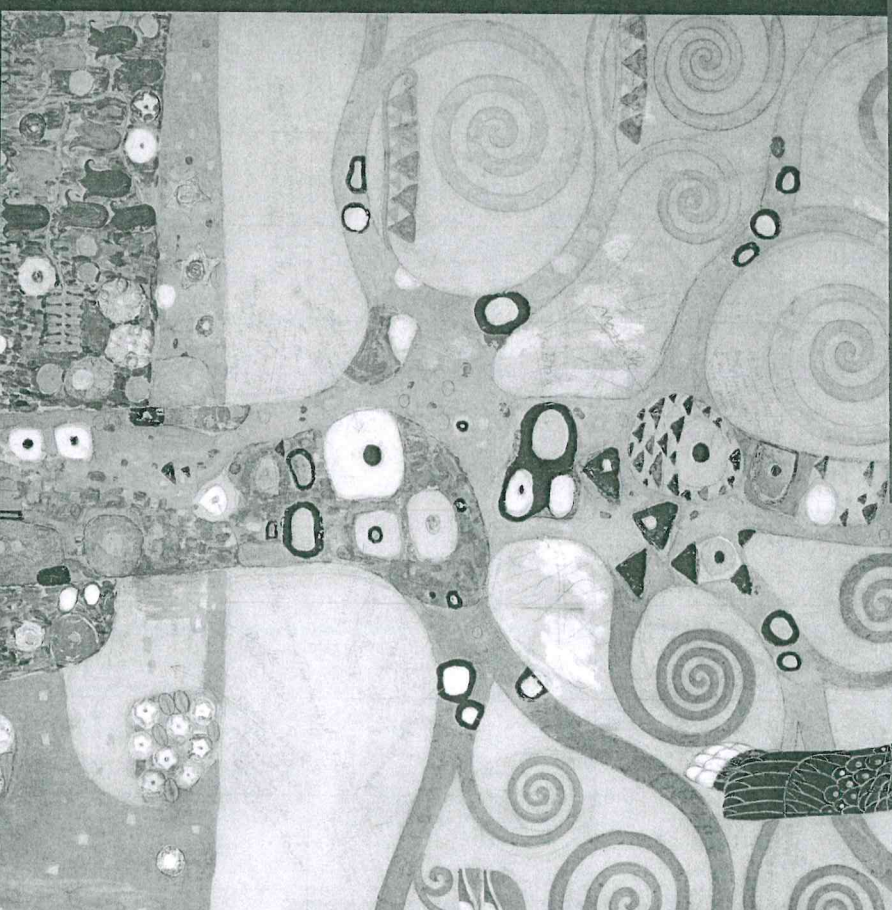
www.routledge.com

Routledge titles are available as Adobe editions in a range of digital formats.

The Routledge Companion to Philosophy in Organization Studies  
Edited by Raza Mir, Hugh Willmott and Michelle Greenwood



ROUTLEDGE  
COMPANIONS



# The Routledge Companion to Philosophy in Organization Studies

Edited by Raza Mir, Hugh Willmott and  
Michelle Greenwood



First published 2016  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN  
and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*  
© 2016 selection and editorial material, Raza Mir, Hugh Willmott  
and Michelle Greenwood; individual chapters, the contributors

The right of the editors to be identified as the authors of the editorial material,  
and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance  
with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or  
reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical,  
or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying  
and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system,  
without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks  
or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification  
and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

The Routledge companion to philosophy in organization studies/  
edited by Raza Mir, Hugh Willmott and Michelle Greenwood.

pages cm. — (Routledge companions in business, management and  
accounting)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-415-70286-7 (hardback) — ISBN 978-0-203-79524-8 (ebook)

1. Organization. I. Mir, Raza A., editor. II. Willmott, Hugh, editor. III.

Greenwood, Michelle, editor. IV. Title: Companion to philosophy in

organization studies.

HM711.R65 2015

658.1—dc23

2015014486

ISBN: 978-0-415-70286-7 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-79524-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo and Stone Sans  
by Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon, UK



Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

# Contents

*Notes on contributors* xiv  
*Acknowledgements* xxxi

Introduction: philosophy in organization studies – life, knowledge  
and disruption 1  
*Raza Mir, Hugh Willmott and Michelle Greenwood*

## PART I Foundations 13

1 Ontology: philosophical discussions and implications for organization  
studies 15  
*Ismael Al-Amoudi and Joe O'Mahoney*

2 Epistemology: philosophical foundations and organizational  
controversies 33  
*Andreas Georg Scherer, Elisabeth Does and Emilio Marti*

3 Ethical philosophy, organization studies and good suspicions 51  
*Edward Wray-Bliss*

4 Methodology: philosophical underpinnings and their implications 66  
*Joanne Duberley and Phil Johnson*

## PART II Theories 85

5 Discourse as organizational and practical philosophy 87  
*Rick Iedema*

6 Feminist organization theories: islands of treasure 100  
*Yvonne Benchop and Mieke Verloo*

7	Hermeneutics in organization studies <i>Michael D. Myers</i>	113	20	The Body: philosophical paradigms and organizational contributions <i>Torleif Thønen</i>	276
8	Institutional theory: reflections on ontology <i>Tim Edwards</i>	125	21	Brands: critical and managerial perspectives <i>Adam Arvidsson</i>	285
9	Marxism: a philosophical analysis of class conflict <i>Richard Marens and Raza Mir</i>	138	22	Capital as a neglected, yet essential, topic for organization studies <i>Harry J. Van Buren III</i>	293
10	Postcolonial theory: speaking back to empire <i>Gavin Jade</i>	151	23	Commodification and consumption <i>Douglas Brownlie</i>	301
11	Poststructuralist theory: thinking organization otherwise <i>Stephen Linstead</i>	171	24	Commons and organization: potentiality and expropriation <i>Casper Hoedemakers</i>	309
12	Practice theory: what it is, its philosophical base, and what it offers organization studies <i>Jørgen Sandberg and Haridimos Tsoukas</i>	184	25	Conflict theorizing in organization theory: a political philosophical reading <i>Alessia Contu</i>	317
13	Pragmatism and organization studies <i>Bilhan L. Parmar, Robert Phillips and R. Edward Freeman</i>	199	26	Control: philosophical reflections on the organizational limits to autonomy <i>Graham Sewell</i>	324
14	Psychoanalysis and the study of organization <i>Yiannis Gabriel</i>	212	27	Corporation: reification of the corporate form <i>Jeroen Velman</i>	333
15	Queer theory <i>Nick Rumens and Melissa Tyler</i>	225	28	Debt for all: towards a critical examination of organizational roles in debt practices and financialization <i>Suhail Riaz</i>	343
16	Structuration theory: philosophical stance and significance for organizational research <i>Matthew Jones</i>	237	29	Decision-making: coping with madness beyond reason <i>Peter Edward</i>	352
<b>PART III</b>			30	Democracy: philosophical disputes and organizational governance <i>Phil Johnson and Joanne Duberley</i>	361
<b>Special Topics</b>			31	Diversity studies: the contribution of black philosophers <i>Elaine Swan</i>	370
17	Aesthetics and design: an epistemology of the unseen <i>Antonio Strati</i>	251	32	Environment, extracivism and the delusions of nature as capital <i>Steffen Böhm and Maria Cécé Misoczky</i>	379
18	Ageing: the lived experience of growing up and older in organizations <i>Kathleen Riach</i>	260	33	Finance: finding a philosophical fit? <i>Geoff Lightfoot and David Hawte</i>	388
19	Agency at the intersection of philosophy and social theory <i>Tracy Wilcox</i>	268			



34	Globalization and the rise of the multinational corporation <i>Guido Palazzo</i>	395
35	Governance: changing conceptions of the corporation <i>André Spicer and Bobby Banerjee</i>	403
36	Historiography and the 'historic turn' in organization theory <i>Michael Rowlinson</i>	412
37	Humour and Organization <i>Nick Butler</i>	421
38	Identity and philosophy in organizations: a feminist/the blind spot <i>Kate Kenny and Nancy Harding</i>	430
39	Inequality and organizations <i>Hari Bapuji and Sandeep Mishra</i>	439
40	Justice: re-membering the Other in organizations <i>Carl Rhodes</i>	449
41	Leadership: philosophical contributions and critiques <i>Jonathan Gosling and Peter Case</i>	458
42	Management and its others <i>Campbell Jones</i>	466
43	Measurement and statistics in 'organization science': philosophical, sociological and historical perspectives <i>Michael J. Zyphur, Dean C. Prides and Jon Roffe</i>	474
44	Needs and organizations: the case for the philosophical turn <i>Cristina Neesham</i>	483
45	Organization and philosophy: vision and division <i>Martin Parker</i>	491
46	Paradigms, the philosophy of science and organization studies <i>John Hassard</i>	499
47	Performativity: towards a performative turn in organizational studies <i>Jean-Pascal Gond and Laure Cabanious</i>	508
48	Power and organizations: a brief but critical genealogy <i>Stewart Clegg</i>	517

49	Quantification as a philosophical act <i>Amit Nigam and Diana Trujillo</i>	525
50	Two tales about resistance: management vs. philosophy <i>Carl Cederström</i>	533
51	Rituals in organizations: rupture, repetition and the institutional event <i>Gazi Islam</i>	542
52	Spirituality, religion and organization <i>Emma Bell and Scott Taylor</i>	550
53	Strategy, power and practice <i>David L. Levy</i>	559
54	Trust: foundations and critical reflections <i>Reinhard Bachmann</i>	568
55	Value: an inquiry into relations, forms and struggles <i>Craig Prichard</i>	575
56	Visual: looking at organization <i>Samantha Warren</i>	584
57	Work: the philosophical limits of an idea in the neo-liberal age <i>Peter Fleming</i>	592

## Index