

Research, curation and writing differently – a review of *Aesthetics, Organization and Humanistic Management*

Aesthetics, Organization and Humanistic Management falls within an existing series, *Humanistic Management*, published by Routledge. For readers unfamiliar with the notion of humanistic management, the introduction to the series (appearing on page iii) contains everything a reader would need to know to appreciate the book and is a helpful gateway to understanding the book's focus. According to the Humanistic Management Network, "... organizations exist to serve people" (Humanistic Management Network 2020) and human dignity is an important principle among its tenets. Human dignity is more than mere human existence and human doing - it is human flourishing. We know, however, that there are many challenges to human dignity that render the human vulnerable.

On first consideration, the coupling of humanistic management and aesthetics might seem odd. However, the editors, Kostera and Woźniak, state their position quickly. The charge against management and organisational knowledge is that it is limited but "seductive". This knowledge offers simple solutions, attractively packaged, to complex problems without obvious or unproblematic solutions, and ignores the "complexity" and "diversity" found in organisational life (Kostera and Woźniak 2021, page 1). Furthermore, our present urgency, the pandemic, has revealed the fissures and inequalities between peoples on different continents and in different social conditions, drawing the inescapable conclusion that the current ways of managing and organising have not served humanity or the planet well at all. These ideas are still mainstream in organisations and business schools (Parker 2018). Yes, the coupling seems not just compatible but critical. The reader immediately knows that they are likely to encounter some frame-breaking ideas.

Aesthetics, as well as being a theoretical practice, is also "a part of our everyday life" (Soila-Wadman 2020, page 114) and occurs in any form of organising. So, the coupling of humanistic management and aesthetics is timely, because it is a social endeavour for creating something that speaks to humanity and because it involves the active participation of those who engage with it, including managers and leaders. For example, Falkowski (2020, page 202) debates how management could engage with art and why it should. The chapter asserts that management does not have to be concerned just with organising and control. Management is also concerned with the act of creation which requires onlooker-participant-reader involvement. Participation in all forms of artful endeavour is a step to creating better workplaces and flourishing humans.

This book argues a case for aesthetically informed research within the context of humanistic management practice and shows how aesthetic understanding can enhance, enrich, and improve the human experience when conjoined with humanistic management.

Aesthetics, Organization and Humanistic Management adds to the calls for less conventional and broader-based research that might address the "ecological, cultural, economic and political" problems faced by society (Kostera and Woźniak 2021, page 2). Aspects of aesthetics taken as human endeavour also reveal a broader view of human activity and organisational life. Aesthetics covers categorisations of things, perceptions, behaviour, and analyses of power distribution. As an example, Laberschek (2020, page 150), in an investigation of the distinct types and purposes of monuments, reveals how the powerful commissioners of monuments represent ideas, events and people.

In the condition such as we find ourselves in now, especially with the challenges of COVID19, the challenges of climate catastrophe and uneven distribution of both power and resources, the search for new learning and unleashing learning potential is critical for the human ability to wrestle with complex and intractable problems. Over fifteen chapters, this book showcases a wide range of research and investigation through various forms of human aesthetic endeavour. The chapters are discrete and the research uses methods involving aesthetics to inquire or concern art in its widest sense to enhance understanding and optimise sense-making for all organisational members. The latter is an activity that all humans should enjoy to promote human flourishing and many of the chapters engage in this way.

It is an invidious task to even think of singling out particular chapters as many contributions left lingering but actionable thoughts. In what follows, however, I give a taste, my curation if you like, of what a reader will find. The fifteen chapters exhibit research involving many forms of human creation from films, the study of monuments, performance art, language, reflection and writing creatively for imagining a different future. There are also many intersections between the chapters.

The problem with management is its oversimplification of organisational, human and social issues. The application of aesthetics and humanistic management as a counterbalance to the limiting and reductive dominant view opens up the prospect of a richer perspective seen through the lens of many artistic activities and other dimensions of human life. Of the many issues with contemporary texts in management, one issue is how they drift into something convenient and lazy. To address this, Kociatkiewicz (2020, page 22) highlights how the meaning and purpose of seminal management texts such as those by Maslow and Taylor have drifted and become reduced to memorable and convenient snippets. There are injustices in this because a close reading of these texts does reveal that the writers, whilst attending to efficiency and productivity, did not disregard the human. However, the practice has not been to contextualise the texts. There is such drift now that the texts deserve reconsideration and reinterpretation. This is a useful warning to curriculum developers.

There are examples of different forms of writing which play to the "writing differently" turn. Graczyk (2020, page 61) reminds us that language is political and "a phenomenon (or a process) that was established as the tool serving to conduct the division of labour and power". The organisation and conventions of language reveal the subjects of layers of domination. Graczyk argues that we can use language to subvert what has become normal to hope for a different state.

Using poetry as an example, Dahl, de Monthoux, & Helin (2020) urge readers to consider the form of writing that the representation of the research or phenomenon requires. This is an appeal to researchers to ask the question, "what form of writing does this require?"; in this, we can add "scriptology" (Rhodes 2019, page 3) to sit alongside ontology and epistemology. More than that, however, there is a plea for reading and writing that makes "academic texts engrossing and beautiful rather than just informative" (Kociatkiewicz 2020, page 29), thereby releasing the human from the stultifying straitjacket of the convention. Ericsson (2020, page 189) also discusses writing that follows a disciplinary plan and contrasts that with writing that evokes the reader's fancy and imagination. Only the reader's subjective experience and, I would add, willingness to take part, constrains – the writer presents but the reader interprets.

In a discussion of the film, *The Hudsucker Proxy*, Peters and Strauß (2020, page 31) illustrate how in organisations there is a veneer of order concealing the reality of complexity and chaos in the pursuit of "technologies of control" (Peters and Strauß 2020, page 33). The film plays with the dualism of "control/non-control", "order and mess" through visual and geometric forms of circles and lines. The authors see circles and straight lines as metaphors for control or freeness. As an antidote to the

atomised and reduced ideas which prevail in management and organisation, Letiche (2020, page 217) uses the metaphor of film - the thin and often transparent layers of material - for pursuing a deeper understanding of phenomena. Writing from an ethnographic perspective, Moriceau, Mairesse & Fronda (2020, page 94) reflect on how organising activity transforms space and query the suitability of organisations to be somewhere in which the human can flourish.

In reading the book, I noticed the incidence of the human activity of curating. The curator exercises choice and makes judgments, deciding the merits or value of a work of art, and, more importantly, I think, who gets access to it. Kudelska (2020, page 73) draws an analogy between alchemy and curating – that is, the turning of the ordinary, perhaps the mediocre and baseless, into something of value. Kudelska resurrects the memory of a fictitious Ernesta Thot and creates a narrative about her as a vehicle for the argument. By creating an entirely believable historical but fictitious character, Kudelska draws our attention to the practice of choice and curation. Curators, through their judgements of value and utility, do what alchemists did. They elevate the everyday object to an art form. Similarly, Carnegie (2020, page 172) investigates how the curating of artefacts and art influences how the onlooker views the subjects and creators of the art and discusses contemporary debates about how we see others through created artworks.

Essential to the practice of Humanistic Management is the focus on dignity. This implies a spotlight on gender-power relations which is, of course, important to this journal. Through the aesthetic gaze of literature, Chapters 6 and 15 (Graczyk 2020; Letiche 2020) both point the way for readers to see the gender-power relations play out and the opportunity for resistance and pushback presented therein.

The authors have themselves employed many artistic and linguistic devices to illustrate their points and this has given the text much colour. There are examples of storytelling, metaphor, imagination and artifice. There are many examples of the practice of writing differently. The sweep of the book promotes the idea that when we engage with aesthetics, we co-create or perhaps recreate the work by bringing in our context and experience. This is momentary unless we elect to share our meanings and interpretations.

The coupling of aesthetics and humanistic management calls on us to unravel the commonly-held view of humans and workers and organisational processes as we are encouraged to pay attention " ... to both the sensual and sensible parts of human beings in organisational and societal activities" (Di Pisa and Stasinski 2020, page 125) and in this way, imagine better futures. Engagement with the aesthetic stirs the human to see what is going on and "...inform us of the way disruptions collide with the regular, the familiar, the ordinary " (Peters and Strauß 2020, page 34). Engagement with aesthetics also assists with making sense of the world about us and increases our capacity to think about difference, imagine and invent solutions to the multifaceted and problems we face through the aesthetic gaze of literature.

How could a reader approach this book? This book has neither sections nor groups of themes as chapters. I approached it in its entirety and linearly but found that I was left to interpret and reinterpret on subsequent readings. My first desire to impose structure resulted in a series of analytical categories. However, once I began to reflect and write, I saw the many threads and connections between the chapters. I subsequently revisited the initial categories during the writing of this review and saw how by returning to the ideas in several of the chapters, the act of interpretation and reinterpretation is a gift for the reader. In a small way, and I hope more benign than some forms of curating, I find that in writing this I have become curator, selecting what to 'catalogue' and discuss.

There is much here to enjoy in this book for its own sake and there are many joys and surprises within and between the chapters. I was, however, distracted by the number of typographical errors I found as I read the eBook. I hope that these aberrations are glitches in the rendering and do not appear in the hardcopy book because this is a book that will have relevance for a long time to come and deserves a place on every Business School Dean's and Faculty Director of Research's bookshelf. The book is bold, brave and relevant.

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