

A HERMENEUTICS OF ACTION

--an aesthetic perspective for business economists

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Summary.

The beautiful and the sublime are criteria for judging actions and objects produced by business organizations giving relevance to aesthetics for management. Following this development makes art and artists provide input to business and product development. This has in turn made us aware of new forms of production based on interpretation for artists make new contributions to art by adapting a method called “hermeneutics of action” because it does not imply making new texts of old ones (as does philosophical hermneutics) but making new things out of old art.

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WHAT DOES AN AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVE MEAN?

What is beautiful and why?

Often the word “aesthetic” is blithely used when referring to something beautiful in much the same way as “ethical” is used when referring to something morally good. Behind this everyday usage there is a whole school of thought backed up by any number of philosophers who claim to be dealing with “aesthetics.” In a time when businesses and their economists try to create value using attractively designed products, exciting experiences and other events that border on art and entertainment, there are many good reasons to explore what “aesthetics” means and how one should define an “aesthetic perspective” on business. Behind this is implied the question of whether a methodology exists for producing that which can be associated with aesthetic experience.

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Aesthetics is a European modern approach!

Let us begin by defining what an aesthetic perspective might be seen to be. A scientific and critical stance demands that we specify that aesthetics is not something that is valid for all people, everywhere and at all times. To understand the meaning of the word “aesthetics,” one can go back in history. Thinking about what is beautiful and why is possibly something that people have always done. But “aesthetics” as a perspective is more precise than this. It is a way to systematize ideas about what is beautiful and magnificent as one began to do during the Enlightenment era of the 18th century, about the same time as a group of Scots and Frenchmen began to systematize ideas about business into something that we now call “economics.” Aesthetic philosophy followed in the wake of the enlightenment, first with men like Kant and Baumgarten, and later with the Romantic era philosophers Schelling, Hegel and Schopenhauer leading the way. If we would like systematically to delve further into an aesthetic perspective, then we must follow in the path of these philosophers.

Kant laid the foundation to the aesthetic perspective

The great thinker Kant laid the foundation to modern European aesthetics. It is important to understand his thinking, because it will mark the limits to an aesthetic perspective. Kant had just written the second of his great books and titled it *The Critique of Pure Reason*. When he wrote this, Kant was an elderly gentleman who had gotten the idea that he would create a comprehensive system of thought for the modern enlightened person. He called his books, “Critiques” because his idea was that we human beings create an understanding of the world on our own. This understanding does not come from without; not from some self-sufficient god. For this reason, we cannot through study or research come to an absolute knowledge that exists independently of us. What we know is always created by us. We may possibly sense “the thing in itself,” but we can never attain and examine it.

In his first book, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant discusses that which we today call “natural science,” knowledge about nature and physics; the knowledge of concrete things. In his second book he writes about that knowledge that reveals how we humans should

relate to each other; what we call morals or ethics. But now, old Kant felt that something was missing, a third book was needed to make his modern philosophical system of thought complete. What was missing, his third book, provides what we can call the aesthetic perspective.

Kant's third book in which modern European aesthetics is developed he called, *The Critique of Judgment*. Kant thought, in other words, that aesthetics is something that one needs in order to make judgments, to offer an opinion about something, to make decisions. This may seem strange, but it is important to understand especially for us economists who claim that we are good at making decisions in various management contexts. Kant believed thus that aesthetics has to do with decision making. How?

The goal: understanding totalities!

Kant thought that we could not understand how the world fits together; we cannot make judgments, assess or decide without having the faculty of judgment. Without this faculty the world becomes a chaotic mess of facts and data that don't fit together and lack meaning and structure. To create order in this mess we have to give shape to our impressions. We must create structure, and it is as part of this process that aesthetics has its role. Aesthetics helps us to create context and meaning in our reality. To have an aesthetic perspective means to assemble knowledge fragments into something that has meaning.

By writing a third book about this kind of creativity, Kant shows us that it is just this third way that gives us what we today call creativity, as defined as the ability to shape or assemble totalities. This is not a process for the natural sciences, the first way; nor ethics, the second way. It is not what he writes about in his first and second book. Rather aesthetics is the key to our ability to formulate something coherent and meaningful about reality. It is the ability to create images, visions, understandings of how different facts, different puzzle pieces of information and facts fall in place. This kind of creativity exists in the space between ethics and science through the third perspective, aesthetics.

The sublime

When something is pleasing and beautiful this meant for Kant that it also helps us to comprehend totalities. That which makes something beautiful is thus its totality. When businesses want to present themselves as a totality of their products and services they often try to create something beautiful with the help of design or advertising. Design and advertising and other cultural products are often not only beautiful. They can also be “radical” and cool. They can be magnificent and give us a sense of the business and its products as something that Kant called “sublime” (“sublime” actually means magnificent). What we today might call “cool” is exactly what Kant would have termed sublime. For him, that which is beautiful and pleasing was as the daytime and sunlight. The sublime was as the nighttime and the cold full moon of the vampire. Both the beautiful and the sublime belong to the aesthetic perspective and create in us a feeling that has a formative function. This feeling provides a coherency in what we have heard and seen. Sublime design sums up all of the characteristics of a product into a totality that we can comprehend as being meaningful. The exquisite formula in a physicist’s research summarizes in a pleasing manner all of the observations made into a theory that gives meaning to the physicist’s work. That something is neat, pleasing or “cool” is thus a prerequisite for our comprehending it as meaningful. Aesthetics, this philosophy that begins with Kant, is thus a description of how we shape coherent knowledge. How does this type of knowledge development work?

Subjective objectivity

OK, so now we understand that it all begins with feeling. We experience beauty or the sublime. Of course all of our feelings are subjective: it is you or I who feel something. In this way aesthetics might seem to be based only in preference or opinion. It might seem to be fuzzy and vague, something that doesn’t at all have to do with knowledge. But the point with aesthetics is to demonstrate that this type of subjective feeling really does have a value beyond my own enjoyment and experience. It is simply a matter of taking such feelings seriously in spite of the fact that they are subjective and vague. These feelings have a value even though they are only experienced by you and you may not be able to

express in words exactly what it is that you are experiencing. Let us see how Kant with his aesthetics argues this.

Kant writes that subjective feeling is a gateway that may lead to an objective truth. This feeling may thus lead us to objectivity, and become a guide to knowledge and truth. That something is beautiful or sublime is thus not just a passing fancy; it actualizes the issue of truth. If you believe that something is pleasing, then of course this is your own feeling. But you often share this feeling with others. This *aesthetic* feeling, as opposed to other kinds of feeling, is in this way a generalized *human* feeling. It joins the subject, the individual, with other subjects. It welds us together in groups, organizations and societies. It builds a social collective reality.

That this is true is something that everyone who has devoted themselves to political propaganda and advertising has known for a long time. In political parties, businesses, theaters, concert halls, museums and opera houses people gather who perhaps only have this aesthetic feeling in common. What is subjectively isolating at the same time works as a kind of social glue, the mortar for building societies. It is this understanding that is making those who work in corporations, which are in fact complex social systems, now more than ever be interested in aesthetics. Business economists are also interested in the aesthetic perspective. What then does this mean?

Images and sounds rather than language and words

An aesthetic perspective is that which makes us respect and understand the feeling that creates a context that brings people together. This feeling is not something that needs to be communicated through language. Everyone seated in a theater, shopping at a

department store or listening to a pop concert can surely not describe with words what they have in common. If we were to go out into the crowd with questionnaires and interviews most would not be able to say how it was that they found each other in music, film or theater as a shared interest. Nonetheless they do have something in common. Kant said that such a group perceives without precepts. By this he meant that should we be forced to put words on our aesthetic feeling we would fail. Perhaps such attempts to capture the content of feeling would only result in the feeling being destroyed or disappearing. This is why one cannot do conventional market research about aesthetics. You cannot ask people why they think something is beautiful. There are no words that can be put to aesthetic phenomena. But they do exist nonetheless, even though the scientists, sociologists, psychologists and everyone else who would like to use words to explain, cannot find a terminology that describes what these phenomena are about. How then are we to approach aesthetics? Why do traditional methods fail and can one perhaps find new ways or methods that adequately account for aesthetics?

LEARNING FROM ART AND ARTISTS

Is there an aesthetic method?

In one way one can say that aesthetics and all of its philosophers have taken a pretty odd task upon themselves. They ask us, modern rational beings, to take seriously a phenomenon that cannot be described using accepted scientific methods. If we were to go out with our usual methodological butterfly nets in an attempt to capture aesthetics, we would eventually begin to doubt its existence. Very little material would actually be caught in our questionnaires, check lists, computer analyses, or whatever other virtual butterfly nets we wave about. But nevertheless we cannot close our eyes to the fact that what Kant and Co. describe actually exists in our midst. We see and experience the power of aesthetics everywhere in society and in business. Following Kant were the Romantic era philosophers who felt that natural scientists, that is those who truly are methodical in their experiments and observations, should gain a respect for this non-traditional methodological perspective. Scientists know how to carefully observe, classify and define whatever they are studying. But at the same time they know that no-one will ever discover a new theory or make a new discovery if he or she is not able to create a

context of all the data that they have painstakingly gathered using their methods. A scientist gathers data using scientific methods and systematic observation. But the creation of context, the final step in research, does not follow from the same methodology. Science, the Romantics said, is thus the fruit of applying an aesthetic perspective to that which one has earlier gathered with the help of scientific methodology; it is, one could say, creating a synthesis of analyzed data.

During the 19th century, the Romantics wanted to push for the use of an aesthetic perspective in the natural sciences. Today a similar effort is being made to bring aesthetics into the world of business. Politicians who consider design and culture to be important creators of value think that we should redefine traditional categories of industry. They prefer to talk about “creative industries” or “experience industries” exactly because these designations provide openings into an aesthetic perspective. The aesthetic perspective leads in turn to a different view of how to run a business. This redefinition of modern business began in England where Tony Blair sought to promote business within expansive sectors such as telecommunications, IT and music. In the US, during the late 90’s, the “experience industry” came to be the designation for businesses in the service sector who provided entertaining experiences in theater-like formats. Starting in the mid-nineties, this has led to their being a kind of industrial neo-romanticism that advocates art and artists as true sources of inspiration for businesses of the future. This then has brought up the question of which methods and techniques should be used to run these businesses, the ensuing debate gives an echo of the 19th century view of science as an aesthetic artistic activity. Now is the time for businesses and business economists to learn from art and artists.

Are there methods for art?

Who has ever seen a patented formula for making a work of art? It is impossible to make list of the ingredients in a certifiably beautiful painting or a sublime piece of music. Does this mean that art and artistic business can survive without methods and rules? No, says Kant, a painter or a composer cannot manage without the color wheel and musical notation. These methods and techniques are absolutely essential, but not in themselves

sufficient to create a work of art with aesthetic power. There are of course methods and techniques that are needed to make a coffee pot or a car. But there is no method or technique that will give you an Alessi or create a Ferrari. Similarly tailoring methods and knowledge of the properties of fabric are important to dressmaking. There are no doubt methods that help IKEA or H&M in copying what Vivienne Westwood or Ettore Sottsass once created. John Galliano was not employed by Dior because he knew the fashion business, but rather because he dared to break with established methods and traditions in fashion.

That a corkscrew is shown at a museum of design, a poster hung at a museum of art, or a motorcycle exhibited at the Guggenheim is not through a creativity that lacks method. A new interest in art means that we today no longer believe in a naïve and completely free creativity. We can not create, either in science or in business, without connection to tradition and method. This kind of creativity leads only to whims, caprices, folly and confusion. There may in all of this be fun ideas, or exciting notions, but they never get concretized in reality. They never become actual works of art or viable businesses. Everything creative is thus founded upon method. This, on the other hand, does not always mean that one should follow a method.

The aesthetic perspective that has made it possible for us to talk about art with the business world, can also explain the difference between *following* a method and *being founded* upon one.

Artists and methods?

If we study how artists work, we will find that most master techniques. Picasso could as a fourteen year-old paint in the academic style, as he had learned this from his father, an art teacher. Salvador Dali was proud of being able to paint using a layering technique like the old Flemish masters. Andy Warhol earned for a long time more money as a copy

artist than by his own work. As a young man, Ingmar Bergman learned all he could about cameras, light and film so as not to be at the mercy of lazy studio technicians who claimed that his ideas for film direction could not be implemented. Stravinsky could compose like Mozart or Bach and Frank Zappa had no problems with music notation. Artists who are not masters of their technique have to rely on outside help and craftsmen. Jeff Koons worked with wood sculptors in Val Gardena, the French sculptor Sosno ordered his marble sculptures from Carrara, Irving Berlin would apparently whistle his new melodies—just as the composer of the musical *Les Miserables*, Claude Michel Schoenberg—to an assistant trained in musical notation.

That artists know their medium, either image or sound, does not mean that their understanding of method is complete to the task of creating a work of art. Picasso devoted his whole life to breaking against conventions and techniques. What separates Salvador Dali from kitsch—even if the difference is slight—does not have to do with technique or method. Bergman used his technical knowledge to push through new ideas among the more orthodox film technicians on the studio floor at SF (the Swedish film industry). Stravinsky loved to create scandal among classical music lovers. An artist's creativity is founded on method, but is more often directed toward breaking the convention of method than following it. Sometimes this means that they turn their backs on methods, but in order for there to be a scandal or any effect at all, the audience and the artist must be familiar with these methods. There has to be something to go against, and that becomes the role of method. For this reason, art must be founded on method.

But scandals are not that common. Most often it more about engaging in *play* with the method, rather than *contradicting* it. This kind of play is probably what we most often find examples of in the world of business. Alessi plays with the coffee pot's systematology and the automotive industry's concept cars are a play on the methodical aesthetic of serial production. The furniture company Källemo engages in play with traditional Swedish form, just as fashion designers play with last year's fashion. This play is often quite sophisticated and clever. Something for connoisseurs who know to appreciate a droll reference to some classic; a small knowingly ironic sidestep in the

usual methodology. In advertising we find any number of cross references of a humoristic, ironic, cynical and even sarcastic nature. But all of these variations have one thing in common, even here methods, traditions and patterns are needed. Even here a methodological base is necessary.

A HERMENEUTICS OF ACTION

To interpret or to shape

So let us recapitulate briefly; the aesthetic perspective sees the creation of meaning as something central. It is about creating meaning in a jumble of facts, and this occurs through subjective experiences which then lead to an objectively shared understanding of context. This kind of creation of meaning is something that we now know best from the context of modern art. Contemporary artists show that the creation of meaning, instead of following methods, is founded on methods that artists contradict and play with.

Within the social sciences, the methodology most often associated with the creation of meaning is called hermeneutics. The methodology in aesthetics, which we have now begun to discern, only partly corresponds to what is most often referred to as hermeneutics, this being an attempt at formulating a methodology for interpreting texts. Hermeneutics originally described theologians' interpretation of Holy Scripture: biblical interpretation.

When one reads a text, a string of words organized according to a grammar, one can also choose an aesthetic perspective that is directed toward understanding the totality of what one is reading. Hermeneutics represents all of the ways in which one seeks meaning over and above their dictionary meaning and the rules of grammar. The reader tries to create a meaning from the text that he or she reads. This meaning can be completely other than

what the author actually intended with the text. Hermeneutics is also not a kind of exegetics in which other previous texts are compared with the text being interpreted. The hermeneutic interpretation occurs, so to speak, in front of the text, not behind it. It would be foreign to the hermeneutician to claim to be able to grasp the intended meaning of a text. He or she can only put forth what the text means to them. However, and here aesthetics and hermeneutics agree, our interpretation of a text does at the same time make a claim to be an objective truth even though it is based on a subjective reading. Of course, one can debate this truth, it is not a rock solid eternal truth but rather dependent on everyone's ability to read and understand the text.

Regarding the question of differences in interpretation, there is a clear line that can be drawn separating a conventional textual hermeneutic and the aesthetic perspective. The aesthetic method, which is otherwise so closely related to the hermeneutics that we can call it a hermeneutics of action, creates rather than interprets. Its purpose is not to create yet another interpretation of the same book. Instead of turning to biblical scholars and other text hermeneuticians let us now return to contemporary artists to see what is meant by this term, a hermeneutics of action. For the artist acts, rather than writes (and should he write, it would be poetry rather than interpretation), when he interprets.

Presentation rather than discourse

The contemporary American philosopher Susan Langer has said that aesthetics follows a logic of presentation rather than a logic of discourse. She apparently agrees with what Kant held, we cannot use words to argue a point according to an aesthetic perspective, which looks to have us perceive without precepts. A textual hermeneutician reads a text (it doesn't need to be the Bible; it could be an interview that having done, one then interprets) and then writes down his interpretation which is then read by other interpreters who then confront it with their own interpretations of the same text. These kinds of debate, in which temporary truths about one and the same book are formulated and then reformulated, occur in a textual form in a discourse. An example might be a scientific sociological debate that occurs in a journal. In this process, one acts using words. But, Susan Langer writes, when it concerns aesthetics, rather than a discourse with words, it

becomes a matter of persuasion through presentation. One does not talk about something; one points to something and lets it speak for itself. The latter type of logic is predominant in the world of art and within businesses that may be found in the experience and creative industries and that produce art-like products and use art-like methods.

Artists do not try to be persuasive about their products using words and concepts. This is the work of art critics and not all who enjoy art read what the critics write. Artists present (exhibit, do performances, set up installations) their art in as striking a manner as possible. By this presentation they want to impress and persuade their audience. They do not describe their own work; they do not make a case of their work. Rather it seems as though the artist who speaks about and describes his or her own work, makes it grow pale and lose that mystical power that sometimes is called “aura.” In his thesis, “Sven Duchamp, expert in aura production,” Ivar Björkman provides a striking example from the world of business of how this type of logic of presentation has worked as an effective marketing tool for designed furniture from Källemo. Björkman’s thesis also provides an explanation for how a hermeneutics of action works as a method for a company that has used art and artists as its model. Sven Lundh, CEO of Källemo, used as his model for his way of running his design company the French Dadaist, Marcel Duchamp. From Duchamp, Lundh learned the art of balancing tradition and revolution; he understood how to create interesting objects that are imbued with secret significance. Many businessmen and managers have followed Sven Lundh’s example and turn to artists as models for managing, marketing, and shaping their businesses.

Competence in concretization

It is not at all far-fetched to speak of a hermeneutic method, because if we study artists more closely we will see that they too interpret. Artists participate in normal everyday life, which today is full of facts. Today it seems as though there are some isolated academics who only work with texts, the rest of us have our days full of moving images, sounds and music, video, film, web-presentations, animations, etc, etc. All of this is currently material for artists. Artists gather up these phenomena just as scientists gather facts and do experiments. Artists organize their material in a creative way to create an

order that in turn is a kind of proposal to the rest of us. Art consists today in proposals of meaningful patterns. Installations, exhibits, collage, events, performances are all collections of facts and observations that want to interpret the world for us. In this way, they are a kind of hermeneutic. Because contemporary artists rarely only write down what they have interpreted in texts, I call their activity a hermeneutics of action.

For all of these means of giving shape to the world and reorganizing the many flickering images that media offers us there actually are methods too. They are however hardly what one would consider artistic methods; they have nothing to do with painting, perspective drawing or modeling. Neither do they have to do with CAD or other technical means for providing representations of reality or managing symbols in some language. Such skills are a part of craftsmanship, which is important for artistic creativity but not equivalent to it. It can never hurt that an artist is able to depict a text pictorially, or recount what is happening in a sequence of images, but the ability to shape or concretize, for which we are now trying to find a method, is not a part of representation. Rather it is a part of presentation.

Thus we are looking for methods which are able to organize elements of reality into a totality that provides meaning. In other words, we are in that part of artistic creativity that is about aesthetics and its ability to concretize and give shape. What can we then say about this type of aesthetic method?

Aesthetic intervention?

Let us attempt to find this method first through its effects. We'll start with a few examples of businesses that a good friend of mine, the Italian design expert Simonetta Carbonaro, gives witness to. Let us see if it can bring us to understand the aesthetic method that gives an artistic shape to businesses.

The German company Dornbrach makes bathroom fixtures and furnishings: taps, pipes, bathtubs, showers, and other things that may be found in the bathroom. At the previous biennale in Venice the company was present as the main sponsor for the German

pavilion. No bathrooms were on exhibit there, but rather excellent contemporary art. Dornbrach's CEO had for a number of years regularly invited artists to create what were called "statements" that at times would refer to bathing, water and body as themes. No bathrooms or company logos appear in these statements which would then be documented in Dornbrach's advertising. The artists had been given complete freedom because the CEO valued their competence for concretizing Dornbrach's inner being. The result has most certainly been completely different than if an advertising company had been given the job. There is a different spirit in these images, a kind of freedom in relation to the company that an advertising firm would probably never have been able to manage, the pressure of budget and customer expectation would have become too great. Advertisers would begin to try and read what the customer wanted, sense how the market might interpret the message, figure out what would "hit home" and why. Exactly this lack of speculation and guessing at market reactions is an important element in the aesthetic method that has made Dornbrach's campaign a success.

Another of Simonetta's examples is the Italian company Fiorucci. Just as other representatives of Italian design and fashion, Fiorucci has distanced itself from the more speculative type of marketing campaigns. This company wants instead to present itself to the public in the same way that an artist presents his or her art. Fiorucci's goal is to cultivate its character, show the company's personality, its values. The idea is that Fiorucci's stores should be imbued with personality, which in turn will attract those who find that Fiorucci's system of values is consonant with their own. The focal point of this method is not to seek out the values of the general public, not to try and figure out what it is that people want, but rather to show what you yourself want to contribute.

Simonetta Carbonaro's motto for this aspect of the Fiorucci method is that one should ask oneself: what would the world lose if we didn't exist? The method seeks to find the answer to this question.

A third example comes from the artist Michelangelo Pistoletto, who at an advanced age created a center in northern Italy to support young artists who want to create "socially

responsible art.” He lets them come in contact with companies in the district so that they can create projects that are about entirely different aspects of the companies’ production than what one normally sees. An example:

A hat-maker who with good reason is quite proud of his old, reliable factory, the only factory that still makes felt hats like in the old days (his best known brand is Barbisio, which is made with water, natural dyes, and the fur from rabbit, beaver and hare—thus, no chemicals—and using the old machines and craftsmanship that those who now make Borsalino hats did away with long ago), invited a group of artists to visit. After showing off the production site and giving a detailed description of the wonderful properties of felt, he turned to the artists to ask for “some good ideas about design.” The artists, intuitively using their aesthetic method, responded in a completely unexpected fashion. Apparently, the hat-maker encountered a kind of competence that he has never come in contact with before. The artists didn’t have much use for the hat-maker’s technical information, the quality of the felt, and other data that he apparently uses to impress prospective clients. Instead they seized interest in some unfinished hat bodies in the workshop. What are you doing with that stuff? the hat-maker says, look at these models that we’re making for Hermes instead!

You’re wrong, says one of the artists, and with that demonstrates an important aspect of the aesthetic method. Your technical data doesn’t interest me at all, but an unfinished hat like this could be all the rage this fall if I show it to my friends in Paris. You should sell it to them directly; forget about design and fancy brands. You don’t understand what you’ve got here, you don’t understand how wonderful it is to play, feel, and form these hat bodies yourself! Anyone can make their own hat out of one of these. Give me a hundred and you’ll see...

While she has been talking her artist colleagues have all grabbed their own hat bodies and begun twisting and shaping their own hats. And the hat-maker begins to rethink the whole enterprise...

As a fourth example we should make mention of the many businesses that already collect art and have begun to invite artists to participate in activities within the organization. In the past there were royal theaters and royal jesters who were given the right to speak the truth to those in power. Now for example, Daimler Chrysler has chosen artists to head up product development groups together with engineers and technicians, so perhaps this is a modern form of this kind of intervention. The artist is chosen to represent a normal, thinking and feeling person, a subjective voice among all of the technical experts. In this way, discussion becomes more humane and one does not run the risk of being caught up in an interest for technical details and internal issues. The artist makes it possible to see projects and even the company as a whole from Ms Carbonaro's aesthetic perspective; in this way one can begin to find an answer to the question, "What would the world lose if we didn't exist?"

These examples demonstrate three common characteristics for aesthetic interventions. They show that an aesthetic perspective, represented by artists participating in a business' production or activity, helps to give shape to a totality (i.e. Fiorucci and Dornbracht) not by listing the business' various concrete elements (the products in these two companies), nor by creating a kind of symbol or sign (a logo or brand). Instead aesthetic method is about finding a third path, and it seems as if artists are best suited for this. Maybe this is because designers are so product-fixated while advertisers are mostly preoccupied by the issue of branding.

In all of these examples, the intervention requires that there be an audience: either viewer or listener. The market (Fiorucci and Dornbracht) and the organizations (the hat-maker Barbisio and Daimler Chrysler) are treated the same as a theater or art audience for whom a performance is being given. This leads to a slightly different approach than when one is looking for methods for communication or consultation. There is in a strict sense no message or content, as what one is aiming for is, as in Kant's thinking, to provoke a feeling that then begins to foment in an audience.

We find, especially in the case of the hat-maker, that the artist plays with methods. The idea of using hat bodies as a new fashion is based on a contrast with fashion dominated hat-makers. Instead of the usual luxury packaging with a fancy brand, the manufacturer should, according to the artistic method, break free from tradition and sell his unformed hats directly to young people who don't care about tradition but appreciate playfulness. In these examples there is an embryo of what we can call a hermeneutics of action; that is the method that is inspired by an aesthetic perspective.

PARTICIPANT VS SPECTATOR

Can one find a useable method in what we have said thus far? The fact is that if we combine aesthetic philosophy, insights from art, and cases showing how it seems to be when one involves artists in the business world then something becomes apparent that one might be able to call method. Let us finally suggest this hermeneutics of action.

Allowing artists to intervene systematically in the world of business, either through outwardly directed activity (vis a vis the market) or internally directed activity (vis a vis a company's internal organization and production), helps to bring a kind of playfulness to the business world that otherwise is often regulated by both administrative and technical rules and methods. The artist goes against, or actually more often plays with these methods. In this way he or she creates a free space that can enable better decisions and clearer judgment. This may seem trivial, but the fact is that many organizations are so neurotically involved in procedures and behaviors that an artistic intervention can provide a much needed breath of fresh air in a thoroughly bureaucratized environment.

In addition, an artistic intervention may lead to a vision of what it is that one wants — and is able to do in a company. The aesthetic perspective, as it has been preached by Kant and his successors, thus creates coherency in a fragmented world, it brings life to a multitude of cold, hard facts and infuses a business with soul. This happens today through bringing art to businesses since other consultant resources (advertising agencies, communications directors, change consultants, industry designers, branding experts, etc) apparently lack the right aesthetic competence. What happens in businesses who hire

artists is much like that which always happens when artists create performances, installations or other theatrical exhibits. Let us then go to the world of theater to see how the hermeneutics of action functions in practice.

In the past, before media was ubiquitous, one went to the theater to see how paintings, images and texts could gain life by being interpreted on the stage. This kind of interpretation did not lead to texts but to performance on stage in front of a set that often recreated famous paintings in three dimensions. Life and movement was given to a still life; flesh and blood together with live voices were given to written books in these exciting and fascinating melodramas that became huge successes during the 19th century.

The situation today is quite the opposite, and this affects our hermeneutics of action. Today, the moving image is to be found everywhere, and the air is full of sounds. The silent movie put image in motion; the “talking pictures” gave life to the actors’ lines. Video, TV, CD and other audiovisual techniques developed into a cascade of media spectacles. In this situation the artist and the arts have been given a different task; to calm and slow the pace, to subdue the noise. As media experts try to top each other with new methods that actually only provide speeded up versions of classical melodrama, many now turn to artists to get a little peace and quiet. The big picture view that the aesthetic perspective provides today is a contemplative one, in which the heat and stress of action films and of MTV videos has been brought to a halt. This is what Louise Bourgeois’ installations, Robert Wilson’s performances and Laurie Anderson’s music provides. In the business world, this is where artists and their successors are in demand. Business has understood that the hermeneutics of action is not equivalent to hyperactivity or acceleration.

The hermeneutics of action also involves another distinctive competence. Taking a sound or an image and composing a contemplative work of art from various audiovisual pieces requires that we are able to move freely from one medium to another. If we see the artist as an expert at imitation and replication then we know that he or she is able to depict a description that she has read or heard about, or that like a naturalistic author, is able to

describe what he has seen. But it is not illustrations or descriptions that we are looking for when we apply the aesthetic perspective. Rather, it is the movement between different media, which at times takes on unusual expression. When the great ballet master Diaghilev wanted to employ a new choreographer, he had a special trick that he used in the interview. He wanted to ensure that the candidate really did have aesthetic competence. Diaghilev used to take the choreographer in question to an art museum and put him in front of a famous painting. Then he would ask, “Do you think you can create ballet from this painting?” In the same way, the CEO of a fashion house expects that a new fashion designer should be able to derive new models from the fashion house’s tradition. How this will happen cannot really be described with words. Diaghilev used not to employ those who would begin to chatter away in front of the painting at the museum, but he would employ someone who simply nodded “yes.” Then through their performance, the choreographer would get to show if they really did master the hermeneutics of action.

This hermeneutic consists in a method which may be difficult to combine with a more academic mode. It requires an audience; it involves creativity manifested in performance and an easy and playful movement between different kinds of media. Perhaps it is in schools of art that one comes closest to a pedagogy with this aesthetic method. But given the demand for this kind of artistic competence from businesses it would not be surprising if business economists and their teachers soon begin to imitate the models for instruction used in art schools.

We see thus how art and artists teach us to regard the development of knowledge and learning in a different way—at least if we combine their teachings with the aesthetic philosophy that Kant laid the foundations for. Hopefully I have given examples that will help the reader see the difference between conventional hermeneutics, the kind that uses textual interpretation as a model, and a hermeneutics of action. That the art that artists create involves interpretation is obvious. Only someone who is completely uninformed would ever suppose that artists are freewheeling eccentrics with an ingenious ability to create, as if by magic, works of art from nothing. Of course this is not how it works.

Rather creativity involves twisting and turning everything that has been transmitted, archived, collected and documented. It is a piecing together, juggling, composing, or to use the more general word for all of this, a shaping. This type of activity is thus much broader and more complex than sitting like a wise monk and writing yet another book about the book of books: the Bible.

Let us finally take on a question that arises when I propose this hermeneutics of action in the context of methodology. I claim, using Kant and aesthetics as theoretical support, that art and artists can teach us a new way to generate knowledge. Normally the development of knowledge is something one conceives of as occurring in seclusion, by observing events and then, in peace and quiet, in a private study, doing an analysis of what one has seen, read or heard. This kind of analysis is what a student would call an essay, what the doctoral student would call a thesis, what the researcher would call a scientific book or article, and what a state official would call a report (of findings). Isn't, then, what artists do quite different from this? Most certainly! But is it so different that it can't be counted as developing knowledge? Does it belong in a book about scientific method? My reasoning that has its roots in Kant's aesthetics answers unequivocally YES to this last question. Let me, with an example of someone who according to most people would be considered the most "scientific," Isaac Newton, again try to specify the place of aesthetics and thus of art in scientific pursuits.

The economist John Maynard Keynes after having purchased at auction an old chest full of Newton's papers got a small shock when he began to leaf through Newton's hidden writings. What he found instead of logical and rational reasoning was that Newton had probably been deeply influenced by the alchemists' magical gold making. He seemed to have spent as much time doing alchemical experiments as in matching the planetary courses with a mathematical formula for the force of gravity. At the same time, it seemed as though Newton had done all he could to hide this magical side from outsiders. It wouldn't have seemed so fitting that the world's foremost scientist believed in making gold and in hidden mystical powers other than those of God the father. Those who have studied Newton would at the same time see that he had found inspiration to seek after

cohesive patterns joining fragmentary knowledge. Without alchemy he would simply not have been able to come upon the mathematical formula describing the power of gravity, this elegant formula for the organization of the universe. When people asked him how he figured it all out, he made up the story about the apple that fell on him when he was sitting in his mother's garden. This story is probably a complete fake, but it worked as camouflage for what actually happened; how alchemy brought the scientist to an elegant shaping of all of his and other astronomers' observations.

So like alchemy, art and artists have a role in the pursuit of knowledge. They provide inspiration to seeking patterns and totalities where the official scientific methods can only stack data and information in impossible piles. Art offers the scientists and theoreticians of today, just as alchemy gave Newton, what the English philosopher Gregory Bateson called, "the pattern that connects." And Bateson's "pattern-creating" definition is an elegant update of what Kant maintained was aesthetics' principle task.

For further reading

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