

Editor's Introduction "Art-Full" Government: On the Aesthetics of Politics and Public Administration

Eugenie Samier

This special issue of *Halduskultuur* is devoted to the exploration of an emerging field in administrative studies, aesthetic analysis. The papers grew out of a joint conference in April 2006 of the Departments of Political Science and Aesthetics at the University of Helsinki and *Halduskultuur*, held for one day at the University of Helsinki and the following day at Tallinn's Museum of Occupations. In preparation for this issue, a small network of scholars in Finland and Estonia with a common interest in aesthetics was formed the previous year to sketch out the potential scope of this approach. As part of our discussions, it became apparent that an aesthetic of administration was inextricably part of the aesthetics of politics, and so we broadened the scope of the conference to the "Aesthetics of Government". Therefore, this issue includes articles on public administration and politics, including a comparative study of police stations in three countries by Markku Temmes and an analysis of financial public management by Pertti Ahonen, as well as an exploration of the "Aesthetic Tension between Politics and Government" by Kyösti Pekonen and a study of political advertising in Finland by Juri Mykkanen.

An aesthetic analysis is very recent in organisation theory, emerging in the mid-1980s, initially with a conference on "Corporate Image" organised by the Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS) in Antibes, France in 1985.¹ The most notable contributors during this pioneering phase were Antonio Strati (1989, 1992, 1996, 1999), Rafael Ramirez (1996), David White (1996), and Mauro Guillén (1997). Organisational aesthetics quickly become an established perspective warranting a chapter by Pascale Gagliardi in the 1996 *Handbook of Organization Studies*. Aesthetics is the most recent major movement in administration, management and leadership studies, following from this development in organisation studies, supported also by work in the management of art organisations field (for example, see Guillet de Monthoux 1993; Ropo & Eriksson 1997) and journal special issues, *Organization* (vol. 3, no. 2, 1996), *Organizational Science* (vol. 9, no. 5, 1998), *Human Relations* (vol. 55, no. 7, 2002), *Consumption, Markets and Culture*

¹ I would like to thank Niina Koivunen who shared notes she prepared on the evolution of organisational aesthetics, for some of the information that follows.

(vol. 5, no.1, 2002) and *Consumption, Markets and Culture* (vol. 9 no. 2, 1996). One of the first in public administration to tackle aesthetics more explicitly is Charles Goodsell in “The Public Administrator as Artisan” (1992). While the notions of craft and artfulness have been with public administration theory for some time, Goodsell’s is one of the earliest to move from a metaphoric use of the terms to an aesthetically grounded discussion of the topic although outlined in only preliminary form. Even earlier, Chester Barnard in 1938 described management as more an art than a science, and as aesthetic rather than logical, however, he had virtually no effect on management and administration studies in this regard, as it continued to follow a positivistic path until recently.

Over the last few years, international conferences have been organised to explore aesthetic themes in organisation and management. Co-organised by the University for Humanistics at Utrecht, the University of Essex, and the Copenhagen Business School, two conferences have been planned on “Aesthetics & Organisation”; the first on “Listening” was held in April 2005, and a companion conference on “Looking” will be held in 2007. A conference series on the “Art of Management and Organisation” was launched in 2002 in London, followed by Paris in 2004, and most recently in Krakow in September 2006. A recently launched journal, *Tamara, The Journal of Critical Postmodern Organisation Science*, has taken a leading role in this area by cosponsoring this conference series, and providing a forum for “critical and postmodern organization science ... based in narrative and qualitative study. One that combines critical theory as well as postmodern theory with praxis”, and whose most recent issue was devoted to “Art and Aesthetics at Work”. In 2006, a new journal was launched, *Aesthesis*, intended to explore the potential of art and aesthetics in management through empirical and theoretical studies, aimed at “exploring or explaining the potential of art and/or an aesthetic led means of enlightening Management and Organizational Life”. All of these activities are oriented toward establishing an alternative to the traditional scientific discipline-based understanding of administration, management and leadership. Prior to these focussed activities, the use of such aesthetic sources as film and literature in administration and management courses has a much longer history, although presented primarily in illustrative form for conventional theories and models of management with little critique of underlying foundations.

Whether this results in a short-lived trend, reduced to a functionalism oriented towards more efficient and effective management, or grows into a grounded intellectual school of administration depends very much on the field acquiring a fluency in the philosophical foundations, conceptual apparatus, and interpretive skills of a humanities discipline, in contrast to the domination of social sciences, and is incorporated into scholarship and professional graduate programs.

The origins of an aesthetic critique are much older, appearing first in the social aesthetic as it informs governmental and administrative practice found in the classical writings of Plato and Aristotle, establishing a tradition that was carried through the Enlightenment period through such authors as Kant, Baumgarten, and Schelling, and into later modern philosophy of the Romantic tradition, Nietzsche, Hegel, Collingwood, the pragmatic school, Bourdieu, Hermeneutics, and Critical Theory. While representing a significant departure from conventional studies in the field,

aesthetics reflects a continuity of thought on the creation, use and abuse of authority from the writings of Plato through to contemporary theory.

Aesthetic analysis also originates in the symbolic interactionist tradition in sociology where imagination and creativity are regarded as foundational principles in our construction of the self, social roles and organisations. For example, Cooley emphasised the role of imagination in creating “society as a relation among ideas”, George Herbert Mead and Blumer viewed the self and social roles as constructed through symbols, and Erving Goffman advocated an inter-subjectivity reliant upon language and its narrative properties and a theatrical metaphor for understanding the construction of social situations (see Collins 1994, 253-283 for an overview). A more direct influence comes from Linda Smircich’s work in public administration. Drawing from anthropology as it informs organisational culture, she defines organisations symbolically drawing upon aesthetic principles in their culture-producing activities. In her root metaphor approach (1983, 347-348), the formal characteristics of organisation are seen to be products of an expressive process including thought, language and interaction using the tools of the aesthetic: images and symbols (e.g. iconographic objects, logos, mottoes, trophies), and styles of behaviour to produce organisational artefacts such as rituals, legends, and ceremonies (1983, 344). From this perspective, organisations do not *have* a culture, but *are* a culture, constructed through aesthetic means and taking aesthetic form.

The “craft” tradition in administration also contributes to an aesthetic view, however, more indirectly. Vincent Ostrom, for example, argued that “the craft of public administration involves a complex pattern of relationships between artisans and their creations. If we view organization to be a fundamental tool in the craft of administration, we need first to recognize that organizations are subject to design and creation like any other artifact” (1982, 40). The limitation of this approach, though, lies in the distinction between craft and creation, artisan and artist; the former is a pragmatic or utilitarian means-oriented practice, whereas the latter is non-utilitarian, existing as an end in itself, described by Kant as “purposefulness without purpose”. Its value is intrinsic, enriching the quality of life. Administration and leadership require both, from a humanistic perspective, for a meaningfully grounded professional practice and critique.

Opening the door to aesthetics brings a multitude of critical and conceptual possibilities in exploring the material and non-material worlds of administration and their interrelationships. What underlies all is the study of form, in structured thought and action, in the physical environment, and in the socio-political world. Other disciplines involved include all of the “arts” disciplines — music, literature, sculpture, painting, interior design, architecture, theatre — as well as visual culture, semiotics, the kitsch critique in Political Studies (an example is Friedländer’s *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*), and anthropology particularly in its study of ritual and ceremonial traditions. The application of aesthetic analysis into the socio-cultural realm, all of which have correlates in the government world, can clearly be seen in major aesthetics organisations and publications. The 17th International Congress of Aesthetics, meeting in July 2007, is devoted to “Aesthetics Bridging Cultures”, including such topics as local and global cultures, oriental and occidental cultures, the sacred and profane, the culture “industries”, aesthetics of

technology, everyday aesthetics, and high and low cultures. The interdisciplinary *Contemporary Aesthetics* journal, launched in 2003, takes an expansive view of the field, providing a necessary forum for the rise of aesthetics as a major critical and interpretive approach of social reality: “In recent years aesthetics has grown into a rich and varied discipline. Its scope has widened to embrace ethical, social, religious, environmental, and cultural concerns. As international communication increases through more frequent congresses and electronic communication, varied traditions have joined with its historically interdisciplinary character, making aesthetics a focal center of diverse and multiple interests”. The International Association for Aesthetics Newsletter displays the same broad interests, recently highlighting the topic of the aesthetics of urban life, as does the *International Yearbook of Aesthetics*, whose 2005 issue even more explicitly applies aesthetic analysis to topics that implicate the governmental world through papers on the political, the formation of meaning (an underlying logic for policy studies), style and anti-style (necessary for a critique of authority and leadership), urban environments, and the epistemology of cultural values.

But what is the definition and scope of the aesthetics of government, including both politics and administration? As I have alluded to above, aesthetic analysis is already somewhat developed in the field of politics, examining leadership style, rhetorical use, politics as a performative or theatrical display, and the construction of political ideologies. And aesthetics is now an established approach in organisation theory. However, its development in public administration is relatively new.

If one takes as a general definition that aesthetics is the study of form and formation, it applies on at least three levels to government studies, extending from an aesthetic foundation to knowledge and ethics to aesthetic dimensions of organisational practice and academic programs, as well as the use of aesthetic sources, and consisting of the means by which organisational form is created, shaping the world and mentality of political leaders and administrators. First, there is the underlying aesthetic construction of ideas or concept formation, traceable in the modern period back to Immanuel Kant’s theory of *Bildungsvermögen* or formative faculty (see Makkreel 1990 for a detailed discussion), carried into the social sciences through the neo-Kantians and Max Weber in their theories of concept formation (see Burger 1987 and Oakes 1988). This foundation applies to several aspects of government, including the policy process, conceptions of organisational form, moral and practical constructions of social relations (embodied in organisational culture and politics), and the social good or the ends to which government activity is oriented.

A second level of aesthetic analysis concerns the actual forms of social interaction, particularly an investigation of the social construction of organisational hierarchy, power and politics, roles and their authority, values systems, the moral boundaries or limits that can be established or exceeded, and promises a rich approach for comparative governmental studies, examined in the context of political traditions (see, for example, Ankersmit’s *Aesthetic Politics* and Spotts’ *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*). The other major aspect of administrative life that is available to an aesthetic critique comes largely out of organisational aesthetics that grew, in part, out of organisational culture. The aesthetics of governmental culture explores verbal and non-verbal performative expression, that is, theatrical aspects, and the use of

language through its literary or poetic qualities, such as narrative qualities, metaphor and other literary devices, that structure the rituals and ceremonies of everyday life, in both positive or constructive and punitive or abusive, exploitative or repressive forms. This dimension affects role and identity construction, organisational design, the policy process, and processes of institutionalisation (see Light & Smith's *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* for a detailed discussion).

A third level on which one experiences the aesthetic is the creation and manipulation of physical reality, primarily in the governmental world through architecture (see Guillén 1997 and Kündiger's *Fassaden der Macht*, 2001) and the positioning of buildings in their urban setting, landscaping, furnishings (see Strati 1996 on the status significance of chairs) and office decoration, as well as attirement, a field that was once called dramaturgy, arising out of symbolic interactionism, particularly from the work of Erving Goffman (1959). It is through the aesthetic that meaningful content is created and conveyed, carried in the form and quality of crafting and materials of artefacts. The importance of this dimension became clear to me when I visited a senior official in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin a short time ago. I was met at the main entrance by an intern, escorted through the main building, over a courtyard and to the rear building (where Honecker once had his office during the GDR period). The long dark wood-panelled and lush crimson carpeted hallway of one of the higher floors I was on, conveyed a strong sense of gravitas due to its width, height and length as well as rich appointment, bringing to mind the expression "corridors of power". The office itself bespoke power, privilege and status, as much as one can have in a large bureaucratic organisation. High-quality oriental carpets, heavy drapery, original artwork, antique desk, and lushly upholstered furniture. Coffee served in porcelain off a sterling silver tray. And an oversized office with large windows. An analysis of a more destructive phenomenon is the critique of narcissism (a topic in management studies that is rapidly expanding), in which this psychopathy manipulates not only inanimate reality for its own ends, but an objectified organisational membership as part of the inanimate environment. Supporting these experiential dimensions is the use of aesthetic sources including literature in fictional and essay forms, film, art, and biographical writings – all of which provide a means for critiquing administrative and leadership expression and the reinforcement of culture, ideology, politics, and power structures. Of these fields, literary analysis is probably the most developed, pioneered in 1924 by Humbert Wolfe and explored in 1968 by Dwight Waldo, however, coming into its own only the 1990s with work by Breischke (1993), Carroll and Gailey (1992), Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux (1994), and Marini (1992), in which the more subtle, intangible and dilemma-ridden aspects of administrative life are captured: socio-political, historical and cultural contexts that contribute to the style of bureaucracy and its bureaupathologies and restrictive forms of ideology; organisational, administrative and political culture; micropolitics including abuse of power and authority, corruption and covert aspects; the personality, identity and character of actors including moral dimensions and dilemmas; and the poetics of government (see Samier 2005).

An aesthetic critique provides a new interdisciplinary and humanities-based approach to organisational politics, ideology, culture, identity, and ethics as it

applies to all aspects of leadership, administrative, and political responsibilities and activities (e.g. decision-making, policy, management). Aesthetic analysis extends from philosophical and theoretical critique to critical and interpretive investigations in the field. More applied aesthetic theory focuses on the implications for professional practice: the ways ideas and ideals are created, how their expression is conveyed, the impact they have on interpersonal relationships, and the organisational environment that carries and reinforces them. In other words, the aesthetic provides the foundation and guidelines for leadership and administrative design and creativity. Part of appreciating aesthetics as it is introduced into a “social science” discipline, is an acceptance of a broader range of expressive form. This includes literary writings, such as poetry, prose fiction and drama, the visual arts, and the philosophical and literary essay.

Originating in part from an aesthetic education tradition, notably Friedrich Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1967 [1795]) in which the concept of the beautiful soul (*Schöne Seele*) results from emotion educated by reason towards moral “beauty” and freedom, Maxine Greene has argued that aesthetic education may lead to acting rather than behaving, where the former “is to embark on a new beginning for oneself, a beginning generated by questioning, curiosity, wonder, restiveness” and “respond mindfully” (1984, 124-125). From this idealist-existential perspective, professionalism is also a sensibility requiring aesthetic development and expression. Characteristic of her existential orientation toward an individual’s choice in constructing value and meaning, Greene promotes mindful action as “to recognize that an encounter with a work of art can open windows in the presumably actual or the pre-defined; windows that open outwards to alternative visions of the world, is to break with the sense that reality is petrified. It may also be to realize how much depends on resistance to the taken-for-granted, on desire, on way of seeing, on the awareness of what is not yet” (1984, 125).

While Greene’s argument is directed at K-12 education, the general principles apply at any level, perhaps even more so to educational leaders and administrators upon whom others are dependent, and who have a larger share of influence over policy and its implementation. The essential individual qualities unleashed through aesthetic education are the critical consciousness, independent choice-making, individual empowerment, and “creative and expressive activities” necessary to freeing oneself from publicity, hype, sense of coterie, convention, and co-optive mechanisms (1984, 126-127) that otherwise dominate social institutions. An illustration of her own experience is emblematic of a fundamental critical awareness of power, dominance, and politics that can be achieved through engagement with artistic perspectives that are indicative of leadership and administration: “I recall seeing a random pile of grey army overcoats in an exhibition of Joseph Beuys’ work; and, because I knew I was in an art space and chose myself with respect to it (apart from the humdrum and routine), I saw what I had never seen about the drabness and weariness of war, and its random pointlessness” (1984, 130). Rather than the current New Public Management manager ideal, a humanistic ideal resembles in many ways the traditional mandarin ideal – individuals who are cultured and educated instead of more narrowly trained.

The four papers in this special issue collectively represent a broad range of aes-

thetic analysis in the governmental field, from the literary representation of police stations, through a psychoanalytic aesthetic analysis of financial public management as a bricolage and an exploration of the comparative conceptual constructions of “ruling” and “governing”, to a study of the public presentations of politicians in political advertising. As is typical in aesthetic studies, the papers also represent the range of scholarly genres from the philosophical and theoretical to empirical research. What unites these papers, though, is an exploration of the underlying aesthetic principles upon which knowledge, ethics, and the construction of socio-political reality are built.

Markku Temmes, in “Aesthetics of the Police Station in Three Countries”, uses literary sources for administrative analysis, an approach that has been adopted more broadly internationally in management and administrative studies over the last fifteen years (see references noted above) to examine their identity construction and organisational culture. Two particularly important aspects of this paper are the analytic method of “jumping frogs” by which the researcher selects valuable passages of text that “leap” out due to their lack of ambiguity in interpretation, and the interpretive lens of the “detective eye” of the authors, that conditions the reader’s image of actual police stations and the potential constructed through theoretical knowledge and the literary text’s critique. Through these various techniques and perspectives emerge aesthetic profiles of significance in understanding the world of the police.

Pertti Ahonen, in “Unconscious Aesthetics in Financial Public Management: Political Science in a Ubiquitous, Deceivingly Uninteresting Topic”, presents psychoanalytic aesthetics as a form of analysis that can uncover the design principles, socio-emotional effects (such as shame and humiliation) and “collective defence against psychic anxiety” of financial public management (FPM), in other words the primarily unconscious relationships between concepts and practice. Based primarily in the object relations school of psychoanalysis, Ahonen considers a perspective from which creativity can be seen to be directed towards both ideals and neurotic dispositions that affect the construction and use of FPM in the public sector. Psychoanalytic aesthetics becomes the window through which the effect of how various accounting and market practices influence organisational form is analysed. It also serves as an interpretive lens for the sensibility and roles enacted by politicians and civil servants, in their range of discretionary action, psychic benefits, power, and influence.

Kyösti Pekonen’s “Aesthetic Tension between Politics and Government” is a more philosophically oriented paper examining concept formation and its effect on the choices we make. The two key concepts of government, “ruling” and “governing”, are explored as metaphors, originating in Platonic philosophy and carried up through the realist tradition of Hobbes, as well as the existential perspective of Nietzsche and Heideggerian phenomenology. Embedded, of course, in the metaphoric creation of these concepts are also notions of obedience, authority and appropriate action that form the governmental institutions of society, as well as conceptions of the “good” and morality.

The final paper, by Juri Mykkanen on the “Aestheticisation of Politics: The Presentation of Self in Finnish Political Advertising”, focuses on the political side of government, through one of its primary media of expression, commercial mass

advertising. Essentially Mykkanen explores image-creation in television ads as a construction and presentation of the political self, drawing in part from the symbolic interactionism of Erving Goffman and the aesthetic analysis of Wolfgang Iser. “Surface aestheticisation” examines the characteristics of the superficial values obtained in political advertising aimed at emotive faculties, as well as “deep-seated aestheticisation” that transforms the unaesthetic of social reality into an aesthetic virtuality affecting knowledge construction and consequently political and moral values.

The aim of these four contributors in exploring aesthetics is understanding and the construction of meaning and values, as well as the insight and authenticity that this brings. They offer compelling views from a nascent movement in government studies, particularly in the public administration field that speaks to the higher goals of public service, and the imagination, critique and creativity that underpins the social good.

REFERENCES

- Ankersmit, F. 1996. *Aesthetic Politics: Political Philosophy Beyond Fact and Value*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Barnard, C. 1938. *The Functions of the Executive*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Breischke, P.A. 1993. “Interpreting Ourselves: Administrators in Modern Fiction.” *Theory into Practice* 32 (4), 228-235.
- Burger, T. 1987. *Max Weber’s Theory of Concept Formation: History, Laws, and Ideal Types*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Carroll, V. and J. Gailey. 1992. “Using Literature to Teach about Bureaucratic Structure.” *College Teaching* 40 (1), 24-26.
- Collins, R. 1994. *Four Sociological Traditions*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Czarniawska-Joerges, B. and P. Guillet de Monthoux. 1994. *Good Novels, Better Management: Reading Organizational Realities*. Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Press.
- Duke, D.L. 1986. “The Aesthetics of Leadership.” *Educational Administration Quarterly* 22 (1), 7-29.
- Friedländer, S. 1984. *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Gagliardi, P. 1996. “Exploring the Aesthetic Side of Organizational Life.” In S. Clegg, C. Hardy and W. Nord (eds). *Handbook of Organization Studies*. London: Sage, 565-580.
- Goffman, E. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City: Doubleday.

- Goodsell, C. 1992. "The Public Administrator as Artisan." *Public Administration Review* 52 (3), 246-253.
- Greene, M. 1984. "The Art of Being Present: Educating for Aesthetic Encounters." *Journal of Education* 166 (2), 123-135.
- Guillén, M. 1997. "Scientific Management's Lost Aesthetic: Architecture, Organization, and the Taylorized Beauty of the Mechanical." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 42 (4), 682-715.
- Guillet de Monthoux, P. 1993. *Det sublimas konstnärliga ledning: Estetik, konst och företag*. Göteborg: Nerenius & Santérus.
- Kündiger, B. 2001. *Fassaden der Macht: Architektur der Herrschenden*. Leipzig: Seemann.
- Light, A. and J. Smith (eds). 2005. *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Makkreel, R. 1990. *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the "Critique of Judgment"*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marini, F. 1992. "The Uses of Literature in the Exploration of Public Administration Ethics: The Example of Antigone." *Public Administration Review* 52 (5), 420-426.
- Oakes, G. 1988. *Weber and Rickert: Concept Formation in the Cultural Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Ostrom, V. 1982. "The Theory and Practice of Public Administration as a Science of the Artfactual." In J. A. Uveges (ed.). *Public Administration: History and Theory in Contemporary Perspective*. New York: Marcel Dekker, 39-53.
- Ramirez, R. 1996. "Wrapping Form and Organizational Beauty." *Organization* 3 (2), 233-242.
- Ropo, A. and M. Eriksson. 1997. "Managing a Theatre Production: Conflict, Communication, and Competence." In M. Fitzgibbon and A. Kelly (eds.). *From Maestro to Manager: Critical Issues in Arts and Culture Management*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 416-436.
- Samier, E. 2005. "Toward Public Administration as a Humanities Discipline: A Humanistic Manifesto." *Halduskultuur* 6, 6-59.
- Samier, E. and R. Bates (eds). 2006. *Aesthetic Dimensions of Educational Administration and Leadership*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Schiller, F. 1967 [1795]. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smircich, L. 1983. "Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28, 339-358.
- Spotts, F. 2003. *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*. Woodstock: Overlook Press.
- Strati, A. 1999. *Organization and Aesthetics*. London: Sage.
- Strati, A. 1996. "Organizations Viewed through the Lens of Aesthetics." *Organization* 3 (2), 209-218.
- Strati, A. 1992. "Aesthetic Understanding of Organizational Life." *Academy of Management Review* 17 (3), 568-581.
- Strati, A. 1989. "Aesthetics and Organizational Skill." In B. Turner (ed.). *Organizational Symbolism*. New York: de Gruyter.
- Waldo, D. 1968. *The Novelist on Organization and Administration: An Inquiry into*

“Art-Full” Government: On the Aesthetics of Politics and Public Administration

the Relationship between the Two Worlds. Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies.

White, D. 1996. “‘It’s Working Beautifully!’ Philosophical Reflections on Aesthetics and Organization Theory.” *Organization* 3 (2), 195-208.

Wolfe, H. 1924. “Some Public Servants in Fiction.” *Public Administration* 2, 39-57.