

ART REVIEW

Affirming an Art Review Section in *BEQ*

Daniel Hjorth, Copenhagen Business School; Nottingham Business School

BEQ opening up to publishing art reviews strikes me as something like an event in itself: the journal's relational capacity is extended to new influences, which brings new potentialities that in turn assemble new readers and existing readers in new ways. This "eventness" indicates that it is an important move for a journal like *BEQ* to make. It suggests, as the editors stated in their essay (den Hond and Painter 2022, 7–8), that art can renew our vocabularies and provide inspiration for thinking anew by having us reflect on our self-formation, inviting us to empathize with the other and enhance our moral imagination (Werhane 1998; Ciulla 1998). Philosophers Bergson, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze, to mention some who were inclined to problematize time, force, power, affect and process, all engaged with art at some point in their careers. If I venture to summarize how the result of this engagement would be expressed, it would be with the slogan "Where to start? Start with art!" In the thick forest of thought, art brings us to a clearing where thinking is given a good reason to start anew. Canonical ethical will-formation surely points us in the direction of roads often taken, yet affected, we stand in the clearing with an increased capacity to interact, and we realize we can imagine multiple ways ahead.

The experience of art can be described in many ways. What intrigues us as *BEQ* readers is perhaps the way it enrolls us in a different conversation as business ethicists (or scholars with research interests within the realm of business ethics). It is indeed reasonable to expect that we will be able to discourse in new ways when the experience of art is invited as a source of analysis, reflection and discussion. It also seems reasonable to think that in the belonging that the experience of art opens up, the way it assembles us as an event, there is a potential becoming of thought to be had—one that might bring thinking to the fringe of the already thought. As with any potentiality, this one, too, can be negated or affirmed. Spinoza would say that to the extent we seek to relate to or connect with other bodies to enhance our capacity or power to act (our *conatus*), we link active forces with this will and thus affirm becomings, processes of making difference happen (Deleuze 1988, 2006; Bennett 2010). For sure, our inclination to affirm new potential becomings as a result of the experience of art is a question of how passionate we are about art, what art does to our power to be affected and our power to affect. Process philosophy suggests that we

conceptualize the experience of art as something which affects us as a sense that life can go beyond knowledge and which allows thought to go beyond life as experienced (e.g., Deleuze 2006; Bennett 2010). This would mean that our capacity to imagine and invent is intensified by the experience of art.

We could thus say that the experience of art comes as an event and that this event is engaging us in or inviting us to converse, discourse, run about, dance or swerve (away) from where thought is at home. To the extent that the experience of art lures thinking into a “space for play,” beyond contemplating and analysing the recognized, it performs its event quality. Descriptions of experiencing art include a de-centring of the subject and an intensification of the “relational tendencies of the event to generate its own potential” (Massumi 2015, 157): life beyond this knowledge, thought beyond this life. We are asked who we are, what we want to become, what love, life and death are or mean to us. We can call this its uniqueness or what makes it interesting. To some, this would resonate with Kant’s thoughts on imagination in the context of his discussion of aesthetics in *The Critique of Judgement*. They would add to the preceding that the experience of art is best analysed as an aesthetic experience (of the sublime in particular) in the sense that the event’s excess over recognition, its power to affect us and engage us into swerving, calls upon imagination and reflexivity to engage in a free play of concepts (cf. Duska 2014). Whereas concepts relate to other concepts and receive their meaning in such seemingly endless chains, imagination is a free play in that it is open-ended, seeks no finality and is not constrained by a system of institutionalized laws.

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze emphasized that the experience of art extracts affects from life (Deleuze and Guattari 1994), that art gives body to, for example, brightness, fear or disgust, and that this opens us up to potentialities, to new movements, and makes us inclined to become active, to affirm the experiment, the creative extension of life beyond the limits of the present. Affect reboots us, and we must come back to thinking anew and make up our minds (Colebrook 2002). Art would in this sense call upon imagination, because reason cannot serve understanding well using existing concepts and their conventionalized relationships to this and that. We might jolt in place and in mid-air seek to imagine how to land again. As such, the experience of art, the encounter with art, is an event that grasps us as an intensification of life and the opening of a passage to difference, with great potential for having us thinking, reflecting, anew. Art is here thought as intensifying the affinity between inventive thought and affirmative life (Deleuze 2006).

In a more social and collective sense, art, historically, seems also to have had a seismic function in human culture: it has always provided a sense of what is coming, foreboding change, diagnosing the social, mobilizing movements, provoking the powerful, giving hope and inspiring utopias. Working primarily with images rather than text, the bodily experience of art reaches us via all our senses and “speaks” to us, often without words. Indeed, artists are not seldom known for saying that the words can get in the way of the experience—that when we try to classify, categorize, find the type, label or concept, we bring the “eventness” out of the event. Art, as we have suggested, extracts affect from life and leaves us often overwhelmed, to which we

might respond with searching for an explanation, figuring out what the rules are. “Nothing is prefigured in the event,” Massumi (2002, 27) says, and he continues, “It is the collapse of structured distinction into intensity, of rules into paradox.” And we find again that we are back in the realm of affect.

As social scientists and philosophers, we may struggle with bringing the studied life of organizations and businesses into our texts without thereby also losing life in the process. Did life stay in language? Was it killed by method, transforming it to an “it-has-been” that lets the “punctum” (Barthes 1981), the chance element, out? “I stand in pause where I shall first begin, / And both neglect,” says Claudius in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, as he (Claudius) ponders his crime—“a brother’s murder.” Shakespeare thereby challenges, with poetic precision, our hesitation before language as something that might get in the way of experiencing the experience. The experience of art, extracting affect from life, provides a different route to rethinking and to rewording what moral imagination serves reason as we seek to sort out the ethical implications and decision from the lesson. Language must itself be problematized in its capacity to bring the eventness of the event to the reader. It might not be the best place to start—in language, in concept—but might arrive at the right words with greater precision when the start is provided by affect in the aesthetic experience. The play itself makes us jolt, and we, too, find ourselves standing in pause, calling upon imagination to help us “reboot” and to think anew about how we relate to questions, problems and dilemmas that require ethical reflection and moral imagination to help us land on our feet/decide/act. Art, I return to this, classical Shakespearean and contemporary alike (Green 1993), is important as a renewal of the ongoing creation of knowledge in the business ethics research communities, the progress of which is “marked less by a perfection of consensus than by a refinement of debate,” as Geertz (1973, 29) said about his own disciplinary home, anthropology. We need to refine our capacity to problematize, and art could help us sharpen our diagnostic tools. If we bring the experience of art into the *BEQ*-centred community of business ethics research, we will have access to different sources of luring thinking beyond the already thought, fruitful—so I believe with the *BEQ* editors—for the renewal of our vocabularies, analyses, conclusions. This includes the ongoing work on our selves (as a work of art, as Foucault suggested) in the never-ending process of becoming-ethical (cf. Crane, Knights, and Starkey 2008).

The affirmation of play that characterizes art, and what it does to us in the aesthetic experience, might now be more important than ever. Learning to live with a multiplicity of language games, or outside an attempt to include all in a grand narrative, seems more important now than ever. The world seems less liveable as long as we try to argue our way towards one unitary grounding of a universal reason. It seems that such a battle for the throne in the court of reason will always legitimize action against “the other” conducted without respect for the other’s otherness. The ironic conclusion is that this makes me, too, the other’s other and thus us “the same” (cf. Rhodes and Badham 2017). “Let’s play in peace,” instead, as Lyotard comments (cited in Green 1993, 221)—a message I believe is central to what art says to life.

The importance of learning to live with difference and multiplicity is thus another important “message” from art to a community of *BEQ* scholars. We need multiplicity and heterogeneity when it comes to modalities of inquiry, methodologies, methods for generating empirical data and concepts and strategies for analysis. This very much characterizes *BEQ* publications thus far, and it is a vital force in progressing research through constantly refining the debates. In business contexts, this also means embracing difference and diversity in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, culture, skills and experiences to accomplish a more inclusive workplace. The more diverse workplace is in this sense also the workplace with more in-betweens from where novelty potentially emerges. As entrepreneurship research and practice have taught us, entre-spaces, in-between spaces, are great assets for crafting new value for customers.

Art is, of course, also a rich source of engagement with and critique of practice, as its portraying of power has again and again shown. Think of Peter Seller and Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove*, Pussy Riot’s performances, Marina Abramović’s *Balkan Baroque*, Francis Bacon’s *Study after Velázquez’s Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, Georg Grosz’s *The Pillars of Society*, Pipilotti Rist’s *Ever Is Over All* or Kara Walker’s *Fons Americanus*. As examples of works of art that engage us primarily visually, generating affect not through reading texts, they remind us of the power of the open-ended, the playful and the visceral as sources of and reasons to engage discourses in conversation on the way to reinvigorating debates and vitalizing the arduous yet delightful work of developing knowledge in the field of business ethics.

When Mollie and Frank, as new editors-in-chief, wanted to open *BEQ* to art reviews and asked if I would like to take on the job of section editor, I was indeed delighted. Having completed a four-year term as co-editor-in-chief (first with Trish Reay, then with Renate Meyer) of the journal *Organization Studies*, I thought the timing was right. With the Art Review Section, we want to leave open the definition of art or the delimitation of what is “in” art. As this editorial has exemplified, it can be and must be many things to avoid performative contradiction. It must be an experience of art that is reviewed, though, and this per se is innovative enough to bring us challenges. The norm in research is that there is a text available for anyone to “check for themselves.” The experience of art (say, a temporary exhibition of paintings or a sculpture park) often does not allow for that. The release of a new book on photography by X would be an in-between case: the book would be available more “permanently” and typically involve texts. Museums have permanent exhibitions, and sculpture parks tend to stay, but we are not describing and debating a text, as in the case of a book review. Instead, *BEQ*’s Art Review Section will publish reviews written by people who have experienced or encountered art in some form. Surely they will have “read” (by hermeneutic or deconstructive “instinct”) this event, analysed the experience (using concepts) and then tell us about it in a text. This writing will have struggled with the art of rhetoric, balancing between giving us the writer’s experience of the event, discussing what it means and does to thought and imagination and reasoning with us about the implications for business ethics research and for ethics in business practice. I am sure art’s life, brought to us through

art review essays (fifteen hundred words), will help affirm new movements of business ethics thought beyond the limits of existing knowledge.

I believe, together with Mollie and Frank, that business ethics research will benefit from more such reflections on encounters with art, in the form of art review essays, and that *BEQ* is an excellent place of entry for such reasons to refine our debates. In this issue, we have the pleasure of welcoming the first art review piece, by Brigitte Biehl, bringing us a description and reflection on the experience of Marina Abramović's *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*. Biehl's piece exemplifies well how the experience of art adds a new basis for reflecting on business ethics. In this case, drawing particularly from feminist perspectives, we are brought into a discussion of gendered relationships in a way that perhaps only Abramović's opera project can offer.

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DANIEL HJORTH (dh.mpp@cbs.dk) is professor at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark; professor at Nottingham Business School, the UK, and adjunct professor at the Graduate School of Management, Kyoto University, Japan. Hjorth served (2017–21) as editor-in-chief of *Organization Studies* and sits on the editorial boards, for example, of *Organization*, and of *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice* (SAGE). His work is published widely in organization, management and entrepreneurship journals and is centred on organizational creativity, management philosophy, art, aesthetics and business, entrepreneurship and humanities and business knowledge.