

Look who's talking!

- aesthetic corporate communication in a dedifferentiated society

Anne-Britt Gran

Entré

As a researcher in the field of art and aesthetics, I was surprised to find so much arty and beautiful vocabulary in the field of economics, so many aesthetic approaches in marketing and organizational theory: *The aesthetic or beautiful organization* (Strati 1999, Dickinson and Svensen 2000, De Paoli 2003), *the expressive organization* (Schultz, Hatch and Holten Larsen 2000), *organizations as theatre* (Mangham and Overington 1987), *aesthetic management* (Thyssen 2003), *the aesthetics of marketing* (Schmitt and Simonsen 1997) and *aesthetics as organizational theory* (Guillet De Monthoux 1998). I saw my own field divided and conquered by a capitalism I once learned was the big enemy of the modern philosophy of aesthetics. Concepts matter. Why are these concepts used in organizational theory and marketing subjects? I learned that studying aesthetic objects or processes or using an aesthetic approach have represented alternatives to dominant positivistic methods and rational approaches in organizational theory (Strati 1999, 2000, Linstead and Höpfl 2000, Carr and Hancock 2003, Hancock 2005). Aesthetics has been needed in the paradigm battle among researchers. It represented an Alter-Native, just as it did in the romantic period and all of modernity. I was safely back in my old field of art and the philosophy of aesthetics. With the alternative anti-positivistic and anti-rationalist approach to aesthetics in organizations it became less relevant to analyse the strategic, instrumental and economic use of aesthetics in organizational life and management. Postmodernist thinkers such as Derrida and Lyotard intensified criticism of the western paradigm of rationality and metaphysics, and their theories about deconstruction and the sublime have influenced the field of organizational aesthetics (for example Linstead and Höpfl) which again has prioritized the aesthetic approach and played down the study of rational use of art and aesthetics. Studying the instrumental use of art and aesthetics is often inspired by the tradition of the Frankfurter school where instrumentalized aesthetics is condemned as alienation and the emancipatory potential of art and aesthetic has been in focus (Hancock 2005).

In marketing subjects this is totally different; here a pragmatic and instrumental approach rules, with emphasis on how to sell more through art and aesthetics. The focus is on how to *use* art and aesthetics and what marketers can *learn* from the field of arts to improve marketing (Schmitt and Simonsen 1997, Brown and Patterson 2000, Schroeder 2000). There are few themes and theoretical links between organizational analysis of aesthetics and approaches to aesthetics in marketing and corporate communication. In praxis there are often strong connections between what is going on inside the organization – organizational behaviour, rituals, symbols and cultures – and the way the organization is communicating with the outside world through work performance, corporate communication and marketing. Strong brand companies are using this insight and workers are living the brand; life and culture inside the organizations are turned out to be the image of the organization and vice versa (Kunde 2000). Aesthetics, at all levels in the organization, is of vital importance in the creation of visible communication in a global economy. The alternative approach in organizational theory is not sufficient to analyse the intensified aestheticization of all kinds of communication today.

In this article I will discuss the alternative aesthetic approach in organizational theory and its relevance today. I will borrow a perspective from the field of corporate communication to connect the internal focus on art and aesthetics in organizational theory with the

instrumental and external approach to art and aesthetics in marketing and brand building. Developing this communication perspective in a pragmatic direction makes it possible to study both instrumental use of art and aesthetics *and* the unintended performative and ritual aspects of organizational life in the same theoretical framework. The historical context is a dedifferentiated society where new hybrids are entering the stage of communication.

My underlying interest is to explore this question: Which approaches to organizational aesthetic are most relevant and important today - in a competitive global market, in a period with strong aestheticization of both commodities and companies, and in a context of dedifferentiation of society and hybridization of the art world?

The alternative approach in organizational theory

As is known, the choice of the terms “aesthetic” and “aesthetics” concerning organizations is connected to the etymological meaning of the term in Greek, which is “experience through the senses” – sensible experience. In *Organizations and Aesthetics* Antonio Strati writes the following about the relation between the two:

Aesthetics in organizational life, therefore, concerns a form of human knowledge; and specifically the knowledge yielded by the perceptive faculties of hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste, and by the capacity for aesthetic judgement (Strati 1999:2).

Aesthetics in organizations, according to Strati, deals with both a specific form of experience through the senses and the ability to decide by an aesthetic judgement, in other words decide whether something is beautiful or not, or qualitatively good or not. The aesthetic judgement belongs to modern aesthetics in the tradition of Baumgarten and Kant, and the terms of the beautiful and the sublime are also central in Strati’s universe of theories. Further, Strati uses the aesthetics term as an epistemological metaphor for an alternative approach to the field of organizations.

...it is possible to gain aesthetic, rather than logico-rational, understanding of organizational life, and that this understanding concerns organizational cultures and symbols, as well as the aesthetic created. “Aesthetic” understanding of organizational life, therefore, is an “epistemological metaphor” which problematizes the rational and analytic analysis of organizations...(Strati 1999:7).

As underscored by others, such a view belongs to a romantic philosophical tradition where the aesthetic realization and the aesthetic perspective are presented as a (better) *alternative* to the rational, logical and scientific realization (Hancock 2005).

With an aesthetic organization we further allude to a certain beautification - a so-called aestheticization of the organization, in order to appear as beautiful and conscious of form, both by employees (gradually a critical resource) and by corporate clients (Dickinson and Svensen 2000). When aesthetics in relation to organizations is mentioned, it is rarely referred to as shocking, dangerous and provoking aesthetic effects. These belong in the art field, and partly in commercials, but not in the aesthetic repertoire of organizations. In organizations, the aesthetics of pleasure rules and “a feel good aesthetic” harmony is at stake as it was in the romantic period.

Focus on the alternative aspect of aesthetics belongs to early modernity, a period of differentiation when science, ethics and aesthetics departed from each other and developed their own logic and rationality. In modernity, art and aesthetics have played the role of *Alter-Native*, as the *Other*, being not rational, not instrumental, but sensible, beautiful and creative, not unlike the role of the Primitive or the *Wo-Man* (Gran 2000). Kant fulfilled the order of

modernity with his three critiques – Kritik der reinen Vernunft (about science), Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (about ethic) and Kritik der Urteilskraft (about aesthetic) – where artists and aesthetic judgement represented the possibility of freedom. What was at stake in Kant's philosophy about aesthetics was not art or beauty as such, but freedom – Kant was not at all interested in art. The artist as a genius, as Kant saw it, was free to create his own forms without being limited by causality (belonging to science) or ethical imperatives, and aesthetic judgement was a free play in the mind of the beholder. Since Kant, art and aesthetics have had an outstanding position in modern philosophy, representing freedom, an alternative and truer experience than the rational, the one and only critical figure and the unrepresentable and unsayable (the French inspiration by Derrida and Lyotard).

As a theoretical *approach* to the manner of operation of organizations, an aesthetic approach can obviously contribute to displaying new sides of the organization, such as the symbolic, semiotic and sensible, and not only the economic, structural and rational. That is what theory does; theory and theatre have the same etymological origin from Greek: they mean "to see." As a mode of seeing, an aesthetic approach can be valuable; it all depends on what it makes possible for you to see.

Such an alternative approach is nonetheless interconnected with some problems. The first is simple and of an analytical nature. The researcher must not confuse the aesthetic *approach* with the *strategic use* of all kinds of aesthetics in organizations – symbols, rituals, performative actions. The aesthetic approach was invented as an alternative to the rational paradigm in organizational theory – it belongs to the society of researchers. In the actual use of aesthetics in organizations, however, this *alternative* realization potential is seldom or never at stake. The intended use of aesthetics in organizations is a kind of applied art, and not pure art for an alternative realization: Aesthetics in organizations will appeal to the senses, yes, will give sensible experiences, may even make the workers happier, but it is not per se an *alternative* to the rational and instrumental logic of the organization; nor does it guarantee any form of *freedom* at any level in the organizations. Freedom is only in the hands of the researchers.

Another problem is of a historical nature, and it is much more complex and challenging than the analytical one. It has to do with the status of modern art and aesthetics as an autonomous and privileged sphere, field or faculty in modern society. It is this autonomy – from the Greek "auto;" self and "nomos," legislation – that guarantees the status of art and aesthetics as an Alter-Native. The autonomy is of course not absolute but relative; it is dependent on the historical context that made it possible – early modernity. In pre-modernity, aesthetics was not a philosophical topic of its own (although the sublime, the rhetoric and the tragedy were) and the artists were treated as ordinary workers and servants, not as outstanding geniuses. The question is if the modern condition still rules the field of art and aesthetics today. And if it does not: Is the alternative approach still relevant and interesting?

Aesthetics of economy and the capitalization of aesthetics is a part of a larger societal process that is known as dedifferentiation. What is being dedifferentiated is the old sectors of modernity – science, morality and the arts – and their forms of rationality. From being separated as a sector in society, with its own form of reason (the aesthetic-expressive), art and aesthetics are moving in all directions at the same time. On the other hand the moral-practical and strategic-instrumental forms of rationality are invading art and aesthetics. The aestheticization of economy and organizational life belongs to the process of dedifferentiation. So does the new blurring of religion and politics, religion and art, religion and economy, which are very un-modern tendencies in western society today.

The separation of religion and politics is one of the most important aspects of modernity; this secularization is truly modern and it distinguishes western societies from so called primitive ones. In the last ten to fifteen years Europe has seen Muslim religion

challenging modern secularization and differentiation – Muslims attacking artistic representations of Muhammed and women demanding to use religious symbols, such as the hijab, at school and at work. The known defender of the modern project, Jürgen Habermas, has in *Glauben und Wissen* (2001) called this new condition post-secularism; a society where different strong religious communities exist in a secular state. Modernity did not get rid of religion, but Habermas does believe that a post-secular culture and public may exist in a context of neutral (not religious) state institutions. The acceptance of Islamic banks in France in 2009, where secularization, *La laïcité*, is very strong, might be another step towards a post-secularized Europe. The Islamic financial system is based on Islamic law – sharia. In other words, it is not secularized. One of the differences between the western financial system and the Islamic is that Islamic banks are not allowed to ask for interest when lending money to customers because taking interest is condemned by the Koran. France has forbidden religious symbols in public on the one hand, and opened up for a religious financial system on the other. France shows how chaotic and complex a post-secular and dedifferentiated society might be with a government that still wants to behave in a modern fashion.

A description of this new blurring of old modern sectors is also found in the works of the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. In *La Transparence du Mal* (1990), the concepts trans-aesthetic, the transsexual and the trans-economic, are especially relevant to this discussion. Baudrillard's ideas prove that everything has become aesthetical, sexual and economic at the same time. This is the “law of the merging of the genres,” and the order of modernity falls apart. The idea of the aestheticization of capital and capitalization of aesthetics is found in Baudrillard's description of the state of trans-aesthetic and the trans-economic.

Another theoretical approach to post modern dedifferentiation is discovered in the French work *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (1993) by the anthropologist and sociologist of science Bruno Latour. Modernity understood itself as an organized time, as opposed to the Primitive society being known to mix religions, laws and science. According to Latour, this is because the modern condition has kept the cleansing and mixing processes apart. Through science and criticism the modern way of thinking could create an image of the modern society that separated these sectors or genres from each other, while mixing them in everyday life. The crossbreed – the hybrid – was a not-seen phenomenon in modernity. Today the hybrid is about to reign and the modern order is heavily challenged. Latour illustrates this through the phenomenon of “the hole in the ozone layer,” a phenomenon involving a hybrid between nature and culture. The aestheticization of economy and artists using business logic are producing “art-capital” hybrids.

To construct a hybrid-message is one of the more subtle strategies within marketing. One example of this is the creative combination of advertising and objective publicity in different media, especially in written media (press) and in television. The message in advertising works better if presented as an editorial or objectified truth. When advertising remains an unrevealed purpose at the same time as the advertised message reaches the consumer, the hybrid-campaign is successful. This type of marketing communication is recognized as *hidden but paid* (Balabsubramanian 1994). What is being hidden is the actual commercial message.

Product placing in movies has become very sophisticated *hidden but paid*, and the hidden product is more and more integrated into the paid story of the movie, direction and dramaturgy - and is becoming a part of the aesthetic expression. The movie *Cast Away* starring Tom Hanks is an example of such product placement. Hanks' character is a Federal Express agent who lands on a deserted island, and the movie reveals both the character's loyalty to the company and the company's ability to deliver the packages. FedEx's marketing department partook in the script writing – the packages are delivered at any cost - and it was

incorporated into the story. Regarding hybrid product placement, or the hybrid as a post-differentiated figure, it becomes challenging to apply an either-or logic. Films like *Cast Away* can hardly be categorized as either fiction or marketing. When the main essence of the film is about certain brands and the product owner is paying for the plot, product placement cannot be separated from the movie as an aesthetic product.

In addition to the long tradition of product placing in the movies, since the 1980s other types of hybrid messaging have resurfaced in the practice of marketing. They all have in common a *hidden but paid* strategy where the intent is concealed by paying for a product, a logo or a slogan being placed in a context different than the obvious advertising. This is hybrid messaging in the form of *masked-art*, *masked-expert* and *masked-celebrity*. Especially relevant in this context is the case of *masked-art* (Balabsubramanian 1994).

A hybrid *masked-art* message is any work of art that provides space for a brand without the commercial intent becoming too apparent. If it had, it would have detracted from the value of the artwork and the actual hybrid effect would have diminished. This has also found its way into the literary landscape. Fay Weldon was appointed by the jeweller, Bulgari, to write a novel for its anniversary in 2004. This was only intended for the company and its workers, but because it was such a well-written book it was released into the main market. Bulgari achieved the ideal version of *masked-art*; the book describes the company and they enjoyed the additional glow of being the subject of a celebrity writer.

Such overall hybridization challenges the alternative approach in organizational aesthetics, because the hybrid threatens the autonomous *topos* of both art and the aesthetic experience.

The internal-external approach to art and aesthetics in organizations

Another problematic distinction in this field is the one between internal and external use of art and aesthetics. In his book *Aesthetic Management* (2003) Ole Thyssen links external use to concrete forms of culture sponsoring and culture collaboration, in Denmark also called creative alliances. These collaboration projects between the art field and private trade are external because they are not integrated into the organization; the organizations can get rid of them without any consequences. This form of cultural collaboration is in a way superficial and outside the core activity of the company.

The internal use of aesthetics deals with aesthetic effects used in the ordinary activity of the organization, such as product development, marketing, and corporate communication. Thyssen calls this internal use of aesthetic management. The differentiation between the external and internal use of aesthetics is a central distinction by Thyssen, a difference between a concrete use of the art field (through sponsoring and collaboration with external actors) and an implicit use of all forms of aesthetic effects in ordinary activity – applied art according to Thyssen. An external use of the art field is, according to Thyssen, almost an insignificant part of the relation between organizations and aesthetics:

The relation between “organization and aesthetics” does not deal with art in this book. Even though the collaboration between artists and businesses, like decoration, sponsoring and creative dialogue in the past years have been much-discussed, it is the least extensive and the least interesting part of the relation between organizations and aesthetics (Thyssen 2003:94).

One of the reasons for Thyssen’s insistence on this distinction is his view of art as an autonomous aesthetic sphere – he is insisting on the differentiation of art in modernity. Art is not supposed to serve any other purpose than its own, because any art that is at somebody else’s disposal is no longer art, but applied art. The fundamental criticism of the system forms the basis in Thyssen’s *Aesthetic management*, a theory by the German sociologist Niklas

Luhmann (Luhmann 1984), which contributes to his strict separation of the economic system and the art system. The applied art belongs in the economic system and the autonomous art belongs in the art system. The relationship between aesthetics and the organization is internal when applied art is used inward in the economic system, while it is an external relationship when the two systems meet in culture collaboration, like decoration and sponsoring. In spite of Luhmann's impressive system theory and Thyssen's sophisticated use of it, I disagree.

Against the theories of Thyssen it can be claimed that this difference between external and internal use of aesthetics today is challenged by the continuously more integrated and instrumental collaboration between private firms and the art field – both in sponsorship, creative work-shops with artists and the use of artists at many levels in the organization. When artists and art institutions are used in product development, corporate communication and development of organizations, the relation between the art field and the organization is no longer only external. The product of this kind of integrated culture collaboration, at least in the most creative alliances, is becoming more and more similar to what Thyssen refers to as internal use of aesthetics. New hybrids blurring the superficial external and the essential internal use of art and aesthetics show up, and the distinction (and opposition) between external-internal is challenged (for examples see Darsø 2004, Gran and De Paoli 2005, Gran and Hofplass 2007).

Thyssen consequently does not regard development in the art field itself, where more and more artists are willing to put their art at someone's disposal without abandoning its art status. New movements like relational art -- where the artist and/or the art work primarily establish the relation to the surrounding world -- is in itself a transgression of the autonomy aesthetic and the demand of liberty in the art field (Bourriaud 2002). The business world and corporations are new contexts where the relational artists work. Art groups, or art companies as they are, like Bonk Business Inc and Superflex are totally blurring the sectors of art and business (Guillet de Monthoux 2000, Steiner 1999, Bradely et al. 2006). Superflex creates Super-Copy products, such as Lacoste t-shirts and the Danish Ph-lamp, which writes Super-Copy on them to avoid the copy-patent-problem (they spend a lot on lawyers). The members of the Superflex company -- they are all artists, -- explain that they are using the logic of brand building against the big brand companies. Other projects by Superflex are Bio-gas in Tanzania (new environmental project) and the Guarana Power soda in Brazil (Super-Copy product). All Superflex's projects are also exhibited in art museums.

The distinction between art, design, product development, commercials and fashion are challenged; the art field is exploding in all directions and art has become a communication tool in the business world and provides new ways of criticizing the economic system. What is happening today, both in organizational aesthetics and in the art field, is the emergence of new hybrids, new connections and unclear marriages between art and business, aesthetics and economic rationality.

The expressive organization and the communication paradigm

Aesthetics offers communication a *form* that moves and touches the receiver. Necessarily, all messages and all communication have an aesthetic side to them because they are given form by sensible effects, but that does not imply that they are given form intentionally, or that they are focused on the form itself. With increased attention on the form of the communication – the *mode* of the message instead of its content – the aesthetics are in the centre.

In theory, organizations and companies are more and more looked upon as communicational actors rather than producing units. The production is taken for granted -- products could be produced everywhere with the same quality; the communication of the products existence has become more important:

Contemporary organizations are – no matter what sector they occupy or what products and services they produce – in the communication business – that is the business of expressing themselves deliberately in their environments (Thøger Christensen and Cheney 2000:247).

The focus of organizational theory on identity and culture, and the strong orientation of the marketing field towards branding and image, contribute in introducing a communication paradigm concerning the understanding of organizations (Brønn and Wiig 2002, Kapferer 2002, Moingeon and Soenen 2002, Hess-Bostad and Marberger 2003). This makes both sign production (such as semiotic strategy) and sensible effects (such as aesthetic strategy) a part of these economic subjects.

The introduction of the expressive organization (Schultz, Hatch and Holten Larsen 2000) implies an understanding of the organization as communicative and able to tell stories about itself to the surrounding world.

Thus, increasingly organizations compete based on their ability to express who they are and what they stand for. Emotional and expressiveness is becoming part of the experience of doing business, which is why we chose the title of our book: The expressive Organization (Schultz, Hatch and Holten Larsen 2000:1).

To be expressive originates from the Latin *expressio* and *exprimo*, which means to press or push something forward. Hence the name espresso coffee, which is pressed through the water in its special pot. Figuratively speaking, *to be expressive* means to express oneself -- something inside someone is pushed out, creating an expression that others can see, read or hear. The use of the term “expressive” in this context is an expression for the new communication paradigm which implies regarding companies as talking actors.

The new communication paradigm is apparent in a new focus on *storytelling, corporate story and strategic stories* (Van Riel 2000, Shaw 2000). The literary exercise of storytelling has become an essential element in the communication of the identity and the values of the company. In addition, these corporate stories can contribute to stimulating the visions of the organization, and to challenge the strategic position of the organization. These stories are often very short and have the character of slogans or mottos. The pharmaceutical company Astra, for example, composed their story as briefly and concisely as: *Knowledge heals* (Holten Larsen 2000). The road that led to this compressed story, however, was considerably longer.

In art, expressionism is the direction within modernism that takes the aesthetic expression the furthest in its emotional extremities, as in Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*. The painting expresses imaginations and emotions in the artist’s mind, and these are in a way pushed out on the canvas. The dominating expression in art modernism was the agony, the inner unease and the terrible war experiences. This is not the case for the expressive organization, which has to express positive, optimistic and consistent messages and values in order to create a good reputation. The expressionism of organizations is situated safely within the aesthetics of pleasure and harmony, and it has little or nothing to with the expression as it is understood in modernist art.

Corporate communication

The term *corporate communication* deals primarily with communication, secondarily with *how* the information is communicated. Corporate communication activates and intensifies the use of both aesthetic effects and art. The understanding of the organization as a communicating actor leads to a more extensive aestheticization of the field. Communication

always makes use of aesthetic effects – regardless of whether or not the actor has deliberate aesthetic intentions – where the aesthetics relate to the manner of the communication. When the *manner* and *form* of the communication become increasingly important in an aesthetic world, the understanding of the importance of aesthetic effects becomes essential in order for companies to succeed in both branding of products and in more sophisticated forms of corporate communication (Thyssen 2003).

Certain theories in the field of corporate communication unite the extrovert branding of the marketing field and the focus of organizational theory on the internal processes and the self-understanding of the companies (Schultz, Hatch and Holten Larsen 2000, Brønn and Wiig 2002, Moingeon and Soenen 2002). With organizational theory a stronger focus on identity became relevant. Simplified and archetypally portrayed, this unity can appear as follows:

Model: Marketing + Organizational Theory = Corporate communication

<u>Marketing</u>	+	<u>Organizational Theory</u>
Direction:	Outwards	Inwards
Focus on:	Sales The employees and the market The image of the brand The opinion of others on product and company	Organizing and management The customer and the organization The identity of the organization The self-understanding of the employees and their relation to the organization
Concern:	Management and marketing section	The whole organization
	=	
	<u>Corporate identity</u>	<u>Organizational identity</u>
	+	
Focus on:	Image and reputation	Collective identity
Perspective:	Manifestation; Identity is manifested as a visible Corporate activity and as visual symbols (logo etc.)	Representation; Identity is a collective representation of mutual understanding, norms and values
	=	
	<u>Integrated corporate communication</u>	

The combination of the focus on communication and the increased understanding of the importance of identity can be considered as premises for aestheticization that took place in both the organizational field as well as the marketing field in the 1990s.

The two different perspectives on identity between marketing and organizational theory is caused by their different focus and direction (Moingeon and Soenen 2002). The marketing field's fundamental orientation towards the market and the customer creates an external – image-based – understanding of identity that is founded on the customer's opinion of the company – focus on reputation. The concrete and visible manifestations of the company are studied as identity. The organizational field, however, develops an internal understanding of identity based on the collective self-understanding of the organization; who are we? Who is

this group or organization? What do we stand for? Organizational theory studies identity as the collective representation of the underlying and not necessarily conscious and intentional patterns of action.

The focus on identity is relatively new in both fields. In practise, the term was first introduced in the USA towards the end of the 1950s, in combination with consultant companies designing corporate identities with logos and visual recognition effects, aesthetic expressions for an imagined internal or underlying identity. In the literature of the field however, the term identity is not introduced until the mid 80s, then connected with the identity of organizations. Today the question of identity is essential in terms of organizations as communicating actors. To quote Thøger Christensen and Cheney: "Again, identity is the issue, communication seems to be the answer" (Thøger Christensen and Cheney 2000: 249). When organizational theory is incorporated in the field of corporate communication, the culture, in the social anthropologic understanding of the term, is strengthened as an effect of the unity. Culture and identity are closely linked, considering the fact that culture is a context for work with identity at the same time as identity is the core of culture itself. Identity and culture are dependent of each other in this perspective, and in practice hard to separate. The distinction between the two terms is primarily analytical, in other words an operational idea. This analytic distinction can be appropriate when used between identity and image as well. The terms are merged into each other in practice in intricate ways; they constitute each other, but in theory they can be separated by terms that make them distinguishable (Soenen and Moingeon 2002).

If the aesthetic and artistic aspects that exist in an organization are combined with the central elements of corporate communication – image, identity and culture -- a model displaying the expedient aesthetical aspects can be staged.

On one level the model indicates that outward and inward communication, corporate image and organizational culture are connected in different ways and influence each other in multiple and complex ways. The fashion in which they are connected must be studied in each case. The organizational cultures do not live autonomous lives in the organization; they are influencing the identity of the organization, just as the image and targets of the company are influencing the employees and their work performance. Studying art and aesthetics in relation to collective representation of identity should be seen in connection with other aesthetic strategies in the company and its outward communication.

On another level, aesthetic aspects and the use of the art field in organization are placed on a continuum between open outward and exclusive inward communication. This is done to avoid that outward - inward is represented as a binary opposition, which produces more problems than it solves in this case. Rather, it seems more relevant to put the outward and inward activities on each side of a continuum and to place the aesthetic aspects and the use of the art field on that same line.

Aesthetic communication

Outwards

Inwards

Focus on:

Sales, the customer,
and the market

Manifestation of identity
Image

Organizing and management,
the employees and the organization
Collective representation of identity
Culture

Visual aspects in circulation:

Logo, product design

Visual effects in annual reports

Design, office shaping,
physical artefacts

Product placement in films

Architecture

Dressing code

Symbols

Work of art as masked-art

Artists developing
logos and products

Corporate collections

Works of art

Sponsoring

Art museum visitation

Literary aspects in circulation:

“Narractions”, slogans,
story telling and the rhetoric
of the managers

Rhetoric in annual reports

Metaphors

Dialogues

Novel as masked-art

Everyday conversation and
organizational talk,
“poetics of organization”

Story-about-product placement in films

Theatrical aspect in circulation:

Staging and directing
every aesthetic mean

Work shop on directing,
acting and creativity

Roles, routines, interaction,
performances, rituals, costumes,
plays, dramaturgy, drama,
“organizations as theatre”

Sponsoring

Theatre visitations

The function of the aesthetic aspects:

Offers external credibility
Gives good reputation
Improves the (financial) results

Creates a social milieu and collective memory
Offers internal self understanding
Makes the employees loyal and effective

Thyssen's approach to true internal and superficial external use of art and aesthetics is abandoned. It belongs to the strict order of modernity. Artwork, artists and the art field *and* all aesthetic aspects can be used in both internal and external ways. The tendencies towards a more integrated and instrumental use of the art field in organizations makes it difficult to discuss this use as external compared to the other activities of the organization. An important sponsored activity that makes the company visible and strengthens its social responsibility enters into its aesthetic management just as does the use of the company designer in the product development process (Berstad et al 2003, Darsø 2004).

It nonetheless seems expedient to differentiate the aesthetic aspects by the different art forms. Here I have chosen visual, literary and theatrical aspects as examples and I have made a tentative placement of the different aesthetic aspects on the continuum line for outward to inwards communication. In a concrete analysis of a case these placements could be different. Visual aspects are the most obvious and visible in the life of the organization: Logo, product design, annual reports, dressing codes and office-shaping are all well-known and important elements of aesthetic management. Architecture is of course more than a visual aspect, but it is also a very important visual aspect that shows or demonstrates the image and values of the company. Product placement in movies is a pure marketing strategy, showing the visual product in a new cultural or artistic context, not telling the audience that it is paid for – i.e., hidden but paid.

Another visual aspect is so-called *corporate collecting*, where the company collects art to decorate the organization's premises or to exhibit in public art museums (Urnes 2002). The works of art become both a part of the organizational culture and identity *and* a way of showing corporate social responsibility (Hoeken and Ruikes 2005). Sponsoring of art museums gives the same opportunity; corporate social responsibility on the one hand and providing art exhibitions to the employees and business customers on the other.

Visual aspects are also present in all kinds of physical artefacts and symbols, and these aspects could be very strategic or totally unintentional. The more unintentional part of such visual aspects has been treated in the field of organizational symbolism, a tradition imported from social anthropology. As is known, this symbolism opened the door to the aesthetic approach to organizational theory. Further, the focus on visibility introduced photographic research as a new way of studying and analysing visual material in organizations. Visual aspects in organizations are both intentional and instrumental *and* unintentional and unconscious, but they are all communicating something about the image, identity and culture of the organization.

As with visual aspects, the literary aspect is present at many levels in the organization – as is the case with rhetoric in annual reports, or in speeches and as management philosophy. These effects have always been there, even though they might not have been understood as literary. The increased importance of slogans and good stories in branding and corporate communication intensify the use of literary effects – this time understood as literary (Van Riel 2000, Shaw 2002). This context deals with *narratives* and *narrations*, in other words, a combination of the words *narrative* and *active*, implying that stories are actions and that they are effective (Kahane and Reitter 2002).

The trend of direct contact between companies and the art field is less common with authors than with the fields of music and theatre, where both the artists and art arenas are incorporated in the activity of the companies. Authors are used as consultants or as authors in the story production itself, but they can also write commissioned books, as Fay Weldon did for the jewel company, Bvlgari, which enjoyed a masked-art campaign advantage. Story-product placement in films is a literary aspect, as hidden but paid marketing, which, as previously noted, was the case in *Cast Away*.

In addition to the instrumental and strategic use of literary effects, you will find everyday conversation and organizational talk, which can be analyzed through literary and ethnographic methods (Linstead 2000, Silverman 2000). Inspiration from the French post-structuralists is strong and the focus on the unspoken, unstated and ambiguous keeps these analyses at a distance from rational aspects of the organization. Such analyses are just as autonomous in modus as are the academic studies of novels in a deconstructive perspective. I suggest bringing everyday conversation back to the context of the organization and corporate communication, since this everyday conversation is neither a work of art nor a metaphysical problem (which after all was the topic of Jacques Derrida).

The theatrical effects can be used at a superior level in corporate communication, where the manager is the director pulling the communication strings that make the organization perform like a consistent, clear and visible actor. Theatre knowledge can also be used on an individual level, in order to teach the managers and employees how to make convincing performances in presentations and how to improvise in difficult situations such as in conflict solving. Actors and directors can be brought into the organization to hold workshops in acting and improvisation, so-called art based training. Sponsoring of theatres can be used as social legitimacy for the company and as caring for the employees by providing them with theatre tickets and internal performances.

Staging and directing all aesthetic means is a way to become visible and appealing for the consumer, client, stakeholder and shareholder. This is also the main message in Pine and Gilmore's theory of the experience economy; the article needs to be staged in order to become memorable for the customer. *Work is Theatre and Every Business is a Stage*, is the sub-title of their book *Experience Economy* (1999), and the authors underscore that this is not metaphoric, but literal.

In addition to such instrumental and strategic use of theatrical aspects, one finds a lot of theatre-like situations and behaviour in organizations, such as roles, dialogues, play and rituals (Mangham and Overington 1987, Khandwalla 1988, Höpfl and Linstead 2000). These theatrical aspects are not intentional or instrumental in the way Pine and Gilmore treat "work as theatre" or in the way sponsoring, directing corporate communication or art-based training are. They are theatrical in the same way as a lot of other situations and behaviour in life are theatrical. This does not mean that the world is a stage – literally speaking. "Theatrical" is an adjective that means *theatre-like*, something that looks like theatre *but is not*. My use of "theatrical" is literal, and it just means that *something* in organizations is theatre-like some times. This use of the term theatrical is both less ambitious and more practical than the metaphoric, "organization as theatre". The use of the "organizations as theatre" approach implies that all organizations can be seen as theatre all the time (Mangham and Overington 1987)." Using the term simply as an adjective, one avoids the never ending discussion about all the limits of the metaphor (Cornelissen 2004). My point here is another one. These unintended theatrical aspects should also be studied in relation to what roles and rituals communicate about the organization, image, targets and performances – not because it is theoretically necessary, but because it is organizationally relevant.

In a dedifferentiated society, the hybrid threatens the autonomous *topos* of both art and the pure aesthetic experience. Hybrids are creating disorder and disbelief; art and aesthetics are becoming blurred by different kinds of financial and marketing strategies. The field of art and the aesthetic experience have exploded in all directions and the economic system has wished them welcome. The alternative aesthetic approach in organizational theory, whether it belongs to the tradition of Baumgarten or Lyotard or Luhmann, is not able to grasp the blurring of genres and the growing of hybrids. Studying art and aesthetics as integrated corporate communication is only one way to go, studying aesthetic corporate communication as propaganda is another one (and another article).

I am not postulating that everything has been hybridized and blurred. The order of modernity is still present in western institutions and politics and in our values and mentalities. What I am trying to convince the reader is that dedifferentiation and hybridization have begun and these processes will continue in years to come.

Litterature

Balasubramanian, Siva K. 1994. "Beyond Advertising and Publicity: Hybrid Messages and Public Policy Issues", *Journal of Advertising*; Dec94, Vol. 23 Issue 4, p29-46.

Baudrillard, J. 1990. *La Transparence du Mal*, Paris: Galilée.

Bourriaud, N. 2002. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les presses du réel.

Berstad, M., Engh S. and L.P. Fjære. 2003. *Fra sponning til samarbeid*. Oslo: Siviloppgave NMH/Handelshøyskolen BI.

Bradley, W., M. Hannula and C. Ricupero (eds.). 2006. *Self-organisations/ Counter-economic strategies*, New York: Sternberg Press.

Brown, S. and A. Patterson (eds.). 2000. *Imagining Marketing. Art, aesthetics and the Avant-Garde*, London and New York: Routledge.

Brønn, S.P. and R. Wiig (eds.). 2002. *Corporate Communication. A Strategic Approach to Building Reputation*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

Carr, A. and P. Hancock. 2003. *Art and Aesthetics at Work*. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cornelissen, J.P. 2004. "What Are We Playing at? Theatre, Organization, and the Use of Metaphore", *Organization Studies* 25, 705-726.

Dickinson, P. and N. Svensen. 2000. *Beautiful Corporations: Corporate Style in Action*, Prentice Hall.

Darsø, L. 2004. *Artful Creation. Learning-tales of Arts-in-Business*. København: Samfundslitteratur.

De Paoli, D. 2003. "Den estetiske organisasjonen", in A. Danielsen, D. De Paoli D, A-B Gran and J. Langdalen *Kunsten å hellige middelet – nye forbindelser mellom kunst og næringsliv*. Kristiansand: HøyskoleForlaget.

Gran, A-B. 2000. *Hvite løgner/svarte myter - om det etniske på modernitetens scene*. Oslo: UniPub Forlag.

Gran, A-B. and D. De Paoli. 2005. *Kunst og kapital. Nye forbindelser mellom kunst, estetikk og næringsliv*. Oslo: Pax forlag.

Gran, A-B. and S. Hofplass. 2007. *Kultursponning*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

- Guillet De Monthoux, P. 1998. "Estetik som organisationsteori", in B. Czarniawska (ed.) *Organisationsteori på svenska*. Malmö: Liber ekonomi.
- Guillet De Monthoux, P. 2000. "The Art Management of Aesthetic Organization", in S. Linstead and H. Höpfl (eds.) *The Aesthetics of Organization*. London: Sage.
- Habermas, J. 2001. *Glauben und Wissen*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2001.
- Hancock, P. 2005. "Uncovering the Semiotic In Organizational Aesthetic". *Organization* 12 (1): 29-50.
- Hatch, M.J and M. Schultz. 2000. "Scaling the Tower of Babel: Relational Differences between Identity, Image, and Culture in Organizations." in M. Schultz, M.J. Hatch and M.H. Larsen (eds.) *The Expressive Organization. Linking Identity, Reputation, and the Corporate Brand*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hess-Bostad, N. and K. Marberger. 2003. *Organisasjoners estetiske kommunikasjon*. Siviloppave, Oslo: BI Norges Markedshøyskole.
- Hoeken, H. and L. Ruikes. 2005. "Art's for Art's sake? An Exploratory Study of the Possibility to Align Works of Art With an Organization's Identity", *Journal of Business Communication*, Volume 3, 233-246.
- Holten Larsen, M. 2000. "Managing the Corporate Story." in M. Schultz, M.J. Hatch and M.H. Larsen (eds.) *The Expressive Organization. Linking Identity, Reputation, and the Corporate Brand*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Höpfl, H. and S. Linstead. 2000. "Passions and Performance: Suffering and Carrying of Organizational Roles", in S. Fineman (ed.) *Emotions in Organizations*. London: Sage.
- Kahane, B. og R. Reitter. 2002. "Narrative identity. Navigation between "reality" and "fiction" ", in B. Moingeon and G. Soenen (eds.) *Corporate and Organizational Identities. Integrating strategy, marketing, communication and organizational perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Khandwalla, P.N. 1988. Book Reviews: Iain L. Mangham and Michael A. Overington: *Organizations as Theatre: A Social Psychology of Dramatic Appearances 1987*, *Organization Studies* 9, 435-439.
- Kapferer, J.N. 2002. "Corporate brand and organizational identity." in B. Moingeon and G. Soenen (eds.) *Corporate and Organizational Identities. Integrating strategy, marketing, communication and organizational perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Kunde, J. 2000. *Corporate religion*. Larvik: Hegnar Media.
- Latour, B. 1991. *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, Paris: Edition Découverte
- Linstead, S. and H. Höpfl (eds.). 2000. *The Aesthetics of Organization*. London: Sage.

- Linstead, S. 2000. "Ashes and Madness: The Play of Negativity and the Poetics of Organization", in S. Linstead and H. Höpfl (eds.) *The Aesthetics of Organization*. London: Sage.
- Luhmann, N. 1984. *Soziale systeme. Grundriss einer allgemeine Theorie*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Mangham, I. L. and M. A. Overington. 1987. *Organizations as Theatre: A Social Psychology of Dramatic Appearances*, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.
- Martorella R. (ed.). 1996. *Art and Business. An International Perspective on Sponsorship*. London: Praeger.
- Moingeon, B. og G. Soenen (eds.). 2002. *Corporate and Organizational Identities. Integrating strategy, marketing, communication and organizational perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Pine, B.J. og J. H. Gilmore. 1999. *The Experience Economy. Work Is Theatre and Every Business is a Stage*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Scholl Press.
- Schmitt, B. and A. Simonsen. 1997. *Marketing Aesthetics. The strategic management of brands, identity and image*. New York: Free Press.
- Schroeder, J.E. 2000. "Edouard Manet, Calvin Klein and the strategic use of scandal", S. Brown and A. Patterson (eds). *Imagining Marketing. Art, aesthetics and the Avant-Garde*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Schultz, M., M. J. Hatch and M. H. Larsen (eds.). 2000. *The Expressive Organization. Linking Identity, Reputation, and the Corporate Brand*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shaw, G.G. 2000. "Planning and Communicating Using Stories", in M. Schultz, M .J. Hatch and M.H. Larsen (eds.) *The Expressive Organization. Linking Identity, Reputation, and the Corporate Brand*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Silverman, D. 2000. "Routines Pleasures: The Aesthetic of the Mundane", in S. Linstead and H. Höpfl (eds.) *The Aesthetics of Organization*. London: Sage.
- Soenen, G. and B. Moingeon. 2002. "The five facets of collective identities: integrating corporate and organizational identity", in B. Moingeon and G. Soenen (eds.) *Corporate and Organizational Identities. Integrating strategy, marketing, communication and organizational perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Steiner, B. (ed.) 2003. *SUPERFLEX/TOOLS*. Köln: Verlag der Buckhandlung Walter König.
- Stensen, J. and H.F. Preus. 2003. *Merkevarebygging, Propaganda og Religion*. Siviloppgave, BI Norges Markedshøyskole, Oslo.
- Strati, A. 1999. *Organization and Aesthetics*. London: Sage.
- Strati, A. 2000. "The Aesthetic Approach in Organization Studies", in S. Linstead and H. Höpfl (eds.) *The Aesthetics of Organization*. London: Sage.

Taylor, S. S. and H. Hansen. 2005. "Finding form: Looking at the Field of Organizational Aesthetics", *Journal of Management Studies*, **42**, 6, 1211-1231.

Thyssen, O. 2003. *Æstetisk ledelse – om organisationer og brugskunst*. København: Gyldendal.

Thøger Christensen, L. and G. Cheney. 2000. "Self-Absorption and Self-Seduction in the Corporate Identity Game", in M. Schultz, M.J. Hatch and M.H. Larsen (eds.) *The Expressive Organization. Linking Identity, Reputation, and the Corporate Brand*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Urnes, J.F. 2001. *Kunst i storforetakenes tid*. Oslo: Fagbokforlaget.

Van Riel, C.B.M. 2000. "Corporate Communication Orchestrated by a Sustainable Corporate Story", in M. Schultz, M.J. Hatch and M.H. Larsen (eds.) *The Expressive Organization. Linking Identity, Reputation, and the Corporate Brand*. New York: Oxford University Press.