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Inventive Pedagogy and Aesthetic Practices: Embodying Learning

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Pedagogy many times departs from a logic of acquisition and reception rather than of creation and invention. As a consequence, the assumptions of many learning theories and pedagogies are based on a modus of recognition which reconfirms the world we inhabit as "that which we already understood our world and ourselves to be".ⁱ Knowing and learning are then formed through accurate representation and, paradoxically enough, prevent us from thinking anew. According to Deleuze, thinking, and for that matter, learning, requires an encounter which forces us to think as we realize that "our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disrupted".ⁱⁱ Thinking comes along when there is a rupture which compels us to come up with a different way of seeing the world. In the encounter, rupture and affirmation are combined: "This is the creative moment of the encounter that obliges us to think otherwise. Life, when it truly is loved, is a history of these encounters, which will always necessarily occur beyond representation".ⁱⁱⁱ Art can be considered as a practice that brings these moments of rupture and creation in conjunction. Art gives "free" admission to thinking as it forms an event that can bring about the possibility of something new.

In the Master course, entitled *Interfaces (Between Aesthetics and Entrepreneurship)*, which we have taught three times at the University of St Gallen, we organize such an encounter with art and aesthetic practices as we dig into the topic of

entrepreneurship. As students raise questions with regard to entrepreneurship and address them in group projects, we try to move away from a modus of reproduction and representation to a non-representational and performative modus of learning. These projects are not just about an entrepreneurial issue but entail an entrepreneurial logic as students have to define their own project theme and how they approach it. With this open and processual approach, we enter a process that is featured by risk, uncertainty and ambiguity and that becomes intensified by entering a performative modus: what is required is that projects are performed in front of an audience at a set date and location. While there is a broad range of aesthetical forms and artistic styles available, we opt literally for performances as these involve embodied learning practices which break with the typical cognitive or experiential pedagogies. The learning is oriented for students towards exploring what their bodies and voices can do, how to think via their senses and affects, and how to live risk and uncertainty.

The course follows a structure of four parts. The first part consists of preparatory sessions on campus where we connect to the ideas and questions students have about entrepreneurship and aesthetics, where we engage with the creative process of their projects and where we make improvisations of text fragments from **Shakespeare's Hamlet**.^{iv} The emphasis from the start is on "making do", trying out and engaging with new connections.

Sessions start with warming up and relaxation exercises and are structured around ad hoc tasks, such as drawing out ideas and scenario lines, improvisations around themes and text fragments and immediate reflection rounds, leading into more rehearsal. In the second part, we explore the aesthetic styles of Robert Wilson and Peter Brook by exploring (video-versions of) their adaptation of Hamlet, by looking at videos about their work and life, and, above all, by trying out their styles of playing around material from Hamlet or from their own projects. The third part is project-work where students independently develop their performance, and where they can consult teachers for feedback on a preliminary version. Part two and three are strongly intertwined and take place during a five-day workshop in a public art-centre located in a roughly restored industrial site, where also the performances take place at the end of that week. The fourth part is a debriefing session where we collectively reflect upon the overall process based on individual learning papers students wrote in the meantime.

The encounter with the aesthetic styles of Wilson and Brook forms a radical rupture, first of all because this generation of (management) students is not familiar with the work of Wilson and Brook. An imaginative leap is required to open up for this non-representational art which questions mimetic theatre that mirrors the world. More importantly, new questions increasingly

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"If there is art to the theatre, it is not an aesthetic art, which is secondary, but an art of concentration"

Peter Brook

emerge around how students do the project and where they have to delve into the assumptions they maintained concerning personal engagement and group work, creativity and risk-taking, criticism and aesthetic assessment, and so on. Both Wilson and Brook are self-made artists who have sculpted a very unique artistic parcours and both have in their own way fundamentally changed our understanding of how theatre and performance is done. As their Hamlet adaptations could not be more opposite, this allows us to explore in contrast several common topics of their respective styles, such as understandings of time and space, rhythm and movement, colour and sound, script and text, body and personage, materiality and object, audience and reception. What unites both artists is that they develop an art of concentration, a purified and minimalist storytelling. These elements are explored not by talking about this but by "doing along with the artists" and by experimenting with their approaches in the students' projects. Through engaging with Wilson and Brook and trying them out, it becomes possible to understand how idea and form, concept and style are fundamentally co-productive in how and what we can create. In these encounters, and the fissures implied, something new must be thought. As a consequence, entrepreneurship is approached in surprising ways, as various projects have related it to madness or to serious play, to the metamorphosis of Icarus, the Phoenix-myth or the figure of Faust, to the invention of the electrical chair or the inventor of LSD, and to the atmospheric logic

of soap bubbles.

This course forms only a small illustration, but an increasing series of examples can be mentioned where aesthetic practices are incorporated in the context of management education.^V Common to this aesthetic experimentation is the emphasis on exploring and using the various senses through which learning can be embodied. These specific aesthetic practices challenge the conception of knowledge and learning both in its everyday practices as in the theoretical understanding of these practices, pointing to a shift towards an inventive pedagogy. The groundings for an inventive pedagogy need not be limited to the work of Deleuze but can be traced also in the work of Derrida and Serres^{VI}, Whitehead and, not the least, Nietzsche. Nietzsche saw education as going through several metamorphoses; learning requires first of all an engagement with the existing traditions and learning the practices of critique before he calls upon an

affirmative spirit "for the sport of creation"^{VII}. This learning modus is no longer accepting or judging but inventive, represented by the metamorphosis of becoming child^{VIII}. That creativity is proposed here in relationship to tradition and critique, should be enough to stop all those who think aesthetic practices in learning can be easily and quickly domesticated; there is no quick fix access to creativity, that would also support the logic of a "performative" - read well-ranked - university^{IX}. Aesthetic practices - and everything they can do for learning in terms of intensity, intuition and imagination - can indeed be inscribed in and domesticated by the dominant narratives in management education; what we have argued for is that they also can form a becoming minor of these managerial narrations, that is, if the encounter brings not only a thinking of the new but also a new thinking. That is, if the brain-storming turns into a "body-storming".

I Quote from O'Sullivan, S. 2006. *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*. Thought beyond Representation. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

II See footnote 1.

III See footnote 1.

IV We play here with Baumol's famous statement on the entrepreneurless theoretical firm: "the Prince of Denmark has been expunged from the discussion of Hamlet" (*American Economic Review*, 1968, 58, p. 64). We believe the whole play of Hamlet is absent in entrepreneurship studies and needs to be entered, as it raises some essentially "entrepreneurial" issues, such as thinking and acting under uncertainty and ambiguity, relating to multiple realities and engaging with issues of power and ethics.

V As can be learned from several examples in the *Journal of Management Education*.

VI See Dey, P. and Steyaert, C. 2007. Troubadours of knowledge. *Passion and Invention in Management Education*, *Organization*, 14 (3), 437-461.

VII Nietzsche, F. [1886] 1969. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. London: Penguin, see page 55.

VIII See also Weiskopf, R. and Steyaert, C. 2009. In: Daniel Hjorth & Chris Steyaert (eds.), *The Politics and Aesthetics of Entrepreneurship*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar.

IX See footnote 4.