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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"). 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"). 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"). 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. 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, cre-
vativity 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 under-
standing of how theatre and per-
formance 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 un-
etes 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 stu-
dents' projects. Through engaging
with Wilson and Brook and trying
them out, it becomes possible to
understand how idea and form, con-
cept 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 illu-
stration, but an increasing series of
elements can be mentioned where
aesthetic practices are incorporated
in the context of management
education. Common to this aethe-
tic experimentation is the emphasis
on exploring and using the various
senses through which learning can
be embodied. These specific aesthe-
tic practices challenge the con-
ception 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 peda-
gogy need not be limited to the work
of Deleuze but can be traced also
in the work of Derrida and Serres,
Whitehead and, not the least,
Nietzsche. Nietzsche saw education
as going through several metamorph-
oses; 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". This learning modus
is no longer accepting or judging
but inventive, represented by the
metamorphosis of becoming
child. That creativity is propos-
se 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. Aesthetic practices
- and everything they can do for
learning in terms of intensity, intu-
tion and imagination - can indeed
be inscribed in and domesticated
by the dominant narratives in man-
agement education; what we have
argued for is that they also can form
a becoming minor of these man-
gerial narrations, that is, if the en-
counter brings not only a thinking
of the new but also a new thinking.
That is, if the brain-storming turns
into a "body-storming".

2 See footnote 1.
3 See footnote 1.
4 We play here with Baumol's famous statement on the entrepreneurless theo-
retical 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.
5 As can be learned from several examples in the Journal of Management
Education.
in Management Education, Organization, 14 (3). 437-461.
8 See also Weiskopf, R. and Steyaert, C. 2009. In: Daniel Hjorth & Chris Steyaert
9 See footnote 4.