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Towards an aesthetics for educational administration

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Just as Weber's explication of the characteristics of bureaucracy has dominated much of the discourse in organisational and administrative theory for the past century, his explication of charisma has dominated the field of leadership. The paradox inherent in demanding charismatic leadership within increasingly rationalised organisations would not be lost on Weber. The 'enchantment' inherent in charismatic performance sits oddly with the 'disenchantment' of Weber's hyper-rationalised world of strategic and routinised organisations.

In current texts educational leaders are, like other leaders, exhorted to exercise charismatic leadership: to 'envisage' the mission of their organisation; to 'celebrate' its culture; to 'symbolise' and 'perform' its purpose. The 'art' of leadership is at once strategic - as in the 'art' of war (Ribbins and Zhang 2003a; 2003b); moral - as in the 'ethic' of administration (Hodgkinson 1991); and aesthetic - as in the 'performance' of culture (Starratt 1990; 1993). The ideal leader is indeed an aesthetic accomplishment of the self. There are echoes here (though somewhat remote) of the Greek ideal of kalos kagathos - the man (always and only a man) both beautiful and good (or perhaps more precisely, the man both beautiful and noble).

The embodiment of virtue and the aesthetic performance of the self are both caught up in recent plethora of texts on school culture. Deal and Peterson's text Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership (1999), typifies this genre in its emphasis on the importance of symbolic leadership in the shaping of school culture. Arguing that their analysis is rooted in an anthropological understanding of culture, Deal and Peterson suggest eight key roles for educational leaders as they perform their cultural work: historian, anthropological sleuth, visionary, symbolist, potter, poet, actor and healer (1999: 87-8). Clearly many of these roles are essentially aesthetic in that they involve imagination (visionary), representation (symbolist), production (potter), celebration (poet) and performance (actor). Aesthetics is seen as a crucial component in the building of a 'strong school culture', one underpinned by 'informal folkways and traditions that infuse work with meaning, passion and purpose' (1999: 1).

Such texts argue that aesthetic activities are fundamental, then, in building motivation and commitment: aesthetics have a moral purpose. Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, is quoted as an exemplar of such cultural leadership:
Towards an aesthetics for an educational administration

The key is heart. I pour my heart into every cup of coffee, and so do my partners at Starbucks. When customers sense that, they respond in kind. If you pour your heart into your work, or into any worthy enterprise, you can achieve dreams others may think impossible.

(Schultz and Yang 1997 in Deal and Peterson 1999: 1)

Deal and Peterson translate the message into the world of education:

The need for some leaders to step forward and take the necessary risks to build positive school cultures has never been greater. If Starbucks' CEO can pour his heart into a cup of coffee, so too can school leaders pour their hearts into student learning.

(Deal and Peterson 1999: 11)

The same message is put even more forcefully by Saphier and King in their assertion that 'Good seeds grow in strong cultures' (1985).

Such a position is both blatant and naïve. It is blatant in its abandonment of the descriptive intention of anthropological approaches to culture and its appropriation of culture for managerial purposes (see Bates 1981; 1983; 1987; Angus 1993). It is naïve in its assumption that strong cultures articulated through powerful aesthetics are necessarily moral or 'good'. It is also a position quite uninformed by debates over such issues in the field of aesthetics or more recent discussions of cultural studies, for both of these fields have been concerned with what might be called the politics of culture.

As is made clear elsewhere in this volume, there is a significant tradition in aesthetics that follows the Greek ideal of harmony, where the man both beautiful and good epitomises the moral and aesthetic aspirations of a 'harmonious' culture. As O'Leary suggests, within this model:

... there is a coalescence of aesthetics and ethics, with the result that every aesthetic judgement - that something is beautiful, or harmonious - necessarily implies an ethical judgement - that that thing is good, or praiseworthy. According to this model, there is no doubt that if one's life and one's behaviour have a beautiful form, then they will also be good.

(O'Leary 1999: 161)

Such a (Greek) ideal of harmony was, however, pursued within a culture where there were significant distinctions between enslaved and free, male and female, citizen and non-citizen. It was, therefore, an ideal open only to a free, male, citizen elite such as that represented in the hierarchy of Plato's republic.

It is, of course, possible to build a model of school culture that expresses such ideals of harmony and hierarchy. Indeed, the English 'public' school in many ways appealed to just such a rationale with its emphasis on physical prowess and beauty and its ethical/aesthetic/political hierarchies.
The difficulty with such a position is, however, its tendency towards authoritarian manipulation. The most obvious example of the dangers of ethical aestheticism lie not in the Greek and Roman examples, nor in the case of the English public school, but in the frightening images of the 'perfectibility' of man inherent in the Nazi and fascist states during the first half of the twentieth century.

In examining such regimes Walter Benjamin (1973) argued that while traditionally art was bound up with (largely religious) ritual and was, in that sense, 'authentic' in its representation of a shared culture, in the contemporary age where art can be 'mechanically' reproduced, it becomes instead a tool of politics. That is, art becomes a means of propaganda and manipulation, substituting and imposing an artificial unity of purpose and ideals while repressing and marginalising other aesthetic representations of politics and ethics, particularly those concerned with changing the status quo. O'Leary shows how Benjamin's thesis works:

Benjamin elaborates this point by showing how fascism organises the newly formed masses while simultaneously maintaining existing property structures. It achieves this by giving its subjects merely 'a chance to express themselves' (Benjamin, 1973 p. 243). In newsreel footage of parades and rallies, for example, the masses are brought 'face to face with themselves' (p. 253) and they are given the opportunity to portray themselves. What this means for Benjamin, is that the principle of aesthetic expression and the beautiful illusion (the schoner schein) takes precedence over the principle of political rights ... Fascism 'violates' the masses in the same way that it violates the apparatus of film in order to make it produce 'ritual values' (p. 243). It proceeds by a successive aestheticisation (and hence ritualisation) of political life; it institutes the Fuhrer cult, it glorifies war, it confers upon the people, the blood, the soil the magical properties of the auratic cult object. (1999: 155)

The result is an aestheticised politics through which a mass hysteria is engendered and in which cult-like rituals persuade people to celebrate even their own destruction. As Caygill puts it, such an aestheticised politics persuades people to:

... participate avidly in their own history while spectating it as someone else's history; they participate in political action and view it from a distance; they participate in their own destruction and enjoy the spectacle. (1994: 28)

A similar destructive aestheticisation of politics was articulated in Italy by Marinetti whose work attempted to replace the centrality of 'woman' and 'beauty' in traditional aesthetics with a monstrous invocation of the mechanical: '... the wholly mastered, definitive future aesthetic of great locomotives, twisting tunnels, armoured cars, torpedo boats, monoplanes and racing cars' on which the
Towards an aesthetics for an educational administration

‘young modern male’ will focus his attention as objects that ‘... glow with pleasure beneath his ardent caress’ (in Flint 1971: 81, 90).

While Marinetti was writing in 1909, his aesthetic was incorporated into both Italian and German Fascism. Junger, for instance, echoed Marinetti in celebrating the unifying aesthetic of the machine:

Today we are writing poems of steel, and we are fighting for power in battles that unfold with the precision of machines. There is a beauty in it which we can already sense: in these battles on land, on sea and in the air in which the hot will of our blood controls itself and finds expression in the mastery of the technical miracle machines of power.

(Junger in Berman 1989: 78)

The purpose of all this aestheticised power was not the liberation of the self and its construction according to personal conceptions of the beautiful and the good, nor even a construction of the self which conformed to a particular harmonious cultural tradition, but rather the coercion of individuals into a unified, nationalistic conception of the self that at once celebrated and was subordinated to a particular image of the nation engineered by the artist/statesman. As O’Leary suggests:

If there is something characteristic about the fascist aestheticisation of politics then, it must be sought in this insistence upon the ideal of a non-fractured subject which finds itself reassuringly reflected in a non-fractured, uniform public space. When thought of in these terms, it becomes possible to understand and explain the fascist theme of the politician as the plastic artist who moulds the people to his will, and gives them a harmonious and beautiful form.

(1999: 158-9)

Education was, of course, a major instrument in the creation of a ‘Volk’, a people who were motivated and committed to a particular vision of their personal and political future (Sunker and Otto 1996). Educational administrators/leaders were themselves required to be both the personification of the vision and the managers of its implementation through an aesthetic of education that carried both cultural and political ideals.

This particular juxtaposition of aesthetics, ethics and politics is surely not what Deal and Peterson have in mind. But, as their only goal in the shaping of a strong school culture is a somewhat generalised encouragement of learning within a shared, common vision, such a result is not discounted by their view of culture, aesthetics, ethics and the practice of educational leadership (1999).

There is, of course, an alternative tradition stemming from Kant that sees aesthetics as an autonomous activity with purposes and criteria of its own independent of religious/political/cultural concerns. As this is articulated in other papers in this volume it will not be dealt with at length here. In passing,
however, it is interesting to note that the reaction of many artists to the totalitarianisms of fascism and communism - of the right and the left - was to assert the 'independence' of art and the need of the artist for 'free expression'. As representational art was inescapably descriptive and therefore caught up in the brutality of contemporary life, the only possible solution was the creation of 'abstract' art. Abstract expressionism was, indeed, an assertion of the autonomy of art. It was:

... for many, the expression of freedom: the freedom to create controversial works of art, the freedom symbolized by action painting, by the unbridled expressionism of artists completely without fetters.

(Guilbaut 1983: 201)

However, even in this case, politics caught up with art. As Guilbaut observes, abstract expressionism itself became a weapon in the ideological battles of the Cold War. It was interpreted within a highly politicised context.

In the first place it was argued that:

The brutality of the modern world can wear down the individual. Against this brutality the artist was supposed to be a shining example of the individual will set against the dull uniformity of totalitarian society.

(Guilbaut 1983: 200)

Within this context:

Freedom was the symbol most actively and vigorously promoted by the new liberalism in the Cold War period. Expressionism stood for the difference between a free society and a totalitarian one. Art was able to package the virtues of liberal society and lay down a challenge to its enemies: it aroused polemic without counting danger.

(Guilbaut 1983: 201)

So even the ideal of the autonomy of aesthetics was appropriated politically in the cultural battles of the Cold War.

To others, of course, aesthetics and politics are historically linked in many jurisdictions - not simply in Fascist states. Eagleton (1990), in his Ideology of the Aesthetic, argues that Kant's assertion of the autonomy of the aesthetic realm provides a necessary disguise for the cultural and political assertion of bourgeois hegemony. In other words Eagleton argues that:

... Kant's aesthetic has to account for, or display, bourgeois ideology, bourgeois morality and bourgeois commodity in homologous relationship. The ruling order ... needs Kant's epistemology: it needs a persuasive account of freedom which masks the manoeuvres of the ideology of private capital.

(Armstrong 2000: 34)
The result is the modern aestheticised state where the first mechanism of repression is an appeal to the aesthetic: the cultural/political combination of desire and morality that construct the motivation for a particular way of life, a particular way of being. Once again, education is a significant mechanism for the production and distribution of such an aesthetic and educational administrators/leaders are instrumental in the articulation (enforcement?) of both vision and practice.

The aestheticised state need not, of course, be totalitarian in its control of cultural agencies. It may simply support the articulation of cultural agencies in a particular form. In many contemporary societies the form is that of capitalism. Indeed it is the theoretical analysis of the structures of power and finance inherent in capitalism that provide the model for Bourdieu's models of cultural and symbolic capital.

In his most fully worked out explications of the importance of cultural capital Bourdieu (1984; 1993) argues that just as financial capital is accumulated through family contacts, business networks, associations, class relations, economic institutions and political power, cultural capital is accumulated through family training, education, class location and associated cultural codes which facilitate access to and the accumulation of prestige. Much of this prestige is dependent upon the accumulation of symbolic capital that is constituted as a hierarchy of privileged knowledge through which aesthetic and social value is produced. Individuals and their families are positioned in social space by their possession of particular kinds of symbolic capital. Their cultural relations are identified and determined by their location in that space. While analogous to the distribution and articulation of financial capital, symbolic capital is somewhat independent of the structures of financial capital. Indeed, its main justification in the conferring of prestige or 'distinction' is the claim of aesthetics or 'taste' to be an autonomous sphere and its promotion of 'the charismatic image of artistic activity as pure, disinterested creation by an isolated artist' (Bourdieu 1993: 34).

Symbolic capital and its distribution is articulated through a network of institutions such as art galleries and museums, cultural agencies, theatres, publishing houses, and foundations which constitute the infrastructure for the 'management' of symbolic capital. While the claim is made that the art produced and regulated by these institutions is autonomous and 'disinterested', Bourdieu insists that they function to legitimate the hierarchies of symbolic power upon which the possession of symbolic capital depends. They are sites of continuous struggle over what is to constitute 'art' and articulate the rules of inclusion and exclusion, regulation, access and value which consecrate the value of symbolic capital, distinction and prestige. Cultural wars are fought within and between such institutions with a Darwinian intensity in order to 'impose a legitimate definition of art and literature' (Bourdieu 1993: 41).

What constitutes legitimate art and literature at any one time is necessarily related to the struggles going on between classes and, perhaps most especially, within the dominant class:
The struggle in the field of cultural production over the imposition of the legitimate mode of cultural production is inseparable from the struggle within the dominant class ... to impose the dominant principle of domination (that is to say – ultimately – the definition of human accomplishment).

(Bourdieu 1993: 41)

Definitions of human accomplishment are, of course, crucial to education both in terms of the content of the curriculum (what constitutes appropriate knowledge) and the pedagogy (what constitutes appropriate behaviour and relations) within educational institutions. Educational administrators/leaders are crucial figures in the definition and policing of accomplishment, both through their articulation (visioning?) of a particular aesthetic and through their disciplining of deviance. They tend, as do most intellectuals, to take conservative positions in the cultural wars over curriculum and pedagogy, those educational carriers of symbolic capital. As Bourdieu points out:

All the evidence suggests that, at a given level of autonomy, intellectuals are, other things being equal, proportionately more responsive to the seduction of the powers that be ...

(1993: 41)

Moreover, educational administrators typically not only articulate the vision of the powers that be, but also preside over educational institutions that confirm both rank and distinction through the legitimation of particular (conservative) definitions of cultural capital and the ‘consecration’ of those, and only those, who can be considered to possess such capital. In this respect ‘the school institution performs a truly magical operation, the paradigm of which is the separation between the sacred and the profane’ (Bourdieu 1998: 21).

As is the claim in the realm of aesthetics, the school also claims autonomy from existing structures of financial and cultural capital, suggesting that talent and effort are the sole requirements for success. In fact, suggests Bourdieu, far from challenging the inherited distribution of symbolic capital, the school typically confirms it. The school simply:

... maintains the preexisting order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital. More precisely, by a series of selection operations, the system separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it. Differences of aptitude being inseparable from social differences according to inherited capital, the system thus tends to maintain preexisting social differences.

(1998: 20)

The articulation of a particular vision by educational administrators and the classification of teachers and pupils in terms of their conformity with that vision as successful or unsuccessful, can, therefore, be seen as a mechanism through which
individuals are located in social, cultural or symbolic space and defined more or less permanently by that location— notwithstanding the school’s embrace of the ideology of promotion by merit. This is an aesthetic as well as a functional classification, one that marks the difference between ‘purity’ and ‘danger’ (Douglas 1970; Durkheim 1971). Bourdieu discusses this distinction in similar terms, contrasting the school’s role in protecting the purity of the ordained social order against the danger of those unconsecrated by such noble affiliation:

The act of scholastic classification is always ... an act of ordination ... It institutes a social difference of rank, a *permanent relation of order*: the elect are marked, for their whole lives, by their affiliation ...; they are members of an order, in the medieval sense of the word, and of a noble order, that is, a clearly delimited set (one either belongs or one doesn’t) of people who are separated from the common run of mortals by a difference of essence and, therefore, legitimately licensed to dominate. This is why the separation achieved by the school is also an act of ordination in the sense of consecration, enthronement in a sacred category, a nobility.

(Bourdieu 1998: 21)

The work of educational administrators is, therefore, aesthetic, not only in terms of their vision of school culture and their embodiment of that vision in the aesthetic performance of the self, but also in the act of consecration of a particular aesthetic distinction between purity and danger, between the noble and the mundane and their classification of individuals according to such categories.

Such classification is crucial to the maintenance of social distinction. As T. S. Eliot argued in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, Culture, with a capital C, was necessarily regarded as a minority pursuit:

To aim to make ... the ‘uneducated’ mass of the population ... share in the appreciation of the fruits of the most conscious part of culture is to adulterate and cheapen what you give, for it is an essential condition of the preservation of the quality of the culture of the minority that it should continue to be a minority culture.

(1948: 32)

Eliot’s concern was the maintenance of high culture and its defence against the emergence of the masses. Here Eliot was in the company of others such as Leavis, who articulated such a view at greater length in his *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1933) and his attempted codification of the canons of high culture in poetry (*Revaluation* 1936) and the English novel (*The Great Tradition* 1962). More recently and controversially Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) provided another attempt to defend high culture against the depredations of working class, minority, ethnic and feminist cultures. Adorno (1984; 1991) had a similar view of *The Culture Industry* and its ‘administration of culture’.
Here, of course, is a perfect example of the attempt to maintain privileged definitions of culture and to articulate them in social, cultural or aesthetic 'space' in ways that define and legitimate hierarchies of aesthetic, cultural and social power. Eliot, Leavis, Bloom, and a legion of others were attempting to defend such a notion of elite culture against the emergence of mass culture articulated, for instance, through cinema, popular music, 'gutter' journalism, radio and television. In twentieth century England, of course, this argument was carried through into the visible separation of the grammar (elite culture) and secondary modern (mass culture) schools: a structural, symbolic and classed system of the most impermeable kind.

Nonetheless, despite the boundaries created by such a system, some working class boys did manage to cross over from working class to elite educational systems. Among the first generation of working class boys to do so in England were the founders of the 'cultural studies' movement, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and Stuart Hall in particular. Working at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham they were among the first writers to suggest that cultural criticism could be constructed from a working class perspective. Williams, in particular, argued that it was possible, through disciplined study, to learn about other cultures and to understand their perspectives — their canons and criteria of evaluation, their aesthetic, and the ways in which their cultural identity was formed (see Gombrich 1988; Williams 1958; 1961; 1980). The cultural studies group mounted a major challenge to the position articulated by Eliot and Leavis. They did so by redefining the notion of culture and opposing the 'literary' notion of high culture with a:

... 'social' definition of culture, in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values, not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour.

(Williams 1961: 57)

Such a turn was quite consistent with another tradition derived from anthropology, which, in its study of primitive cultures, adopted a similar view but which was only just beginning to apply the same techniques of cultural analysis to contemporary societies.

Coupled with a neo-Marxist understanding of social relations, this school of thought developed quickly an analysis of cultural relations, cultural production and cultural reproduction which showed how culture was segmented and hierarchised and how it was reproduced in the institutions and practices of everyday life. Aesthetic differentiation was seen as a mechanism of the reproduction of cultural and social difference: it served a structural and an ideological purpose:

The reproduction of the social relations of production requires, in class societies, the continual production of specifically classed and gendered individuals within an ideological field that naturalizes existing classes and
Towards an aesthetics for an educational administration

In the broadest sense, the work of ideologies is to represent historical contradictions as natural: as immutable differences (between man and women, blacks and whites, 'them' and 'us', the 'successful' and the 'idle'); as rich or amusing variety ('it takes all sorts', vive la difference'); as mutual dependency ('different but equal'; social contract, a share of the profits); or as mere appearances subsumed in a larger unity (the family, the British people, 'we're all human beings'). All these and many other forms of naturalization are at work in developed social formations, not only in those institutions of the superstructure (school, church, family) that directly 'manufacture' ideology, but also in the most intimate interstices and very atmospheres of public and private life.

(Hall 1980: 261–2)

At first, the idea of reproduction and the ideological domination of by elites of cultural institutions was a focus of study. More recently, however, the study of culture as a 'way of life' has mutated into the study of cultural practices of particular groups and their interactions. Simultaneously, as Paul Ricoeur (1986) suggests, the method of social science has shifted from the structural to the conversational, where the meaning of social life is to be understood through the analysis of the standpoint of its participants expressed in talk in small settings.

Such a position leads to a rather different view of society: one that is articulated not through structure, but through negotiation between cultural practices of enormous diversity. Society is a series of multiple realities each of which struggles to articulate its interests and understandings through struggle and negotiation with other 'realities'. Meaning itself, is produced through struggle and articulated through the aesthetics of language, symbolism, performance and artifice:

... culture no longer refers to shared meanings that reflect people's way of life. Instead, cultural practices refer to the many institutions, classes, and groups that compete in the articulation of the social meaning of things, to the many sites and positions from which knowledges and ideas are developed, and to the conflicts arising out of the struggle to stage performances and to affect audiences.

(McCarthy 1996: 26)

Such a view suggests a certain relativism in the conception of culture and the aesthetic practices through which it is negotiated. Such a plurality brings the very notion of meaning into question: the status of various claims as 'fact', 'opinion', 'knowledge' or 'ideology' are constantly disputed as are the motivations behind certain dispositions:

For these reasons and others, the study of cultural practices makes evident the problem of the politics of meaning. It raises questions about how particular cultural meanings came to be produced, why, and by whom. It forces
upon us the realization that the same cultural ideas, words and images often mean different things to different groups. And furthermore, the meaning of something is continually subject to change both because social objects are multi-coded and because there are a multiplicity of 'languages'. The cultural order becomes the outcome of historically diverse and conflicting groups.

(McCarthy 1996: 26)

Such an anarchy of cultures is far from the ideal celebrated by Matthew Arnold in his advocacy of bringing the 'best that has been thought and said in the world' to the unruly masses thus insuring against revolution through the civilising effect of elite culture (1960: 27).

But contemporary societies are marked by such an anarchy of cultures, some developed from within, others the result of cultural contact and migration. The central issue in such a multifarious, post-modern world becomes that of how to communicate across cultural boundaries (Touraine 2000) and how to construct 'common institutions in which many forms of life can coexist' (Gray 2000: 6). In essence this project is an aesthetic project as it involves the exercise of imagination, presentation, performance, interpretation, and identification. The point here is that rationality or logic may well not be a sufficient vehicle for cross-cultural communication as the paradigms of different cultures may be incommensurable (McKee 2005).

This does not mean that different cultures cannot talk with one another, but that the mechanisms for doing so may depend upon translation, empathy and creativity:

The key skills for this kind of public debate are no longer training in formal or informal academic logic, but real life resources, such as our abilities to be creative and our willingness to keep trying to communicate with people whose language of argument we might not at first understand.

(McKee 2005: 161)

Charles Taylor puts the same point in a somewhat different way:

... for a culture sufficiently different from our own, we may have only the foggiest idea...of in what its valuable contribution might consist. Because, for a sufficiently different culture, the very understanding of what it is to be of worth will be strange and unfamiliar to us. To approach, say, a raga with the presumptions of value implicit in the well-tempered clavier would be forever to miss the point. What has to happen is... a 'fusion of horizons.' We learn to move in a broader horizon, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture. The 'fusion of horizons' operates through our developing new vocabularies of comparison.

(Taylor 1992: 67)
Dewey, of course, saw this imaginative process as fundamental to the aesthetic experience as well as to the process of education. In his *Art and Experience* he argued the centrality of imagination in coming to terms with the new and incorporating it into the construction of the self: the capacity to look at things as if they could be otherwise. This capacity, he suggests, is:

... a way of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole. It is the large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes into contact with the world. When old and familiar things are made new in experience, there is imagination. When the new is created, the far and strange become the most natural inevitable things in the world. There is always some measure of adventure in the meeting of mind and universe, and this adventure is, in its measure, imagination.

(Dewey 1980: 267)

Imagination, as a central component of aesthetic awareness and as a central process in the incorporation of the new and strange into our consciousness is, therefore, fundamental in negotiations between 'cultures'. It is also fundamental in the process of education. Indeed, it can be seen as the everyday experience of children from various backgrounds in their attempts to come to terms with the strangeness of the curricular, pedagogical and evaluative structures of schools.

And, indeed, just as imagination is needed in our negotiation and interpretation of other cultures and the incorporation of such understanding into the curriculum of schools, so does our pedagogy need to be informed by such imagination in our attempts to understand our students. Maxine Greene puts this necessity quite forcefully:

Those of us who 'do' aesthetic education, those of us who try to find spaces for it in problematic schools, are sensitive to the multiple life stories young people are carrying with them into our classrooms. We are sensitive to the multiple voices that need to be heard, the multiple vantage points from which the young look at an often uncaring world. At once, we are aware of what are thought of as multiple intelligences, as diverse symbol systems and languages for interpreting what presents itself as reality. And we are particularly conscious of the importance of imagination, so often omitted from education reports: imagination that allows us to open windows in the actual and disclose visions of what might be.

(1988: 110)

So here is an argument for the fundamental importance of the aesthetic in negotiating difference through imagination: for the incorporation of the other in the experience of education (see also Greene 2001). Such a vision is particularly apt for education in a world of difference where the dangers of the authoritarian imposition of an elite culture or an aesthetically engineered politics of unity are present and real. It is also apt in a world where the retreat into gated communities within
which a shared and exclusionary vision provides an alternative authoritarianism and repression (Bates 2005; Peshkin 1986; Touraine 2000).

But the purpose of education is not simply to encourage people to understand the world they live in, in all its complexity and confusion, but also to empower students to act within it. The importance of the aesthetic is not simply, therefore, the encouragement of a somewhat passive connoisseurship, but the encouragement of agency. As Herbert Read argued:

Education is the fostering of growth, but apart from physical maturation, growth is only made apparent in expression – audible or visual signs and symbols. Education may therefore be defined as the cultivation of modes of expression – it is teaching children and adults how to make sounds, images, movements, tools and utensils. A man who can make such things well is a well educated man. If he can make good sounds, he is a good speaker; if he can make good images, he is a good painter or sculptor; if good movements, a good dancer or labourer; if good utensils, a good craftsman. All faculties, of thought, memory, sensibility and intellect are involved in such processes. And they are all processes which involve art, for art is nothing but the good making of sounds, images, etc. The aim of education is therefore the creation of artists – of people efficient in the various modes of expression.

(1958: 11)

The purpose of such expression, of such aesthetic capacity was, for Read, the capacity for self-expression within a democratic framework, one where the agency of individuals was acknowledged and valued. It followed that 'a democratic education is the only guarantee of a democratic revolution: indeed, to introduce a democratic method of education is the only necessary revolution' (Read 1958: 304). Here are echoes of Dewey's argument of the close relationship between aesthetics, civilisation and democracy (Dewey 1931; 1966; 1980).

The role of the aesthetic in the encouragement of agency is a concern of contemporary educators such as Maxine Greene:

It may be our interest in imagination, as much as our interest in active learning, that makes us so eager to encourage a sense of agency among those with whom we work. By that I mean consciousness of the power to choose and to act upon what is chosen. I mean a willingness to take initiatives, to pose critical questions, to play an authentic part in on-going dialogues – to embark, whenever opportunities arise, on new beginnings. This means that we desire, through aesthetic education, not only to foster continually deepening understanding of the several arts, but to empower teachers, students, parents – all those involved with the care and nurture of the young – to act upon their freedom in the world they share with others. That means resisting determinism, apathy, indifference, carelessness, and the numbness and anaesthesia that seems to affect so many people's lives. Dewey once said that the opposite of 'aesthetic' is indeed 'anaesthetic'. In relation to that we
might think of aesthetic education as education for wide-awakeness – for a more active, responsible, ardent mode of pursuing our human quests.

(1988: 110-11)

Here, then is an aesthetic vision that couples imagination with agency and regards the function of the aesthetic as the appreciation of difference and the appropriation and negotiation of such difference as sources of the self. It is a compelling vision and one in keeping with our times. The question is, is it capable of providing a powerful foundation for an aesthetic for educational administration? Eisner, for one, has his doubts:

One might hope that schools of education that prepare school administrators would provide the kind of professional education that would enable them to think critically about the virtues toward which education aims. One might hope that such people would be encouraged to think deeply about the aims of education and to provide leadership and educational services to the community on whose support the schools depend. Unfortunately, as schools become more industrialized, the training programs for administrators focus more and more on the development of skills of labour negotiation and on courses offered in business schools, departments of economics, and the like. Such courses might have utility for some aspects of educational administration, but they are essentially technical studies. Embedded within technique are implicit visions of what is important, and these visions are seldom appraised by criteria emanating from a conception of education itself.

(1979: 14)

Conclusion

It has been the argument of this chapter that a vision of educational administration derived from a conception of education that is indeed truly aesthetic might well be possible and might well form the basis for an educational administration that is more than simply an administrative exercise for, as Touraine points out, 'a school that is no more than an administrative service is unacceptable' (2000: 167).

References


Towards an aesthetics for an educational administration 221


