

Impositions of organised work in the cultural sector

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Dirk Baecker¹ 

Abstract

This article identifies key issues for understanding cultural management as a profession. The starting point is the understanding of organisation as communication about work, of culture as communication about values, of art as communication about perception, and of management as communication about decisions. Each of these forms of communication is an imposition if one assumes that the workforce usually already knows what is at stake, that values are taken for granted, that perception is treated as a private matter, and that decisions are rooted in established traditions and routines. Cultural management, therefore, involves weighing up these impositions against one another and balancing them out by referring to one another. This presupposes a modern flexibility of work and culture, art and management, which traditional societies neither recognise nor can tolerate. From a sociological perspective, this article develops a contextually rich understanding of the field of cultural management – perhaps too rich – and reduces this understanding to the formulation of a navigation code for the options of cultural management that may be too simplistic. The thesis is that cultural management can address any conceivable topic, provided it addresses *each* of the four forms of communication mentioned. Cultural management is thus as limited as it is broad in scope. It takes on a form that makes nothing less than global society the medium of its possibilities.

Keywords

Arts, culture, management, organisation, work

¹Zeppelin University, Friedrichshafen, Germany

Corresponding author:

Dirk Baecker, Bautzner Str. 73, 01099 Dresden, Germany.

Email: baecker@mac.com

A craft

Organisation, as Niklas Luhmann (1984) once put it, is communication about work: on the one hand, it involves expecting a certain group of people to engage in a demanding form of behaviour known as work; and on the other hand, it involves structuring this work in such a way that it can be observed and adapted as the implementation of decisions. Neither of these is self-evident.

The cultural sector, in theatres, orchestras, studios and museums, can look back on a history of dealing with organisations that need not hide in the shadow of the centuries-old experience of temples, banks, monasteries, municipalities and armies. We know that the hospitals of antiquity and the Middle Ages sometimes recruited their management staff from among former soldiers (Elgood, 1951). Presumably, cultural institutions and projects were usually too small to justify such a measure, and one tended instead to draw on administrative officials from those courts that could afford an orchestra, a choir, a troupe of actors and the associated staff of artists and technicians. Evidently, for studios a craft-based, private approach prevails; for museums an archival-administrative, for orchestras a craft-courtly, and for theatres either a courtly or a vagabond-like, self-organised self-image, dependent on the opportunities offered by the fair and other village and town festivals, each of which acts as if all work here – be it craft-based, administrative or audience-oriented – were self-evident. The unreasonable demands of organised work are absorbed within minimal hierarchies between master and apprentice, theatre director and ensemble, concertmaster and musician, or office manager and staff, without allowing for any decisions other than those secured by established traditions and routines and thus scarcely noticeable as decisions.

To this day, the cultural sector benefits from this proximity to craftsmanship – that is, to a type of work that need not rely on bureaucracy, rationality, or profession in the sense of abstract expertise to clarify what is to be achieved and how this can be done. This does not mean that artistic work does not have its own improbabilities, but as in craftsmanship, this improbability can be addressed through references to the particular performance to be done. Added to this is an art market that absorbs the improbability of artistic work through, in some cases, considerable willingness to pay within the context of competition for reputation, collectors' passion or investment strategies.

If one also considers that the late 18th and early 19th centuries brought to the fore individual and thus ingenious aspects of artistic work – precisely because they were prepared to deviate from the familiar (especially from the courtly and academic) (White and White, 1993), it is hardly surprising that the cultural sector, insofar as it relates to the presentation of artistic work, has treated the fact that this artistic work needs to be organised with little prominence. Questions of studio organisation and hierarchy within the orchestral sphere tend to be regarded as local colour and a welcome treasure trove of anecdotes within a field of social activity that is ultimately of interest for entirely different reasons. One predominantly imagines the artist as a genius, a lone figure oscillating between despair and exuberance, who expects nothing from the cultural sector other than a presentation of the results of his creative work, arising in turn from the work itself. Although the extent to which society actually influences artistic work and cultural presentation has been

evident in every artist's biography since at least the time of Giorgio Vasari and Jacob Burckhardt, it has only recently been explicitly re-examined (White and White, 1993; Becker, 1982; Faulkner, 1983; Warnke, 1986; Crane, 1987; Zolberg, 1990; Bourdieu, 1996; Luhmann, 2000). Organisational aspects often play a role here, though rarely with the sociological rigour we must seek when examining the distinctive features of organised work in the arts and culture sector.

The ellipse of culture and arts

On the other hand, one might suggest that questions of organisation in the cultural sector are rarely addressed precisely because the concept of culture already encompasses a sufficient number of organisational functions, the realisation and implementation of which already foster a professional self-image in dealing with artistic processes and works, which can then also be regarded as a management achievement.

To support this line of thought, it is helpful to point out a distinction between art and culture, the significance and scope of which is controversial and which may amount to little more than a nuance; yet it is not unimportant for subsequent considerations regarding the profession of cultural management. What is the common ground between artistic work involving images, music, text, sculpture, theatre, film, television and video on the one hand, and a culture of society on the other? In the concept of high culture, this question could always be considered answered: one proved oneself to be cultured by demonstrating one's good taste – or, failing that, at least one's connoisseurship – through one's ability to engage with works of art. But this understanding of culture as high culture was merely a remnant of the bourgeoisie's imitation of aristocratic distinction and could not endure for long in a modern society that no longer organises distinctions of style and taste vertically and hierarchically according to high culture and low culture, but horizontally and heterarchically according to milieu and subculture (Hoggart, 1957; Williams, 1958; Bourdieu, 1984). The reference of culture to art, however, has survived both the equalisation of society and the extensive ethnologisation of the concept of culture.

We speak of an ellipsis of culture to emphasise culture and arts being the two centres of a common circle. They certainly belong to each other, but they are equally certain not concentric matters of affairs. How did this elliptical understanding of art and culture come about? Why is culture always interested in works of art, and not merely in the customs and traditions of peoples near and far, in funeral rites, eating habits, festivals, ways of working, conceptions of the customs of people, that is in the practice of religion, the treatment of animals and plants, the understanding of body and gender, the expression of grief and joy, hatred and love, the great and small tricks in the search for the meaning of life and a sense of belonging on this planet? Why does cultural work not confine itself to an interest in the preservation of folklore? Why does one not follow Plato's advice and silence poets and storytellers such as Homer and Hesiod, who, with their terrifying, ridiculous and in any case untrue tales, merely pervert the minds of young men (and young women) (Plato, 1991, 386 ff.)? Why is cultural work not restricted to singing the praises of what is good and just, to provide people with orientation and guidance?

Questions of this kind are only partly rhetorical. Both historically and in various parts of the global community today, there is ample evidence of an interest in cultural activities that is confined to the celebration of community, the organisation of festivals and the observance of rituals. It is all too often overlooked that engaging with modern art represents a major challenge for literate cultures (not to mention tribal societies) that have not undergone the painful history of a dynamisation of society in grappling with the consequences of the printing press (McLuhan, 1962). It was only the culture of the printed book, with its dual interest in redundancy and variety, that began to liberate the handling of form and colour, gesture and sound, image and tone, and to assign them to individually divergent perception, so that, on the one hand, art can experiment more than ever before, whilst, on the other hand, its products and processes can also be individually rejected more swiftly than ever before. This is precisely what sociology describes under the heading of a differentiation of art as a social system of its own within society (Luhmann, 2000). Literate cultures based on writing, by contrast, relate works of art not to individual artists and viewers, with corresponding tolerance for form and style, but to communities and their rituals, with correspondingly little scope for individual deviation in both the production and reception of art. Those who deviate must therefore secure support not only within a group or milieu, but across society as a whole. This is only possible in a state of rapture or laughter, and is then, strictly speaking, not a deviation but a temporary reversal of the order that is thereby affirmed rather than undermined (Bakhtin, 1984).

The question of how a culture relates to art does not answer itself. We must acknowledge that art behaves as rebelliously towards culture as it does towards the rest of society, without this leading to culture losing interest and, for example, looking for culturally viable activities only in the realm of sport, play and entertainment.

So what is art all about? Evidently, art is not the lofty object of disinterested delight to which modern society has both concentrated and reduced it, but rather, as a form of engagement with the beautiful, the ugly and the sublime, including the horrific (Baumgarten, 1983; Kant, 2000; Adorno, 1997), which in turn is an imposition with which society does not voluntarily, nor with impunity, burden itself. This imposition stems from the fact that the production and reception of art in all its forms render individual perception visible and challenge us to reflect on individual perception.

Note that we assume operational closure both in social and psychic systems, the former being reproduced by autopoiesis of communication, the latter by autopoiesis of perception (Luhmann, 2012, 2000). There are structural couplings between those two types of systems, e.g. language, but the communication of perception is necessarily paradoxical, since the operations of the two systems cannot connect to the operations of the other system.

Art is communication about perception, which, and this is what constitutes the imposition, is thereby no longer to be taken as self-evident, and this is so precisely because, in communication, differences become apparent between individual impressions on the one hand and their social expression on the other, differences of which neither the individual nor society could previously have dreamed. In the way in which communication about art has so rapidly retreated into the *sensus communis* (Kant), into certain conventions of

formulating judgements of taste (beautiful, ugly, sublime, new, interesting), one can still observe today a certain awkwardness in speaking about individual perceptions, which, during the heyday of bourgeois art, was not unjustifiably mitigated by the rule that the shared enjoyment of art should be conducted as silently as possible. For only in this way can it be prevented from being spoiled by the fact that the individual must, on the one hand, attempt to express his divergent (because they are subjective and personal) perceptions and, on the other hand, a certain commonality of observation.

This socially risky communication about perception is something that both artists and viewers must first allow themselves to engage in. Nothing about them is self-evident. Neither perception nor the attempt to discuss it meets with open eyes and ears in a society that, even without engaging with art, must cope with a sufficient number of challenges posed by complex questions in family life, work and everyday life. That is why art is differentiated, which amounts to placing it under special conditions and subjecting it to special demands that protect it, but also protect the rest of society from it, because this differentiation provides arguments for regarding it as a special case of communication and, accordingly, for not having to react to it in every instance. Enjoying it does not mean to have to change one's behaviour. Towards the end of the 18th century, the terms used to describe the differentiation of art production and art appreciation were genius and wit. Not everyone can afford this genius, this acumen and this wit, and those who do so do so under the protection of social safeguards that mark the special achievements produced here as such and shield the rest of society – work and family, politics and education, science and religion – from them. Not everywhere, or to be more precise: hardly anywhere, does one speak with impunity of individual perception. It is a matter for the subject and is therefore suspect. If one wishes to avoid losing respect for one's dignity – to use the categories of tradition – one keeps one's perceptions to oneself in all demanding moments and, at most, allows others to surmise them in the context of what is then already regarded as proof of trust, if not friendship. Anything else would be intrusive in precisely the sense that modernity then declares to be the norm.

If one makes clear to oneself this element of unrest in art within modern society – this constant threat to the harmony between the individual and society in their handling of the signs and symbols that define their world, this constant challenge to the individual to embrace an individualisation that, by definition, must proceed almost unprotected, and must proceed solely on the basis of the individual's capacity for idiosyncrasy, it becomes easier to understand why culture, in its forms of work, is so fond of drawing on art, indeed can hardly avoid doing precisely this. For what is culture? Is there an answer to this crucial question of modernity (Luhmann, 2022; Eagleton, 2000; Baecker, 1997)? Is there a conceptual core that organises the heterogeneous multitude of those perspectives whose discussion we have been witnessing for many years under keywords such as plurality, alterity, diffuseness and hybridity (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1963; Lotman and Uspensky, 1978; Hall, 1992; Bhabha, 1994)?

In the light of this debate, it is considered politically insensible, bordering on the disrespectful of the other, even to pose the question of the concept and function of culture, let alone to answer it. If, within the context of this debate – albeit almost unnoticed by it – one considers the proposal formulated by the anthropologist and

sociologist Bronisław Malinowski towards the end of his life, following extensive experience in the field, it quickly becomes apparent how much our inquiry into concepts of cultural management in particular, and cultural studies in general, would benefit from revisiting this proposal. Malinowski (1944) understands culture as the mechanism of mutual coordination between institutions and rituals, people and their needs, practical activities and the norms of a society, which, as this coordination, is subjected to constant pressure from both outside and within to continually adapt to changing circumstances. It should be noted that culture here is not the set of norms by which one reassures oneself of how to deal with changing demands correctly or incorrectly, but rather the mechanism by which the norms that guide this distinction between correct and incorrect behaviour can be kept flexible.

This distinction is central to subsequent sociological and ethnological research, although it has become apparent that it is not always easy to maintain (Parsons, 1973; Geertz, 1973). In fact, this distinction can already be found in Plato, when, in the context of his reflections on a proper education (*paideia*, the term that most closely corresponds in Greek thought to what was later understood as culture), the guardians of his just city are to be distinguished from good dogs: a dog spontaneously distinguishes between strangers and its own kind, being hostile towards the former and friendly towards the latter; a guardian, however, learns to understand and to differ understanding, and only then determines what is familiar and what is foreign (Plato, 1991, 376a–e). A guardian educated in culture learns to adapt the distinction between right and wrong to the circumstances, and to welcome yesterday's strangers as today's friends, and vice versa.

The double point of this concept of culture formulated by Malinowski lies in the fact that mutual coordination and adaptation – including, it must not be forgotten, the management of the tensions and conflicts required for this – must be linked to the framework of society's norms and institutions on the one hand and to a corresponding process of coordination and adaptation to the balance of human needs on the other.

What is important for the considerations of this essay is that, against the backdrop of this anthropological and sociological concept, culture can be understood as a mechanism of both coding and the modulation of this coding, which, through the ongoing maintenance, comparison and subversion of social conditions, holds this society together as an objection to itself and therefore draws upon art, because it is from here that the most fluid and sensitive of all social differences – the difference between the individual and society – can best be addressed. The culture of society addresses the individuality of the individual as the point at which society's demands and impositions can be most clearly recognised. It is in the individuality of the individual, understood as the prospect of human happiness and unhappiness in social interaction, that society's cultural critique also finds its most important anchor (Rousseau, 1992); and this was and remains the focus of research in a philosophical anthropology concerned with the limits of human plasticity in its engagement with the demands of society (Plessner, 2018).

The organisational achievement of culture in dealing with artistic work as well as with other phenomena of society lies, therefore, in the fact that what can be communicated as culture is, on the one hand, that which fulfils the function of coding and modulating this

coding, ensuring mutual adaptation within the framework of society's norms and institutions, and which, on the other hand, does not lose sight of the necessity of addressing the individuality of individuals, which can most reliably – because it is most visible – be achieved through art and its engagement with individual perception. Such a description of culture's organisational function does not, incidentally, exclude the two borderline cases of high culture and entertainment, but rather includes them, for high culture, too, is concerned with the formulation and cultivation of adaptive processes, albeit in relation to mostly unattainable – yet still enjoyable in this form – ideal standards of engagement with society; and in entertainment, too, the individuality of individuals is addressed, albeit in the form of relief and relaxation that they, in turn, can enjoy.

Once one has grasped the scope of these admittedly rather convoluted formulations of our reflections, one can then devise a more concise formulation. It states, analogous to the understanding of organisation as communication about work, that culture can be understood here as communication not only through but also about values. Once again, culture is not the sum of values or the set of values at a society's disposal for the normative regulation of its affairs and relations; rather, culture is the communication of these values as the variables capable of observing, formulating and shaping identity and difference, transition and overlap, weighing up and rejection between different social spheres within society. These values generally operate through implication, not through assertion, as Luhmann (2012) emphasised, but this makes it all the easier (if anything here can be considered easy) to invoke and represent them in the most diverse and divergent combinations and thereby derive precisely the medium in which cultural work and, subsequently, cultural management are possible.

As soon as artistic work enters the sphere of influence of culture and thus of communication about values, it is expected to address the issue of social adaptation (through celebration, criticism or mere representation) and to do so with reference to individual acts of perception (in the medium of image and sound, gesture and event, text and sculpture). In doing so, it itself comes under the pressure of cultural moderation. There is no reason to assume that this pressure is welcome to art. It is as unwelcome to art as it is to any other sphere of society that believes it has every good reason for its actions and inactions on its side and wishes to be relieved as far as possible of considerations for other spheres of society or of individual restrictions. Artistic work does not aim at culture *per se*, but may be more interested in individual difference than culture has so far been able to comprehend. Not least, art may associate more unease than comfort with the values communicated by a culture. Arts prefer, so to speak, rejection of values to acceptance because it is in rejection that individuals discover their capability to decide for themselves. Herein lies not only an artistic but also a cultural achievement (a culture of arts being distinct from culture), but that does not mean that the prevailing discourse on culture is already capable of understanding this.

This is what I mean when I speak of culture's encroachment upon art, the 'taming' of art by culture, which burdens it with demands capable of socially organising artistic practice, or at least its presentation. Out of consideration for cultural alignment and embedding – however, the appropriate audience and milieu are found – the time and place, duration and intensity, playfulness and seriousness of the performance then emerge

almost of their own accord, including the costs of the set and the prices of the tickets. In observing the ellipse of art and culture, one might surmise the decisive points of address for the formation of a profession in cultural work, and in the ability to sustain and nurture the tension between the two fulcrums of this ellipse, starting points for the development of virtuosity in this profession.

Unexpected decisions

After the impositions of organisation, art and culture, we come to the impositions of management. As if it were not enough to communicate about work, perception and values, management also communicates about decisions. Management consists of observing and varying the organisation's possibilities for carrying out work as the execution of decisions, and in turn varying these possibilities themselves. This brings a further contingency factor into play, which on the one hand makes the reality of cultural management even more complicated, but on the other hand claims to be able to regulate the issues of communication regarding work, perception and values more simply than before, precisely within the context of this additional complication. Criteria are introduced which, in turn, can be revoked and altered by management, but which, for the duration of their contested validity, set out guidelines as to which decisions are to be made and how.

Management is thus a second-order concept. It makes decisions about decisions. Both types of decision are made within the organisation – where else? – yet one concerns the execution of work and the other the variation in that execution. This distinction opens up the space for addressing the tension between, on the one hand, the demands placed on work arising from the nature of the task itself – however habit, craft and profession have come to define that task – and, on the other hand, the demands placed on work arising from the re-embedding of workers, work and the products of work within society. One need only consider for a moment the contrast between behaviour required by hunting and war, field work and study, factory work and office work, on the one hand, and the behaviour required in family and social settings, in the marketplace and at festivals – that is, in so-called everyday life, in a kind of Habermasian lifeworld – on the other, to realise that societies need some form of management of difference, of transition, and of the exclusion of confusion. Tribal societies had set up small camps outside their villages, a sort of quarantine station, where men returning from the hunt, agitated by the bloody business, were allowed to cool off for a week or two before being permitted to meet women, children and the elderly again (Udy, 1959).

Organisations, as Stanley H. Udy (1959, 1970) summarised this situation, are institutions for managing the structural inconsistency between the so-called physical and the so-called social demands of work. Working hours and breaks, e.g. the famous banana time (Roy, 1960), implicit contracts and even more covert arrangements between supervisors and employees (Luhmann's useful illegality; Kühl, 2026), but also the blue hour, the apéro, the drink between finishing work and returning home to calm the spirits agitated by work and its circumstances, not to mention worker and occupational subcultures, in which the meaning of certain special values regarding the approach to work can be

safeguarded through their transmission from generation to generation, are institutional arrangements which, in this sense, must simultaneously guarantee the differentiation of the organisation from society and the re-embedding of the organisation within society. It is a matter of managing a difference, and it is a matter of fact that, without this difference between the organisation and society, the management of an organisation would have no means whatsoever to intervene within the organisation.

The criteria on which management relies, and in which the distinction between organisation and society is contained as a form of this distinction (that is, with regard to differentiation *and* connection), are of various kinds. In recent times, driven by a peculiar combination of growing financial problems on the one hand and rising profit prospects on the other – that is, a growing dependence of even non-private-sector organisations on the market and thus on competition – business management criteria have come to enjoy particular prominence.

These criteria stem from the theoretical abstraction of an organisation into a business and consist of reducing the complexity of the organisation to questions of economic efficiency and technical effectiveness. Historical coincidences, such as the fact that the founder of business administration, Erich Gutenberg (1897–1984), was an economist, are partly responsible for the fact that today we have an academically established discipline of business administration (*Betriebswirtschaftslehre*, Albach et al., 2000), but no discipline, notwithstanding institutes of industrial engineering, of technological administration (*Betriebstechniklehre*). Further circumstances, such as the fact that business administration had to fight for both academic recognition and its distinction from economics at universities, are then responsible for the fact that business administration increasingly lost sight of the theoretical motive for its foundation emphasised by Gutenberg and instead stylised itself as a practice-oriented discipline. Through this combination of weak theoretical prominence and strong practical prominence, business administration subsequently succeeded in developing, on an ad hoc basis, a considerable flexibility in the formulation of its subject matter (Whitley, 1984, 1988), to which has recently been added an effort – again inspired by economic theory – to ensure the consistency of its problem formulation as a theory of the firm (Roberts, 2004).

The prominence of business management theory has pushed into the background other criteria for reintroducing the distinction between organisation and management, criteria originating from the tradition of public administration and other professions. Criteria of legality, political expediency, medical standards, the handling of heresies, military effectiveness, academic reputation or campaign capability have proven their worth as management criteria for the variation of decisions in government bodies, political parties, hospitals, churches, armies, universities or protest organisations, long before the idea arose to grant cost-benefit considerations a certain degree of legitimacy (Kay, 2024). It is important for the current debate on the merits and demerits of business management theory to highlight the functional equivalence of these criteria. They all reintroduce consideration of specific social contexts into particular organisations in such a way that decisions (about decisions) can be made there which unleash the organisation's own momentum ('autonomy') *and*, in turn, bind this momentum (heteronomy) back to society as a boundary condition for the organisation's reproduction.

This *also* applies to business administration, insofar as business administration relates to the economy, its markets and its prices, in order to derive from this the socially validated criteria for the variation of decisions. Business administration, too, abstracts – this is the theoretical aspect highlighted by Gutenberg – from the complexity of the social system of organisation in order to be able to subject this organisation within the organisation to criteria derived from society in general and its economy in particular. It is part of this abstraction and part of this subjugation that business management's cost-benefit criteria are sometimes stylised into objective quantities that appear to have nothing more to do with social disputes and their variability and interpretability. However, Karl Marx had already dispelled this myth of objectivity – underpinned by claims of a natural scarcity of humanity's resources – in his *Critique of Political Economy*, by demonstrating that every price and every wage is the product of a social struggle (Marx, 1990). This is not to dispute the physical and physiological evidence underpinning the argument of scarcity, but to point out that every concrete scarcity is the product of a socially enforced assertion that is, for that very reason, no less controversial in factual, social and temporal terms (Latour and Lépinay, 2009).

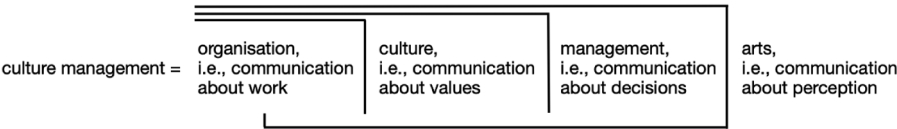
Business management theory does not allow us to escape the uncertainty and undecidability of the dispute over appropriate and successful management criteria; rather, it settles this dispute in the moment and in favour of itself by drawing on the modern myth of rationality. Pointing this out is not superfluous in our context, because, in the context of reflections on concepts of cultural management, business management theory not only plays a role – as it does in other non-profit organisations – as a counterforce to traditionally established professional criteria for decision-making but may also be regarded as a cultural phenomenon of the first order, the observation of which promises rich insights into current conditions. For, on the one hand, in the light of business management statements on strategy formulation and product profiling, on personnel management and branding, on cost control and fundraising, observations can be made regarding the increasing variability of conditions long assumed to be constant and therefore scarcely discussed, let alone problematised – ranging from the state's alleged or actual diminishing willingness to make 'voluntary' cultural expenditure, ranging from audiences that have become fickle, not to say capricious, to variables in the realm of production costs, fees and admission prices; and secondly, the trends towards what is described in catchphrases as the 'economisation' of society are situated within a field of dispute over the future of society, a dispute characterised at least as strongly by efforts towards moralisation, pedagogisation, politicisation or aestheticisation. Rarely is the openness of a culture – understood as communication about values – demonstrated as impressively as in a society which, amidst structural change triggered by globalisation and informatisation, migration and climate change, and in the face of a whole series of fundamentalist counter-movements, has sufficient reason to keep its values flexible.

No one would expect cultural management practices to take into account the complexity of the situation as described in these considerations. Concepts of cultural management, insofar as they are to prove their worth in research, teaching and consultancy at universities, cannot be developed without taking this complexity into account and without problem formulations whose abstractions keep this complexity in view; yet practice

requires practical simplifications that can be worked with without causing too much harm. This condition is met by those simplifications which, when necessary, can be ‘reflected’ back towards complexity without thereby losing their ability to be operationalised anew.

Proposals exist for developing practical approaches to cultural management by framing business administration through public relations concepts, visitor retention programmes, an awareness of the conflict-prone nature of art and culture, or a reflection on the openness of decision-making processes (DeVereaux, 2019; Kirchberg and Zembylas, 2025). The criterion of profit orientation in private-sector organisations remains the easiest stop-and-go rule for projects of all kinds to communicate, as it can be expressed in figures that are constantly recalculated. But it is obvious that this does not – or at least not easily – apply to cultural institutions and projects. However, this does not alter the fact that in the form of so-called soft budgets (which must be topped up by the institution’s sponsor if necessary) criteria of rentability are nevertheless constantly being used to assess the financial constraints under which one operates (not least: monthly salary payments), and thus to assess the mission to which one claims to be committed (DiMaggio, 1986).

We need not add any further insights here to these research findings and the approaches to textbook literature derived from them. Instead, I shall confine myself to summarising the considerations made so far in a concise formula and drawing some concluding reflections from this formula. I draw on the notation of the form calculus developed by George Spencer-Brown (1969) and formulate the following equation for cultural management:



The formulation of the problem of cultural management in the form of a Spencer-Brown equation makes use of three advantages of Spencer-Brown’s form calculus:

- Firstly, it is a notation that thinks in terms of topological dependency relations. Each variable, including the value to be found for it in each specific individual case, is understood as the product of a distinction, $\sqcap$, made by an observer within a context that informs but does not dictate the distinction. We are thus operating within a communicative or systemic, rather than a causal, network of relationships, without wishing to exclude diverse causalities that do not, however, determine the matter at hand.
- Secondly, the notation allows us to identify a re-entry, $\sqcup$, of the distinction into the ‘form’ of the distinction – all distinctions within the space of their distinction – which, on the one hand, make sure that each variable stays variable and, on the

other, can be regarded as the level at which the mutual coordination, modulation and reflection of the variables can take place. In relation to the form of distinction, they designate the medium (Heider, 1959) within which the actors operate in order to make their distinctions.

- And thirdly, we can conceive of forms of this kind as eigenvalues or eigenforms of recursive and infinite equations (von Foerster, 2003; Kauffman, 2005), which emerge through the repeated application of operations of distinction to themselves and thus become robust points of reference in an otherwise turbulent, if not chaotic, practice.

Cultural management means communicating about work, values and decisions in such a way that further communication about work, values and decisions is subsequently possible – no more, but also no less. In this respect, we are pursuing a fundamental principle of autopoiesis (Maturana and Varela, 1980), which, in the strictest sense of the word, allows for anything and everything, provided that it is possible to continue along the same path afterwards. We formulate, if you will, a navigation code that is compatible with artistic, technical and administrative work in established institutions or ongoing projects, with local and global, critical and affirmative, political and moral, religious and educational values, as well as with authoritarian and participatory, routine and innovative, patient and impatient management styles, *provided that one is open to being replaced by the other; that is, in every concrete manifestation, it can be both subverted and varied as well as confirmed and reinforced*. Cultural management means varying work and values in mutual relation to one another in such a way that information can be provided at any time regarding which decisions are based on which criteria of variation.

Note that we indicate the arts, understood as communication about perception, on the outside of the form. It is understood as a precondition of cultural management that, in turn, cannot be determined by the work, values and decisions of cultural management, even though, to be sure, it may be sensible to them, or even be constrained by them. But the premise of cultural management remains the freedom and self-determination of arts, as the communication about work, values and decisions is taken to be distinct from aesthetic decisions. A production aesthetic may try to change this point of departure, assuming that organisation, culture, management and arts are mutually and critically dependent on each other in any self-reflective society, but the standard situation is still that arts are autonomous aesthetic creations, the presentation of which is an additional and later act of, precisely, culture management.

We formulate this navigation code here from a sociological perspective. We therefore do not expect the decisions mentioned to be carried out consciously, that is, as the result of corresponding intentions on the part of the individual actors. We are speaking of an institutionally embedded social practice that is distributed across all its constitutive moments; that is, it must be carried out and sustained by a plurality of actors but cannot be conceived and implemented by a single actor. Furthermore, the assumption of responsibility can only take place within the social practice of cultural management itself and must then see whether individuals can be found who are willing to take it on personally.

Finally, note that a Spencer-Brown equation allows variables to be arranged side by side as the product of their distinction, whilst at the same time distinguishing the depth of the space in which they are situated. Thus, the variable ‘communication about work’ is situated in the deepest space, s_3 , and the variable ‘communication about decisions’ in the second-shallowest space, which is distinguished, s_1 , with an even flatter space, s_0 , on the outside of the form distinguished by an unwritten cross. The deeper the space, the more numerous the contextual determinations; this is also evident from the number of crosses the respective variable is distinguished by, any one of these crosses marking a distinction to be drawn by observation.

Our equation thus reflects the widespread impression in the art and culture scene that work and the communicative organisation of work constitute the most demanding activity within the framework of cultural management. It is the inside of a form, the outside of which is indicated by an interest in the arts. Culture and management are intervening variables. But the actual work and the communication about work concern the arts and their presentation. There is nothing tautological about this formulation because the respective contexts and, therefore, the respective mindful considerations are different. They converge with the presentation of any one aesthetic piece of fine, performative, dramatic or musical arts, but depart again the very next moment. Cultural management, so to speak, is the art to synchronise diachronic perspectives.

What, then, are the impositions of organised work in the cultural sector? They consist in having to endure the fact that one’s own work and the values one invokes are subject to scrutiny and variation not only in terms of the works produced and the ideas thereby established, but also in terms of the decisions made in the process. Apart from the more or less convivial circumstances in which this occurs, one must speak of impositions here not least because work and culture belong to those spheres in which one tends to seek the self-evident, the unquestionably successful, rather than that which must be called into question again and again.

This is therefore perhaps the point that demands the greatest tact. The cultural manager must be able to gauge the varying pain thresholds among artists and audiences, critics and patrons, technicians and administrators, at which the questioning of the self-evident tips over into the transgression of the permissible. And they must keep an eye on whether, at this pain threshold, the greatest cultural achievements are only just becoming possible or are already becoming impossible.

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ORCID iD

Dirk Baecker  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8921-0538>

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