

Joseph Beuys and Live Scribing: Overlaps Between Creative Practice and Managerialism



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Abstract

This paper explores the context of management theory and creative practice through an underlying linkage between the work of Joseph Beuys and the practice of live scribing or graphic recording. The paper traces the origins of graphic facilitation from an intersection of management science and design in the 1970s and examines how it has evolved into a service offered today by firms such as Scriberia. Joseph Beuys in his own way was also a *'live scribe'*. Designated under his all-encompassing concept of 'social sculpture', his was a performative art; constructed with the aim of healing social ills and reuniting elements of the primitive and modern. Within this context, Beuys' use of live drawing, metaphors, and artefacts is compared to services offered by scribing firms of today. This paper also discusses the influence of Rudolf Steiner's lectures and drawings on Beuys's concept of social sculpture as well as on the development of anthroposophical principles in organisation management. Finally, this paper evokes strategies of illustration in comparison to transmutative approaches to the management of data from the world of banking and the subprime mortgage market.

Introduction

This paper is part of a continuing project of repositioning or appropriating practices from the wider cultural creative landscape to expand on the concept of illustration. In my previous papers, internet memes [1], the possibilities of networked image [2] the new town development of Poundbury in Dorset [3] have all been considered under the auspices of illustration. In my last paper for Confia, I moved on to consider the films and web content of journalist and filmmaker Adam Curtis. This was done to specifically address 'Interdisciplinary Appropriation' in the context of my own potentially flawed research as well as the wider discipline of illustration itself [4].

Moving on from the edifices of architecture, the 'poor image' [5] of exchanged illustrations and the contextual potential of broadcast media, this paper will consider similarities and overlaps between the work of Joseph Beuys and the illustrative and performative practices of live scribing or graphic recording. This paper will use this seemingly incongruous comparison as a springboard into further discourse regarding creative approaches to data and managerialism towards operations evident from within illustration and wider creative practice.

Keywords

Illustration; Graphic Recording; Graphic facilitation; Live Scribing; Scientific Management; Anthroposophy; Joseph Beuys.

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Artist and educator Joseph Beuys stated, '[t]o be a teacher is my greatest work of art. The rest is the waste product, a demonstration' [6]. Specifically in these demonstrations, Beuys utilised chalkboards and imagery in the facilitation of his pedagogy – in the creation of 'social sculpture' (Fig. 1). To Beuys, the idea of social sculpture is the ability given by actual or symbolic objects to shape humans into becoming more social and more sensitive to other people and their surrounding environments [7]. To this end the boards and drawings only exist as artefacts; they are not the sculptures. Nevertheless, these blackboards act as evidence of the process, textual and diagrammatic metaphor in the service of social sculpture.

UK-based graphic consultancy firm Scriberia define graphic facilitation as, 'the use of graphics to facilitate a conversation or process' [8]

With Scriberia's concept of 'the live scribe', in some commonality to Beuys's practice of social sculpture, the artist is promoted as an individual with the power to 'offer fresh perspectives and pick new pathways through problems', ultimately 'changing the way groups think' [9]. However, within the key action of 'facilitation', equivalency towards Beuys's social sculpture hits a departure point. Scriberia's social sculpture exists in the service of the capitalistic managerial. Goals such as efficiency, profitability and organisational communication are embedded comfortably within the group think ethos of Scriberia's graphic facilitation. With this facili-

Fig. 1. Joseph Beuys photographed by Rainer Rappmann in Achberg / Germany 1978. Used under a CC BY-SA 3.0 licence



Fig. 2. Illustrations created by Scriberia as part of the Turing Way book dashes and illustration sprints in 2019. Used under a CC-BY 4.0 licence. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3332807



tation, the waste product – the demonstrative artefact – so performatively discarded by Beuys, becomes a totem-like product (Fig. 2).

We might consider both this totem-like product as well as the action of live drawing – the performative artefact – as operating similarly to 'social sculpture', also seeking to shape the group dynamic. However, in departure from Beuys's focus on the environmental and the symbolic, Scriberia's graphic facilitation prioritises shaping humans into becoming more social and more sensitive, in a primary sense, to the organisation they serve, rather than the environment that they inhabit.

Motivated by this discursive jump, from the point of view of the illustrator, this paper will propose instances of crossovers and links between management theory and proposed precursors of live scribing or graphic recording. In his Seminal 1919 Publication of management theory, Frederick Taylor puts forward the principles of 'scientific management', applicable to all kinds of human activities, 'from our simplest individual acts to the work of our great corporations, which call for the

most elaborate cooperation' [10]. It is ostensibly within the service of demystifying this type of 'elaborate cooperation' – within the remit of the managerial – that the illustrator, under the guise of the live scribe, might find themselves operating.

The intention is not to propose the managerial as a monolithic or deterministic force that shapes reality in a uniform way, rather this paper positions itself within a colloquially ubiquitous 'managerialism' pervasive in our society and culture today. In line with assertion of managerialism as a 'deeply ideological project transcending its traditional position when entering into society' [11] this paper is an attempt to understand such phenomenon from the perspective of creative practice and specifically illustration.

Finally, a further contextual location may be found within a critique explored in my previous paper for Confia, concerning the work of filmmaker Adam Curtis. In his film *HyperNormalisation* [12], Curtis traces the rise and fall of various management theories that have shaped the world since the 1970s. He puts forward a narrative regarding organisations and governments utilising an illusion of stability and rational control, while ignoring the complexity and uncertainty of our reality. Curtis defined 'management science' as an impetus utilising 'targets' and 'measured outcomes' in a pretence of rational neutrality; 'loaded with powerful, and very debatable, political assumptions about how society should work, and what human beings are really like' [13].

The Dawn of Graphic Facilitation

It was in 1976 - from the origins of this discursive landscape; the intersection between new-age thinking, management science and design - that architecture student David Sibbet found himself attending a seminar facilitated by Berkeley academic Arthur Young. In this seminar, Young used hand drawn graphics, to describe the integration of physics and metaphysics within a framework for visual thinking he called 'The Theory of Process'. Inspired by this, Sibbet developed a rationalised grammar for visual language called the Group Graphics Keyboard. With this visual language Sibbet founded the first graphic facilitation firm, Grove Consultants International [14].

With the Grove Consultants the primary form of facilitation was group drawing rather than an artist led approach to image making. The intention these group drawing activities was to enable the participants to co-create a shared understanding of complex issues. By using visual tools, such as charts, diagrams, and metaphors, the participants could express their ideas, opinions, and feelings in a collaborative and creative way. These activities also aimed to foster engagement and alignment among the participants. The role of the graphic facilitator was to guide the group through the drawing process, using questions, prompts, and feedback to help them to generate insights and solutions that could be implemented in their work contexts [15].

Sibbet was not the first person to attempt to formalize the use of graphic mark-making in the facilitation of ideas. Sibbet acknowledges

that the original term ‘group graphics’ was already in wide use before he trademarked it, citing David Straus and Michael Doyle as pioneers of graphic facilitation as well as crediting them with introducing him to group facilitation. In his own paper on the subject, Sibbet goes on to explore variations of graphic facilitation, describing self-proclaimed ‘shaman’ Jim Channon’s ‘metaphorical’ large scale drawings as ‘magical and complex worlds with the potential to catalyse amazing insights during group process’ [16].

As well as an early pioneer of graphic facilitation, Jim Channon is also known as the infamous author of the *First Earth Battalion Manual* [18], a self-published new-age guide for the ‘psychic super-soldier’. The illustrations, graphs and maps published within this guide represent the type of content Jim Channon graphically facilitated in his role as a consultant for the US military. In an article for the Guardian written to mark the release of a Hollywood film partially based on his life story, Channon described himself as a ‘strategic shaman’ who creates ‘visionary illustrations’. He goes on to outline how, after working for the US military, his ‘work shifted to corporations’ where he has taken the ‘same approach to redirecting Fortune 500 companies and other large institutions toward their higher purposes’ [19].

The Strategic Shamanism of Graphic Facilitation

London based Scriberia in commonality with Grove Consultancy International are offering systems to understand or guide group thinking, to ‘make links, plot paths, spot gaps and reach consensus’. Through graphic facilitation the illustrator might ask questions of efficiency, redirect focus, and consider aims and objectives; ‘Issues surface, clarity emerges, alignment happens’ [20]. However, in departure from this seemingly rational posturing, it is the emotive almost mystic power of images to effect group thought that is also offered up by Scriberia.

In *How to Draw Anything* published as part of Quercus Books self-help series *Little Ways to Live a Big Life*, Scriberia puts forward a childlike rediscovery of the authentic intuitive self. The book portrays ‘unlocking superpowers and harnessing the full potential of drawing’ by invoking the ‘shapeshifting’ potential of metaphor [21]. From online promotional material, co-founder Dan Porter summons ‘the magic that happens when a bunch of people get together in a room to co-create a shared vision’ as the cornerstone of Scriberia’s business and reputation [22]. On the Scriberia website, potential clients are intriguingly invited to ‘discover the magic’ of Scriberia and enquire about the animated possibilities of the work that can be produced [23].

In this context, we might understand Scriberia’s online showcase of a finished product - a mural commissioned by the Financial Times - as something more than just a surface-level presentation. The mural is described as ‘a beautiful way for colleagues from all over the FT to learn more about us and the impact the B2B team are making here at the FT’. However, the graphic consultation process that led to the creation of the mural is not mentioned in this promotional material, it is the post-con-

sultation mural that is the focus of this commission. Taking a hypothetical leap, we might interpret this mural as a talisman-like artefact with the ability to achieve elevated goals such as ‘greater transparency’ and ‘greater collaboration’ [24].

The artist and educator Joseph Beuys in his own way was also a live scribe or graphic consultant. Designated under his all-encompassing concept of ‘social sculpture’, his was a performative art; constructed with the aim of healing social ills and reuniting elements of the primitive and modern [25]. Central to this practice was his lecturing accompanied by props and his live chalkboard drawings. Beuys’s use of live drawing in commonality with the ‘strategic shamanism’ of Jim Chanon, offers up a romanticised othering of the shaman as pedagogist; ‘In places like universities, where everyone talks too rationally, it is necessary for a kind of enchanter to appear’ [25].

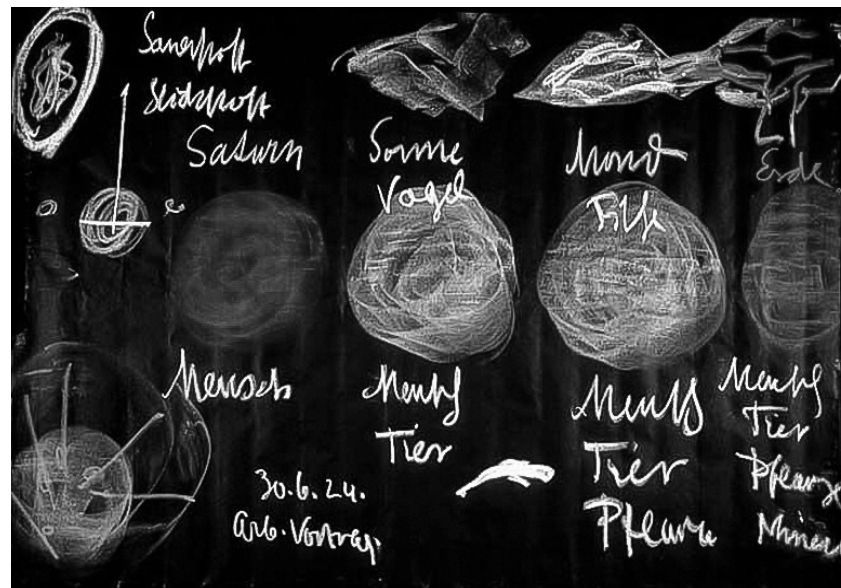
Beuys’s mark-making, diagrams and texts produced in aid of this enchantment are intentionally abstruse, intended to sit metaphorically with the content he is discussing.

Unlike Beuys, for Scriberia the live power of drawing is presented as a clarifying spectacle central to the consultancy process that they are offering. Live scribing, sometimes described by Scriberia as ‘content capture’ [25] is a live drawing performed at a meeting or conference to capture the essence of what is discussed. Post-discussion, Scriberia want ‘every client to maximise the value and versatility of their investment in scribing’. To do this, they encourage clients to invest in further post-event visuals ‘to remind your attendees – on or offline – of the highlights and insights’ [26]. As discussed initially within this paper, for Beuys the left-over artefacts from his lectures and performances were always presented as something to be discarded. Nevertheless, the chalk boards and props he used can be found indexed and archived or exhibited as part of modern art collections all over the world [27].

Perhaps in his theatre of discarding the leftovers of performances, Beuys was greatly influenced by Rudolf Steiner, the Austrian philosopher, social reformer, architect, esotericist and orator. In 1919 a colleague of Rudolf Steiner suggested that thick paper should be used to cover the black boards he used during his lectures so that his drawings would be preserved for posterity. In this way, over 1100 drawings Steiner made during his lectures were preserved [28]. In similarity to Beuys and in departure from Scriberia these works were not intended as artworks, but as illustrations and visual aids to the performance of his lectures (fig. 3). A contemporary of Steiner, cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer, published a broad critique of anthroposophy, making specific reference to these lectures.

Kracauer referred to Steiner as a ‘modern magician’ who, ‘through dangerous clouds of opium smoke’, ensnared the audience with rhetorical tricks and coloured lighting. Kracauer portrays Steiner as transporting his audiences to a place of ‘daemonic barbarity’ and ‘unbridled wilderness of ornamentation’, with the use of illustrations, props, and lighting [29].

Fig. 3. Old Saturn - Old Sun - Old Moon - Earth, Rudolf Steiner blackboard drawing from GA 354. Used under a CC-BY 3.0 license.



The Unbridled Wilderness of Organisation Management

Rudolf Steiner was the founder of the Anthroposophical Society. As a philosophy, anthroposophy puts forward the existence of an objective spiritual world, one that can be engaged with intellectually via human experience. Followers of anthroposophy are instructed to present their ideas in a manner verifiable by rational discourse. Underlying this is the ostensibly pseudoscientific notion that an anthroposophist studying the spiritual world can achieve the same clarity as a scientist investigating the physical world [30].

Today a number of banks, companies, charities, and schools (Waldorf education: 'Steiner schools') are organized along anthroposophical principles [31]. Harvard professor of business history, Geoffrey Jones, in his 2017 book *Profits and Sustainability; A History of Green Entrepreneurship*, spells out the considerable impact both Steiner, and later anthroposophical entrepreneurs, had on the creation of the contemporary mode of ethical and ecologically minded businesses [32].

Examples of financial institutions organized along anthroposophical principles are GLS bank from Bochum, Germany, founded in 1974, Triodos Bank, founded in the Netherlands in 1980, Cultura Sparebank, a 1982 Norwegian ethical banking initiative, La Nef in France and RSF Social Finance in San Francisco.

Organisation management theorist Bernardus Lievegoed founded the N.P.I. in 1954, influenced by the theories of Steiner. Now succeeded by the Association for Social Development with the stated goal of 'healing forces in people and organisations, so that both can develop further. striving towards a healthy interrelationship between the spiritual, human and material aspects of the social organism'. They achieve this through 'consultancy, training and research relating to all aspects of organisation development, group development, and individual development' [33]

In this way, ideas originally presented by Steiner in lecture form, originally accompanied by his own intuitive version of graphic facilitation, have permeated outwards. Perhaps Steiner's belief that drawing is a way of expressing the mystery of humanity; his aim for drawings to affect the development and will of the listeners to his ideas; has been proven a century later by the incongruous effect that these original lectures seem to have had on the material reality of the world that we live in today.

The Improvised Shamanism of Joseph Beuys

In 1951 Joseph Beuys was accepted into Ewald Mataré's master class at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts. During the Second World War, Mataré was one of many modernist German artists to be classified as a degenerate by the Nazi regime.

It was at that time, Beuys found himself conscripted into the Luftwaffe. In 1944, the aircraft he was flying was shot down over the Crimean Front. Beuys claims to have been rescued by a nomadic tribe of Tartars, who saved his life by greasing his injured and hyperthermic body with animal fat, before wrapping him entirely in felt [34].

However, most of this is probably untrue; Tatars had been cleared by the Soviets from the region where he crashed, Beuys was the navigator of the flight rather than the pilot, the flight was not shot down but most probably crashed in bad weather. His account of being conscripted also changed in later life; instead, Beuys describes joining out of a 'feeling of belonging and solidarity with others my age' [35].

Critics in his lifetime pointed to the fallacy of Beuys' storytelling regarding his own biography as proof of a wider falsehood in his character and art [36]. In a 2013 biography, Hans Peter Riegel, a former associate of Beuys, alleges that Beuys surrounded himself with former and long-time Nazis, as his artistic patrons and his political allies. In the book Riegel makes connection between Beuys's occultism, a nostalgia for Nazism and an alleged obsession with Rudolf Steiner's racial theories regarding a supposed Germanic soul, the German spirit, and a special mission for the German people. Riegel contends that Beuys allowed Steiner's worldview to infiltrate his symbolism, his art and permeate all of his work [37].

Prior to this, in response to previous criticism, in 2001 art critic Peter Nisbet from his article 'Crash course: Remarks on a Beuys story', spells out a detailed lineage of Beuys's developing statements on the crash event. In doing this, Nisbet puts forward Beuys as deploying a type of autobiographical strategy as an artistic narrative event. In this way the lie is the art. Nevertheless, in Nisbet's writing there is emphasis on conscious strategising which seems to sidestep a more straightforward characterisation – that Beuys may have been making it up as he went along. On this point it is worth noting something observably apparent to practitioners of illustration watching footage of Beuys from his live-action events or chalkboard lectures: Beuys was an improviser. He was utilising the tools of the creative practitioner, intentionally obscuring, indulging in performative obtuseness.

They Are Making It Up as They Go Along

The illustration featured from Steiner's 1923 lecture *Colour and the Races of Humankind* republished as recently as 2013 by Rudolf Steiner Press [38] depicts Steiner's proposed racial types. The illustration aims to display the primary traits of each racial type according to Steiner's theory: for 'blacks' an 'instinctual life', for 'yellow' people an 'emotional life' and for 'whites' a 'thinking life'. As exemplified here by Steiner, artists and illustrators are capable of bad practice. It goes without saying that not all creative practice is good practice. However, alongside a societal under-valuation of the creative arts there also perhaps an under-appreciation of the power of creative practices to perpetrate and permeate wider society and potentially do real world harm. Possibly, creative practice can also be seen to have permeated current thinking regards management theory. With prominent terminology such as creative destruction², creative banking, creative management; management science seeks to borrow and adapt thinking and approaches from creative practice. This process of appropriation isn't a new phenomenon, terminology and ideas from competitive sports have been wholeheartedly embraced by our contemporary phenomenon of managerialism³.

Nevertheless, even sidestepping any form of appropriation, managerialism since its inception has embraced the potential of creative thinking in its willingness to utilise made-up datasets together with performative ideological narrative in the service of defining 'elaborate cooperation'. Returning to the foundational thinker of scientific management, Frederick Taylor, we can understand that the objective of his theory, improving efficiency and labour productivity through scientific method, is undermined by his seemingly creative approach to data collection [39]. By the early 1960s, in writing concerning his ideas, Taylor's methodology is considered arbitrary and non-scientific, his data inconsistent and flawed [40].

Another prominent example of this type of activity would be the 1982 book *In Search of Excellence* by management consultant and writer Tom Peters [41]. Peters began writing *In Search of Excellence* as an internal project at McKinsey, the consulting firm he worked for at the time. Upon publication it was an immediate bestseller and today the book is now widely acknowledged as the most influential management book in the last 40 years [45]. It is also widely acknowledged that the book is based on suspect or fictionalised data. Empirical studies have suggested that the evidence that the book utilises is not the product of rigorous investigation [46]. Further than this, in a 2001 article concerning the success of the book, Peters is attributed to have stated that all the data backing the books arguments was 'faked'. In the same article, addressing whether the books process was 'fundamentally sound', Peters stated:

² The term first came to prominence via academic and business consultant Clayton Christensen [42], the original concept of 'creative destruction' was derived from the theories of socialist revolutionary Karl Marx [43].

³ Of particular interest here would be the essay the C'mon Champ: What the world of sport can teach creatives by Dan Porter of Scriberia exploring his thoughts regarding how sports psychology can help creative professionals overcome challenges and achieve goals [44].

Absolutely! If you want to go find smart people who are doing cool stuff from which you can learn the most useful, cutting-edge principles, then do what we did with Search: Start by using common sense, by trusting your instincts, and by soliciting the views of 'strange' (that is, nonconventional) people. You can always worry about proving the facts later... [47]

Not all Creativity is Good Creativity

After the 2008 global banking crisis, Mervyn King, the economist who served as the governor of the Bank of England, wrote an entire book utilising the metaphor of alchemy for the destructive creative actions of bankers and regulatory systems that led to the crisis [45]. Taking this desire for metaphor further, thinking in terms of how illustrations operate, analogous to Scriberia's consideration of the 'shapeshifting' potential of metaphor, we can envisage it on the level of the metaphorical itself that creative bankers devised the 'shadow banking system' [48] that brought about this crisis.

As illustrators we might understand this creative banking system as a metaphoric machine that transforms debt into securities, creating new financial products or instruments by combining different types of debt, such as subprime mortgages or credit card debt, into securities that can be sold to investors. In the words of seminal illustrator of New York, Saul Steinberg, to express 'certain things' the illustrator might 'transform them' to 'clothe reality so that it will be forgiven' [49]. Certainly, this is an apt description of the creative process involved in debt repackaging.

However, taking this to its logical conclusion, what we have with the creative strategies embodied by the shadow banking system is a failed metaphor. It does not create a meaningful or coherent connection between debt and securities, but rather a dangerous and unstable connection that can potentially collapse at any moment.



Finally, this is a 2018 editorial illustration by Ariel Davis for the online article '10 years after the financial crisis, is the housing market still at risk?' (fig. 4) [50]. Ariel Davis is an illustrator based in New York. As part of her practice, she creates editorial illustrations that are designed to sit

alongside news media. In the design of such work, the objective is perhaps not to straightforwardly clarify such subject matter. In consideration of illustration, we are commonly directed towards the root of the term, to illumination. In fact, often illustrations operate on enigma, they intentionally mystify to surprise.

Unlike David Sibbet's 'Group Graphics Keyboard' there is, of course, no single agreed methodology for understanding this image – this is precisely why it works. As well as the depiction of housing itself, this image operates on the level of nostalgia, melancholy and online as an animated gif; it operates as a spectacle. It can only successfully operate this way

Fig. 4. Editorial illustration by Ariel Davis. Reproduced with permission of the Author.

because of the ambiguity of visual form.

Following the alchemy metaphor directed at the creative banking of 2008, this illustration is also perhaps a transmutation, an image transforming the mundane absurdity of the banking crisis.

An alchemy of subject matter is potentially a dangerous process. In the image above, the transmutation is deployed benignly; we should be very thankful for this. Creative practice – in visual culture as in banking – does not always operate in the best interests of its audience.

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