Editorial

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I was lookin' back to see if you were lookin' back at me

To see me lookin' back at you

Massive Attack: "Safe From Harm", 1991

Angelus Novus *shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something that he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread.*

Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History", 1940

For organisations, regardless of whether they are involved with strategy, accounting, marketing, entrepreneurship or innovation, vision and the ability and power to look is key. Moreover, contemporary organisations seem to be obsessed with looking ahead. Forecasting, envisioning, strategising, perspectivism, project work, future scenarios, framing, but also diagrams and statistical analysis are constant activities. All these efforts are attempts to look ahead in order to better grasp perceived challenges that meet the organisation as well as gain a better grip on the future as such.

The early 20th century painter Paul Klee did not suffer from such a uni-directional engagement with time as seems to be the case with today's corporate organisations. His seminal painting *Angelus Novus* (*The New Angel*), painted just after World War I, explores our relationship with time and history. The angel – which Walter Benjamin (1999[1940]) calls the 'Angel of History' – is not bent on forecasting or predicting. The angel does not look ahead but instead gazes backwards. The angel is looking at the

present, 'his eyes staring' (Benjamin, 1999 [1940], p.249). The angel is in shock, probably viewing the devastated Europe in the aftermath of the war.

The dominant trope pertaining to the managerial gaze, however, remains bent on envisioning the future. Moreover, most research on vision and its practices seems to share the obsession with looking and looking ahead, and is centred around visual metaphors to such an extent that it has been termed 'ocularcentric' (Kavanagh, 2004). One reason for a 'critical' engagement with vision in organisation, it has been argued, is that visions from time to time blind the visionary (Spoelstra, 2009). Nevertheless, critical accounts of vision and images of organisations are still rare in organisation studies. In a recent special issue on vision in organisation, however, Warren and Acevedo (2012) call for a shift of focus from mere metaphorical or representational views of vision towards exploring 'ways of looking' in practice. Early attempts to do so developed from an interest in organisational aesthetics (e.g., Linstead and Höpfl, 2000) where both visuals of organisations and practices of dealing with them were analysed. This was then further explored in marketing and branding studies (e.g., Schroeder, 2011), feminist studies (Davison, 2010) and process studies, where the problem of representation has become central (Davison and Warren, 2009). On this basis, Warren and Acevedo conceptualise an embodied understanding of vision (via Belova, 2006; Styhre, 2010), identifying two analytical approaches: 'practices of looking' and 'visual regimes' (see the editorial for a thorough overview of this emerging research).

From this research, this special issue of the *International Journal of Management Concepts and Philosophy* has gained insight into organisational aesthetics and its effects and consequences. More importantly, however, we also depart from the understanding of looking as an activity, something one does, and, consider what such "practices and regimes of looking", in turn, do to organisations. Hence, the contributions in this special issue are concerned with *the politics of looking*. Compared to previous studies, the articles here often reveal a 'darker' side, pointing to the various hazards connected to looking. These hazards relate both to practices and regimes of looking; to the forms of looking and their relation to aesthetics and also to means of looking and representing. We will attempt to problematise such dangers of looking, showing how the papers help enhance our understanding of the practices and regimes of looking.

Looking is never a neutral, passive activity. Contrary to vision, which is something you generally 'have', looking, like organising, is a verb. Looking is an act. You actively look, even if you do not look for something in particular. This is why being looked at also becomes important: the act of looking implies – or creates – categories and divisions (Cooper, 2005). Unlike hearing, looking operates with a clearly defined field, a space of organising and ordering, with points of reference and focus, but also blind spots, places for hiding and limits. When looking becomes formalised as an organisational practice, it necessarily creates contrasts and comparisons. We become objects caught up in the gaze of others. Compared to touch and taste, which involve direct contact between perceiver and perceived, looking may be said to operate with and reproduce distance. We can look at something from a distance: sometimes, in fact, being too close may be a hindrance to the sight. There is also a difference between looking at something or someone from a shorter or longer distance, and looking into, in which case the spectator might go from being a passive observer to a more actively involved participant.

Looking objectifies. The subject of the gaze consumes the object it perceives. Looking constitutes images as objects, although it is not necessarily an obvious or even stable relation: if a bar guest is looking at a stripper and giving her money, and the

stripper looks at the guest in order to get money, then it is hard to tell who is 'consuming' whose gaze. A certain male gaze calls forth and reifies particular versions of gender, the colonial gaze reproduces the exotic and the subaltern, while the capitalist gaze sees commodities and calculations. When gaze is refined and extended through formal organisations, it produces a fixed system of subjects and objects (Jay, 1986).

The struggle for looking thus raises high stakes – economic, strategic, moral and political. Not looking or looking in the wrong direction can be devastating, but so, too, can misplaced vision, the wrong *kind* of looking. For looks themselves are deceiving. Klee's angel expresses the horror at looking at the world as it is, not assisted by vain fantasies about a (brighter) future. The financial crisis of 2008 confirmed Klee's insight into the danger of looking. A lot could have been avoided had the financial institutions looked at, and learned from, the history of economic development and growth. Instead, (financial) organisations keep looking ahead into their fantasized future, caught up in the ecstasy of the promises of eternal growth and development (Costea et al., 2007). By constructing what Benjamin termed a 'constellation' of advertising images from financial institutions, De Cock et al. (2009) visualise how such fantasies about the financial market are upheld. Their analytical result is depressing:

> "Although capitalism encompasses the whole world, it sustains a *stricto sensu* 'worldless' ideological constellation, depriving the large majority of people of any meaningful cognitive mapping [in regards to the logic of the capitalist system]." (De Cock et al., 2009, p.17)

It is implied in De Cock et al.'s study that to go and 'see for yourself' is a patently risky strategy especially today, when such looking is almost entirely mediated by images and photos. But you of course never get what you see. To Sontag (2003) images, in particular photos, do not convey reality:

> "Photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed. And photographs are a species of alchemy, for all they are prized as a transparent account of reality." (Sontag, 2003, p.81)

Photos thus instruct our memory, that is, they retrospectively decide what it was you saw when you went to look for yourself (Sørensen, forthcoming). Such fantasies of an alleged transparency highlight the dangers of overlooking the power of representation in the visual realm and, further, that of deceiving and objectifying technologies of looking. This power can be observed in both our everyday practices and when our observations are made visible and deployed in analysis, i.e., when looking becomes a means for research methods. Lately, the need to visualise research results in other forms than in traditional research texts has gained ground, not only in the social sciences, but also in natural sciences. Hence, journals offer to publish research results and methods through professionally produced videos. While such developments have provided much insight, the difficulties of representation connected to such processes have not been adequately addressed. With visual material, this becomes more important, as a photograph or film clip seems to assure us that we have indeed captured some raw reality. "To articulate what is past," Benjamin (1999 [1940], p.247) noted, "does not mean to recognise "how it really was". It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger".

This is why one cannot take looking at face value: the face is, for one thing, a mask which cannot be believed. This is not (only) Guy Debord's late modern insight in the *Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1967). In the first century AD, the apostle Paul warned against the enigmas of looking: "For now we see through a glass, darkly" (I Cor. 13:12).

For Paul, we do not really come to see much by looking, and this is not only because ancient glass was less clear than today's translucent material. Paul uses the term 'enigmatic', *αινιγματι*, for 'darkly': to look is to become engaged in an enigma, a riddle, or a maze. God's all seeing eye, unlike the eye of the subjective sinner, is not selective and hence morally corrupt. God's eye is essentially without qualities; and hence, 'objective' in its act of perception. The medieval intellect, for this reason, "delighted in the play of signs as figures, metaphor, analogy, symbol, and vision" (Lowe, 1982, p.10). To their contemporaries and heirs, the mystics – the forerunners of our own 'knowledge society' – the true essence of God (and of the mystics themselves) is revealed through vision and light. This is an essence one partakes in through receiving the same insights as those already initiated, and then viewing one's soul as part of *gnosis*, knowledge itself (Rossbach, 1996; Kaulingfreks and ten Bos, 2005). Descartes also took part in mystical practices and thought that *gnosis* could light up the little flame, *pneuma*, which burns inside the human heart. Descartes shared Plato's, the Semites' and Paul's distrust of the immediate apparent visual. However, the Cartesian alternative – the sovereign power of reason – was itself "a model based on the metaphorics of vision (the mind's eye) in which the properties of the visible were transferred into the mental domain" (Kavanagh, forthcoming, p.xx)..

Alongside the danger of representation in practices and regimes of looking, we wish to call attention to related ocularcentric assumptions in much organisational aesthetics. This is a field which, as Hancock (2005, p.35) has argued, remains dominated by a "somewhat romanticised envisioning of the aesthetic". To Benjamin, this romantic decadence is connected to art's loss of aura in the age of mechanical reproduction: here art is released from its tradition and its singularity is diminished. Earlier, art had a magical, ritualistic function, as it connected mankind to the gods: "This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognisable as secularised ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty" (Benjamin, 1999 [1940], p.217). This 'cult of beauty' has made an easy transition into organisation studies, where scholars are preoccupied with aesthetics in a way that Danto (2003) characterises as 'beautificatory'. The problem, of course, is that beautiful organisations will not necessarily do beautiful things. What looks good may not be good. Nazism is a case in question: its Hugo Boss designed uniforms did appeal to the masses (as well as to the elites), yet, as Sontag (1980, p.105) observes in her writing on Nazi aesthetics: "The colour is black, the material is leather, the seduction is beauty, the justification is honesty, the aim is ecstasy, the fantasy is death". Aesthetics, and with it looking, resides, as Rancière (2004) observes, at the heart of what is political.

Although the 20th century has been marked by a change in the philosophical conception of looking, notably the linguistic turn in which attention from the visual sign and image shifts to language and meaning (Heidegger, 1996), looking remains inscribed in a plethora of technologies. The results of our looking are enhanced, amplified, diffused, recorded and re-transmitted. However, our point is not that looking or the technologies that privilege looking are 'bad'; like Foucault (1983, p.343), we also reject the position that 'everything is bad'. Foucault's message was that 'everything', including the practices connected to looking, "is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do". This 'doing' is the issue, since we cannot just reproduce what we see, and render some kind of normative, 'critical' judgement of the type: "We do not like what we see". Rather, we must engage with what we look at in order to make it look different, to change the way it looks, and the way it is looked at. We cannot be content with how things look in the 'actual' realm;

this is only part of the rich virtuality of which the actual is drawn (according to Deleuze (1988)). This is the task of art, according to Paul Klee, and it is also this task – to change the way we look – which is undertaken in the studies presented here:

> "The visual material [or the organisational analysis] must capture nonvisible forces. Render visible, Klee said; not render or reproduce the visible." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.342)

Such challenges should help us to develop methods that can identify those figurations that attempt to free themselves "from the restrictive modes of perception and formulaic means of representation" (Bamford, 2013, p.49). The contributions in this special issue all search, each in their own way, for such configurations and express them so as new forces become visible.

Sverre Spoelstra's paper directly engages with the question of visibility and invisibility in leadership studies. In his paper, Spoelstra raises the provocative question: Does leadership exist as an objective phenomenon? Or does leadership become visible through the objectifying attempts of the leadership scholar? Drawing on the work of Jean-Luc Marion, Spoelstra suggests that leadership scholars conceptualise leadership as a 'non-objective phenomenon'. This, following Marion's analysis, would make it impossible to make leadership visible by means of traditional research methods. Given that non-objective phenomena are rich and saturated, they can only be grasped passively, perhaps by a stroke of grace or wonder. Marion gives God as an example of a non-objective phenomenon, a phenomenon so extraordinary and excessive to the senses that it cannot be grasped. However, just as believers in God can grasp him through the practice of faith, followers of a particular leader can similarly grasp leadership through their faith in the leader and his vision. Such faith is accessed, for instance, through the study of iconic contemporary leadership images, which Spoelstra suggests may be a way out of leadership studies' current impasse.

The effort to 'render visible', to use Klee's formula, is also the subject of Birgitte Gorm Hansens's examination of technologies of visualisation at a Nano Science Center. In her paper, Gorm Hansen observes two types of visibility in scientific practice. The scientists look at and produce images of the studied object, in this case advanced images of chalk samples. However, the scientists are also being looked at, and they must produce images of science itself, in this case the chalk project that must be presented as something which can be measured and evaluated. The analysis departs from Latour's understanding of the paradoxical nature of 'oversight' in science; one can only achieve overview and clarity by simplifying, but any effort at simplification runs the risk of misrepresenting the object of study. Such insight begs the question of what are the costs of manufacturing visibility? Exploring this question, Gorm Hansen, using Strathern's lateral analysis, develops a particular visual methodology of juxtaposition and comparison. The paper analyses how science itself is manufactured as an object of knowledge by the same processes of enhancement and erasure that the scientist uses to manufacture and assess samples. This 'lateral move' leads her to ask what it is we produce when we are performing visibility in science and at what cost, i.e., which resources go into it and what becomes in the process invisible.

Moving from natural science laboratories to managerial practice in a Danish public school setting, Helene Ratner and Justine Grønbæk Pors' analysis continues Gorm Hansen's exploration of how to 'render visible'. The problem at hand is the difficulty in managing and evaluating the employees' self-managing practices.

These practices are believed to be manifested via observable expressions of attitudes and feelings. Ratner and Pors' investigation actually creeps under the human skin in a double sense. While in Gorm Hansen's case, visibility is rendered by an advanced, scientific machine, which 'looks' at the object and manufactures an image of it, the technologies of visualisation in Ratner and Pors' case are translating human emotion and expression into accountable information. This exercise leads to a more political reflection regarding the dangers of this kind of information machinery in the school system. Ratner and Pors find that when rendering self-management practices visible, and when translating the identified expressions into evaluator data, the employees become objects of normative judgements; their ability to carry out self-management is deemed either good or bad, satisfactory or in need of 'further training'. This normativity highlights the double bind of looking: when we are looking at something in particular, we are also looking away from something else. In this case, certain types of emotions and attitudes will be promoted as desirable, and the individual will learn to perform them when required. This performative aspect is further re-inscribed into the school system, as these technologies of visualisation demand actual presence; the translation is thus a process of witnessing and of being able to recount what has been seen and what it meant. We are thus not simply dealing with an act of looking, but with the subsequent recapitulation of what one has looked at to others. We might call this a 'look narrative' or 'look account'.

The performative powers of looking are especially prominent in the organisational technology for predicting the future, known as forecasting. In their paper, Sine N. Just, Nico Mouton and Jonas Gabrielsen use observations of the Danish real estate market coupled with conceptual explorations to argue that the function of forecasting is not to foresee the future, but to create what it predicts through a distinct 'way of looking'. We do not just look at the future, we construct it. The paper explores four functions of forecasting: creating the future, avoiding the past, making the present and the casting of forecasters as experts on the future. In order to sustain their claim, Just et al. depart from the performative turn in economics, where speech act theory is combined with Actor Network Theory (ANT). As in the two earlier contributions, this allows the authors to explore the network surrounding forecasting (both actors and technology), the effect of certain actions, and not least the power-relations in the network. The performativity of forecasting is twofold: forecasters visualise market developments, and then steer the gaze of market actors in a certain direction (simultaneously diverting their gaze from other potential directions). Just et al.'s analysis contributes to the understanding of the performative power of looking. It highlights the social and networked aspects of looking and the diffuse power-relations that come with it. Compared to Ratner and Pors' contribution, where there the hierarchical power-relations are more clearly demarcated between, for example, employer and employee, Just et al.'s analysis leads us to problematise such positions and try to go beyond any clear cut distinction 'professional vision' and the 'amateur' (Styhre, 2010).

Professional vision and the co-production of markets and products is the topic of Saara L. Taalas and Irma Hirsjärvi's contribution. This case deals with the productive space of a commodity's 'after-life', and the 'professionals' who contribute to these spaces are consumers. The analysis is based on an ethnographic study of Rising Shadow, a Finnish science fiction and fantasy literature digital network. Fandom is here conceptualised as an active audience, a productive category that co-produces products and markets while engaged in acts of consuming. Following Benjamin, (cultural) products thus gain meaning and value in their 'after-life', i.e., the life the

product lives after having entered the market; when fans and followers use and enhance the product. Taalas and Hirsjärvi argue that this also changes the power dynamics of traditional markets, beyond a dualistic and hierarchical producer-consumer relation. Such co-creative processes might pose a threat to traditional producers, who, confronted with these alternative visualisations and representations, lose control over the right to the original work. Fandom might be an exemplary case of this production, as a fan is, per definition, someone who 'has seen the light' and become fanatic. The prohibition against making yourself images of Jahve (see the Second Commandment, Ex. 20: 4–6) expresses this fear stemming from (dangerously popular) representations, since any such representation can lead you astray, coming to stand in for the reality of, in this case, God. The fan is, literally, a fanatic for whom the image, the *mirage*, has replaced the reality: various social technologies, as Taalas and Hirsjärvi show, are being invested to sustain this kind of fan enthusiasm. Of course, a new dogmatism arises around the construction of the fan-image, so that, while science fiction by definition should be an extremely open genre – dealing, after all, with future events – it is not just *any* version of that future that counts as worthy of fanaticism.

This is also the theme in the final contribution by Lewis Goodings, Steven D. Brown and Martin Parker. The authors invite us to deepen our understanding of how material representations partake in the creation of what they are supposed to represent. In the case of the USA' attempt to reach the final frontier and colonise space itself, Goodings et al. identify how NASA 'premediated' the event via the Apollo programme. That is, the Apollo programme was (partly) used to create a 'lasting cultural memory' of the moon landing. The moon landings, in particular, present an instance in which the US space agency NASA attempted to 'premediate' how the (gigantic) operation was to be recollected: it was never the purpose to land on the moon; it was rather the purpose to construct a cultural memory of *having landed* on the moon. Through analysing a number of recent recollections of the moon landings, the paper explores how mixed the memories of the landings are in light of the careful and costly efforts of premediation that NASA engaged in. Compared to Taalas and Hirsjärvi's notion of a product's 'after-life', the Apollo program is an example of a producer trying to control the post-production of the event. Photographs of the landing are in this case highly staged imageries (to the point of them creating doubt and suspicion as to whether or not the event actually took place). Just as the Catholic Church used paintings during the Counter-Reformation to shape the memory and subjectivity of those looking at them (Sørensen, 2010), NASA was engaged in active premediation of what was to become the memory of having landed on the moon.

Hovering above the earth, but not at such a safe distance as the moon, Klee's new angel, his *Angelus Novus*, is still looking down on us to see if we are looking back at him, in order, possibly, to learn to look at the present. The angel sees us continue to hurl headlong into the future, blinded by our own vision of progress and forecastability. We keep looking, but we do not see much, if seeing is to be connected to gaining insight rather than to becoming premediated by designed imageries. The studies in this special issue, however, may help us 'render visible' what we do not currently see. If representing is about rendering *the* visible, that is, reproducing what is already there in a more precise manner, then *rendering visible* is about sensing and gaining insights into those invisible forces that form and subject us as we create visibilities and invisibilities, memories and forecasts, landings and take-offs; a whole politics of looking. These forces may appear at times to be dark and unforeseeable, even sinister. Whether we like the looks of it or not, they remain part and parcel of the world as it is.

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