Improvise!™: Jazz Consultancy and the Aesthetics of Neoliberalism

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The global economic turmoil of the 21st century has not been kind to jazz musicians. While jazz performance has rarely made for a comfortable, stable career *per se*, the traditional avenues that musicians have used to make a living have become increasingly difficult to navigate. Steady, well-paying work in clubs and dining establishments has become harder and harder to come by. Fewer couples are hiring jazz bands for wedding ceremonies. Original creative music—never an especially lucrative mode of music-making—has become still less profitable, as erstwhile jazz clubs across North America close their doors or transition to new, jazz-less business models. Even when individuals, companies, or dining establishments do wish to provide music for their guests, clients, or patrons, they are more likely to hire a DJ—a single musician who can supplant an entire band.

Faced with this economic uncertainty, dedicated jazz musicians have improvised, becoming more entrepreneurial in order to find new ways to eke out a living by making music. A prime example is Michael Gold, a jazz bass player, presently based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Through the 1980s and into the 1990s, he was one of the busier bassists on the scene in New York City, where he played with jazz luminaries from guitarist Tal Farlow and saxophonist Al Cohn to vocalists Sheila Jordan and Jon Hendricks to saxophonists Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh. He was a classmate of Ingrid Monson's during their Master's studies at the New England Conservatory and holds a PhD in music from New York University.

He's also one of a small but growing number of musicians who have parlayed their experience and expertise in jazz and other improvisatory modes of music making into careers in business consultancy. Founded in 1999, Gold's group, Jazz Impact, brings exceptional jazz musicians to corporate events to illustrate the ways in which an improvising jazz band might serve as a model for management and leadership in a corporate setting. The Jazz Impact message falls chiefly along five valences, which Gold refers to as the "Five Dynamics of Jazz," captured by the acronym APRIL: Autonomy, Passion, Risk, Innovation, Listening. Gold's mnemonic encapsulates his own ideas with about twenty-five years of research by leadership and management scholars. Autonomy refers to the diffuse leadership structure of the jazz band, wherein (according to the metaphor, at least), authority circulates from musician to musician as they take turns proposing tunes to play, dictating tempi, and of course taking improvised solos. The word passion describes the dedication and the emotional commitment that a musician brings to her art and her performing ensemble. Risk is an obvious one, meaning "the ability to take chances and explore new territory and methods in pursuit of shared goals, and the ability to support others in their explorations" (27 July 2012). The notion of innovation grows directly out of risk, referring to the idea that musicians are, on the one hand, determined to keep their work forever fresh and new and, on the other hand, that they respond to challenges, unexpected changes, or other "incongruities" in ways that potentially transform those moments into opportunities to reimagine and reinvent old systems of knowledge and old techniques. Finally, listening undergirds all of the previous four "dynamics," signifying the profound dialogue that must happen between members of a jazz band in order for them to effectively share leadership, maintain passion and drive, and collectively take risks and discover new musical ground.

Jazz Impact is by no means the only organization using jazz and other improvised musics to make this point. Keith Sawyer, Morgan Distinguished Professor in Educational Innovations at University of North Carolina, has given keynote lectures at corporate events around the world outlining his take on these concepts. Getting in the Groove, directed by Oakville, Ontario-based pianist Brian Hayman since the early 2000s, runs a similar program using musicians from Toronto. League of Rock, founded by guitarist Terry Moshenberg and drummer Topher Stott in 2006, takes a different tack to a similar end, focusing on improvisation and collaborative songwriting in a rock music setting. While all of these groups use somewhat divergent techniques and different terminology, their core messages always seem to circle back to some variation of "Five Dynamics of Jazz" and the APRIL acronym. All of these groups aim to show business leaders how they might use improvisation as a metaphor through which to develop management structures and styles that invite employees to take creative initiatives, to maximize their strengths, and to listen deeply, confident in the knowledge that their colleagues and bosses are reciprocating, and to go home at night feeling fulfilled and self-actualized. Between them, Jazz Impact, Sawyer, Getting in the Groove, and League of Rock have brought these messages to such corporate giants as AT&T, Starbucks, TD Bank, Ernst & Young, Time Warner, Microsoft, Unilever, and the Davos World Economic Forum—along with community groups, health organizations, churches, charities, and other not-for-profits.

Gold's "Five Dynamics of Jazz" may look familiar to regular readers of this journal, or to anyone versed in the growing literature on improvisation studies. The elements of dialogue, empathy, co-creation, immediacy, risk-taking, and perseverance in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles that Gold sees to be central to jazz improvisation are equally a part of the central metaphors of improvisation studies; it is those selfsame elements that make (as Ajay Heble has often written) "improvisation [...] a crucial model for political, cultural, and ethical dialogue and action"

(Heble). As Heble, Daniel Fischlin, and George Lipsitz write in their most recent book, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights, and the Ethics of Cocreation*:

In its most fully realized forms, improvisation is the creation and development of new, unexpected, and productive cocreative relations among people. It teaches us to make 'a way' out of 'no way' by cultivating the capacity to discern hidden elements of possibility, hope, and promise in even the most discouraging circumstances. [...] Without a written score or script, improvisers envision and enact something new together, and enrich their experience in the world by acting upon it and changing it, in the process creating things that would not have otherwise come into existence. (xii)

Again, the central ideas of co-creation, risk, contingency, discovering hidden possibilities, and "making a way out of no way" are equally at home in Gold's business consultancy or in the business-oriented literature on management theory, leadership, creativity, and organizational design as they are in improvisation studies.

The critical distinction, of course, lies in the other side of the analogy: the principal reasons for looking to improvisation as a model in the first place, and the things that improvisation is said to be a metaphor *for*. In consultancy practices and business literature, the goal is so deep-seated, so axiomatic that it is often left unstated: expanding profit within an increasingly neoliberal capitalist economy. In improvisation studies, the goal is starkly different (if not diametrically opposed): to quote Heble, Fischlin, and Lipsitz once again, "improvisation is at its heart a democratic, humane, and emancipatory practice.... [S]ecuring rights of all sorts requires people to hone their capacities to act in the world, capacities that flow from improvisation" (xi). Where capitalism and neoliberalism enter into the equation of improvisation studies, they are most commonly understood to be oppositional forces that can potentially hinder emancipation, democracy, and the full realization of universal human rights: "[Neoliberal corporate] imperatives are at odds with creative-commons musicking generated out of aggrieved communities in the name of resistance to oppression, community solidarity, and identity narratives" (4). In effect, then, improvisation studies and the business-oriented consulting practices and literatures that deal with improvisation take more or less the same central metaphors but reach dramatically different conclusions.

This article examines this key tension by situating improvisation-based consulting practices like Gold's Jazz Impact in a variety of overlapping contexts. In the first section, I consider the work of Jazz Impact and other consultants within the framework of an emerging literature in the interrelated fields of management, leadership, and organizational behaviour on what Giovanni Schiuma calls "Arts-Based Initiatives"—work that looks to a variety of artistic practices (including jazz and improvisation) to illuminate and model better, more innovative, and more profitable business practices. In the second section, I suggest that these various literatures and consultants—together with a huge and ever-expanding body of writing on "creativity"—collectively operate to provide an aesthetic aspect to "creative" and "knowledge-based" labour in the postindustrial North American "knowledge economy." The *work* of postindustrial, neoliberal capitalism is thereby reformulated in these discourses as a mode of aesthetic self-expression. In the third section, I argue that this aesthetic veneer is extended to the *neoliberal market itself*, transforming it from a concrete (if complicated) system of international trade defined by a complex of state and corporate regulations into a veritable manifestation of the Kantian Sublime. This aestheticization of the market, I argue, threatens to occlude the profoundly socially destructive impact of the laissez-faire neoliberal regulatory regime that has taken hold of economic and social policy on an increasingly global scale over the last three decades. In the fourth and final section, however, I explore how the lessons of improvisation studies might intervene in the corporate appropriation of improvisation. I suggest that corporate interest in jazz and improvisation—and artistic practice more broadly—in fact represents an opportunity for improvisers and artists to make their voices heard in the upper echelons of corporate power, and I point to a number of places where this is beginning to happen. While I acknowledge that any kind of real, systemic socioeconomic policy change (on the state and at the corporate level) must necessarily be incremental, I propose a number of concrete ways in which improvisers can have a real, positive impact on the globally catastrophic course of neoliberalism—to "make a way out of no way" (Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz xii).

Improvisation and the Creative Economy

These and other music-based consultants have all emerged in the last 10-15 years in the context of a vogue in the core business fields of management studies, leadership, and organizational behaviour for "arts-based initiatives"—or ABIs. As management scholar Giovanni Schiuma explains, "An ABI is the planned managerial use of art forms to address management challenges and business problems with the aim of developing employees and infrastructure that affects the organization's value-creation capacity" (2). Apart from jazz-based initiatives, various corporations have looked to the visual arts,¹ poetry,² and theatre³ in particular in their search for the artistic metaphor that will help them maximize their "value-creation capacity." Schiuma's description of the purpose of ABIs echoes Gold's APRIL acronym: for Schiuma, most of these ABIs offer an enticing combination of entertainment (events that will galvanize and inspire the work force, hopefully increasing their passion for the workplace), a means to focus on and improve

employees' "soft competencies" (such as their ability to listen and dialogue), and a new frame within which to consider an organization's infrastructure in order to better foment innovation and creativity.

Jazz Impact and Getting in the Groove in particular play to all of these aspects by bringing live musicians to perform concerts for their client companies. Throughout the concerts, directors Michael Gold and Brian Hayman (respectively) and their musicians lead event attendees in a discussion of how a jazz band manifests the ideal behaviors of the ideal organization—listening, dialogue, fluid leadership, risk-taking, etc.—in order to yield a creative, innovative performance of well-trodden source material (i.e., the jazz standard). In this way, the jazz band is a kind of creativity machine: input old knowledge, run it through an improvisatory dialogue between creative stakeholders, and see it emerge reborn on the other side. Importantly, the jazz band is also virtually ceaselessly creative: the process is infinitely repeatable and the outcomes infinitely varied. And because that process is spontaneously improvised, it works fast, responding instantly and en masse to unexpected challenges and changes.

Jazz Impact, Getting in the Groove, and their kindred consultancy groups have emerged in large part in response to a growing body of management studies and organizational behaviour scholarship that has explored the utility of jazz as a metaphorical frame for business management and leadership—a corpus that Nicholas Sorensen surveys in more detail in his article in this journal. The first such piece of which I am aware is Karl Weick's 1977 study (co-authored with Michel Bougon and Din Binkhurst), "Cognition in Organizations: An Analysis of the Utrecht Jazz Orchestra." This article does not deal directly with improvisation, choosing the UJO as its subject primarily because it appeared to be a closed economic system that "depended little upon outside resources" for its continued operation, and thereby served as a good case study to which to apply an analytical model called "etiography" (the precise meaning of which is very dense, and not especially relevant to the present discussion). This early work, however, established the jazz-business metaphor as a small but important sub-field within management studies, paving the way for work by David Bastien and Todd J. Hostager ("Jazz as a Process of Organizational Innovation"), Western University business professor Mary Crossan ("Improvise to Innovate"), Miguel Pina E. Cunha & Ken Kamoche (*Organizational Improvisation*), and Sawyer (*Explaining Creativity: Group Genius*). Particularly critical to the growing discourse around the "improvising business," to use Sawyer's term, or "organizational improvisation," to use Cunha and Kamoche's, was a 1998 special issue of the journal *Organization Science*. The issue grew out of a 1995 symposium hosted by the Academy of Management National Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia called "Jazz as a Metaphor for Organizing in the 21st Century." The symposium and subsequent journal issue brought together the leading thinkers in the embryonic field, including Crossan and Weick, as well as Mary Jo Hatch, Frank Barrett, and Alan Meyer (among others), together with jazz clarinetist Ken Peplowski.

Among other things, the authors of the issue proposed that while the jazz/improvisation metaphor wasn't necessarily universally applicable to every category of business it would be especially valuable to the creative elements of organizations (something that could also be said of ABIs more generally). Organizations whose "value-creation capacity" (i.e., profitability) hinges on developing innovative technologies (such as software engineers, the telecommunications industry, or auto manufacturers), finding new ways to exploit old socio-economic and legal structures and systems of knowledge or data (such as banks and other financial institutions), or telling new stories about familiar brands (such as via advertising and marketing agencies) have come to recognize that in order to be creative corporately, they must facilitate and foment the creativity of their employees both individually and collectively.

In common with several of these management theorists, Jazz Impact's Michael Gold admits that the improvisation metaphor isn't necessarily universally applicable to every category and element of business. Some organizations, he acknowledges, would be better served by the model of the string quartet, wherein (in his view) "every interaction between the individuals is defined, and there's leeway in the way you express these ideas, but you're not being asked to change anything, you're not being asked to improve anything [...] You are duplicating an idea that is fixed in time, which is essentially the concept of industrialization" (27 July 2012). (Evidently, his use of the string quartet glosses some crucial elements of the historical and performance context of that idiom in service of an easily digestible metaphor, but more on that later.) Where the jazz metaphor is especially applicable however, Gold reiterates, is in the creative elements of organizations (something that could also be said of ABIs more generally). In short, creative industries perceive the need for creative minds—a principle that is often understood as a key element of the broader rubric of "human capital."

The idea of human capital is essentially as old as the idea of capitalism. Adam Smith was the first to make reference to the concept in his *The Wealth of Nations*:

The acquisition of such talents, by the maintenance of the acquirer during his education, study, or apprenticeship, always costs a real expense, which is a capital fixed and realized, as it were, in his person. [...] The improved dexterity of a workman may be considered in the same light as a machine or

instrument of trade which facilitates and abridges labor, and which, though it costs a certain expense, repays that expense with a profit. (179)

In other words, maintaining—and ideally improving—the physical, intellectual, and emotional health and wellbeing of the work force is one of the costs of doing business, and one that capitalists ignore at their peril. Failure to consider “human capital,” Smith recognized, would invariably have negative consequences for a business’s bottom line.

In the context of contemporary creative industries, the locus of human labour (the primary human resource the capitalist seeks to exploit) has largely shifted from the body to the mind, and consequently the balance in discourse around human capital has shifted from an emphasis on fostering physical health to an emphasis on fostering intellectual acuity and agility. The emergence of the ABI phenomenon—and the concomitant jazz-based management theories and corporate team building initiatives—is a direct symptom of this shift in managerial focus.

Emerging alongside the perceived increased need for more creative workers and teams in the “creative sector” in the last two decades is a related need to cope with the rapid change that this new economic order supposedly entails. Whereas Taylorist management (i.e., industrial-age, assembly-line oriented management) focused on both management structures and individual jobs that were methodical and infinitely repeatable, the tumultuous postmodern marketplace is seen to demand new approaches that are sufficiently agile, flexible, and intuitive to stay one step ahead of the competition. If a Taylorist organization was a majestic but unwieldy orchestra or string quartet, where employees slavishly repeated simple but mundane tasks (as it commonly is in the jazz-based initiative rhetoric), then the postmodern creative organization must be a dynamic improvising jazz band. And the role of ABIs like Jazz Impact, Sawyer, Getting in the Groove, et al, is to teach organizations to improvise.

Creativity and the Aesthetics of Neoliberalism

Of course, the increasing predominance of the creative sector in the North American division of labour is itself a direct consequence of the rapid changes in an increasingly globalized economy. Beginning in the mid-to-late 1960s, profit margins for most North American corporations began to stagnate as employee wages and manufacturing costs increased (due in large part to a spike in oil prices driven by the newly-formed Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries—or OPEC), while consumption steadily declined in the face of rising commodity prices and growing unemployment—a process economists refer to as stagflation. By the early 1970s, these interrelated processes had resulted in a sweeping economic recession. Partly in order to combat the recession, the Nixon administration in the United States instituted several new monetary policies—withdrawal from the Bretton Woods agreement (an international economic treaty that fixed global exchange rates, using the U.S. dollar as the “reserve currency” against which all global currencies were indexed) by delinking the greenback from the value of gold. The goal of these new policies—commonly known as *Nixon Shock* for their unannounced implementation—was to drive down the value of the U.S. Dollar in order to facilitate both international trade and domestic consumption, whilst hopefully bringing about an end to the recession and a return to prosperity. Meanwhile, the increasingly influential economists of the Chicago School of Economics (led by University of Chicago professor Milton Friedman) argued for a return to *laissez faire* state economic policy (wherein the state minimizes its regulatory intervention in the global free market), while at the same time promoting the value of publicly held shares as the fundamental hallmark of a corporation’s overall worth. Collectively, these policies form the backbone of the neoliberal socioeconomic ideology that has held sway since the 1970s.

The (largely unanticipated) consequences of this incipient neoliberalism have been abundantly documented in cultural studies and critical economics literature alike: the emerging emphasis on shareholder investment pushed corporate CEOs to strive for readily demonstrable short-term profits over longer term goals. With that aim in mind, many North American CEOs looked at the rising cost of domestic manufacturing, recognized the increased global fluidity of capital afforded by the collapse of Bretton Woods, considered the dramatically reduced cost of labour in Asia, and began to outsource more and more of their manufacturing to that continent. As rapidly improving communication technologies made the prospect of running a globalized business increasingly cheap, easy, and attractive, the North American manufacturing sector—the driving force behind economic and urban development in the 20th century throughout much of the United States and Canada—shrank accordingly. Consequently, while there has been an overall steady increase in the net capital circulating in the United States and Canada, the distribution of that capital has been concentrated almost entirely in the upper socioeconomic class strata. As George Lipsitz (among many others) has observed, “for the entire 1980s, 85 percent of new jobs [in the U.S.] were in the lowest paying categories. Forty percent of the U.S. work force had no pension plans and 20 percent had no health insurance. The real income of the richest 1 percent of the population increased by close to 20 percent, while the real income of the poorest 40 percent of the population suffered a 10 percent decline. In a period when housing costs doubled and the prices of basic necessities increased by 100 percent, real discretionary income fell 18 percent between 1973 and 1989” (128). All of this in a period of ostensible economic boom.

Hence, there is something tautological about the common trope in management literature, where increasingly flexible, improvisatory organizational schemata are a necessary *response* to globalization. In point of fact, the increased flexibility and mobility of capital on a global scale essentially *generated* the tumultuous circumstances in the emergent global market that management theorists argue require this flexible response.

It is enormously significant, however, that the flexible management responses to the turmoil of globalization are framed in terms of the aestheticized language of “creativity.” Indeed, it is important to notice that consultancy and management strategy oriented around Arts-Based Initiatives emerged at precisely the historical moment that they did—in the mid-1980s, just as neoliberalism was taking shape throughout North America and around the world. In the opening sentences of his bestselling 2005 book, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right Brainers Will Rule the Future*, author, management theorist, “creativity expert,” and ABI consultant Daniel Pink effectively encapsulates this discourse:

The last few decades have belonged to a certain kind of person with a certain kind of mind—computer programmers who could crank code, lawyers who could craft contracts, MBAs who could crunch numbers. But the keys to the kingdom are changing hands. The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind—creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers. These people—artists, inventors, designers, storytellers, caregivers, consolers, big picture thinkers—will now reap society’s richest rewards and share its greatest joys. (1)

Management theorist Richard Florida quantified the aesthetic dimension of neoliberalism that Pink (and many others) have intuitively recognized in another bestselling and widely influential book, *Cities and the Creative Class*. According to Florida’s “Bohemian Index,”—a measurement that correlates a concentration of “bohemian” creative artists with innovative industry—“the presence and concentration of bohemians in an area creates an environment or milieu that attracts other types of talented or high human-capital individuals. The presence of such human capital concentrations in a region in turn attracts and generates innovative technology-based industries” (114). In concert with many other theorists, then, Florida and Pink propose that the globalized, neoliberalized marketplace permits—even demands—a new artistic sensibility. Florida summarizes, “Capitalism—or, more accurately, new forms of capitalist enterprise (i.e., the R&D lab and the startup company)—are extending their reach in ways that integrate formerly marginalized individuals and social groups into the value creation process” (116). According to this logic, neoliberal economics enables bohemian creative artists to finally contribute something of value to the cities where they live and to society at large by emerging as the leaders and labourers of the next great economic gilded age.

The task of organizations, then, is simply to get out of the way—to deregulate, as it were. In his seminal 1969 book, *The Social Psychology of Organizing*—published eight years before his work with the Utrecht Jazz Orchestra—Karl Weick proposed that the most innovative, creative organizations were not leviathan corporations with imposing office towers, but rather networks of smaller units: “autonomous building blocks that can be brought together, disconnected, or re-formed with relatively little disturbance” (qtd. in Sawyer, *Group Genius* 156). Such an organization would be better equipped to navigate the unpredictable vicissitudes of the global economy, where one unit would be well prepared to deal with a particular situation even as another unit might founder, ensuring the sustained vitality and profitability of the organization as a whole. Moreover, such an organization is essentially non-hierarchical, with leadership distributed fairly evenly across all of the autonomous building blocks—presaging Weick’s later observations about shared leadership in the jazz band, and Michael Gold’s first “jazz dynamic,” autonomy. In this way, creative, visionary leaders are permitted to excel (with the support of their teams), unencumbered by the ponderous, plodding edifice of conventional organizational bureaucracy.

There is considerable stress placed on the visionary capacity of *leaders* in this aestheticized neoliberal paradigm. No longer is it sufficient for a manager to simply be an effective, efficient *administrator*. In order to steward an organization through the *sturm und drang* of the global market, leaders must have *vision*—an exceptional ability to synthesize seemingly disparate strands of information, a fearlessness in the face of precipitous risk, and an unswerving passion for the organizational mission (again, all crucial components of Gold’s “Five Dynamics of Jazz”) that will enable her to arrive at an innovative solution. Daniel Pink reiterates Gold’s aesthetic framework (albeit, drawing his terminology from a different musical genre), coining the term “symphonic thinking” to describe this ability to make sense out of a bewildering array of information: “Symphonic thinking is a signature ability of composers and conductors, whose jobs involve corralling a diverse group of notes, instruments, and performers and producing a unified and pleasing sound. But today Symphony is becoming an essential aptitude for a much wider swath of the population.... [as success in business increasingly comes to depend on] recognizing patterns, crossing boundaries to uncover hidden connections, and making bold leaps of imagination” (130).

Jonah Lehrer builds on these earlier perspectives in his recent (and controversial⁴) book, *Imagine: How Creativity Works*, suggesting that this seemingly magical market-oriented prestidigitation can in fact be quantified by the latest cutting-edge creativity research from the field of neuroscience. He refers to the work of Johns Hopkins University

neuroscientist Charles Limb, who has used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) technology to scan the brains of jazz pianists in action in order to explore the process of improvisation. Limb asked his research subjects to slide into an fMRI machine with a specially-designed piano keyboard. He instructed them to first play simple, mundane melodies like major scales or memorized tunes, and then to improvise a solo accompanied by a recorded jazz quartet. As Lehrer describes it, Limb concluded firstly that improvisation begins with a “surge of activity in the medial-prefrontal cortex, an area at the front of the brain that is closely associated with self expression. Limb refers to it as the ‘center of autobiography in the brain’” (Lehrer 89-90). In Limb’s estimation, this suggests that improvisers are engaged in a kind of self-expressive storytelling when they play. Of particular interest, however, was the activity in the neighbouring dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), a region of the brain closely associated with impulse control. Significantly, activity in the DLPFC decreased during the improvisation, suggesting (in Lehrer’s elegant turn of phrase) “the musicians were inhibiting their inhibitions, slipping off those mental handcuffs[...] They were letting themselves go” (Lehrer 91).

In all of these formulations, we see repeated the same tropes—a sense of autonomy, a drive towards self-expression, a willingness to take risks, and an ability to look into chaos and derive order—all framed within the language of aesthetics. In the context of a push towards more creative and flexible *organizations*, the enormous pressure placed on the visionary capacity of the *leader* is somewhat surprising in that it is almost entirely individualized. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrable in the neuroscientism (not to say neuroscience) deployed by Lehrer (as well as by Pink in his book).⁵ With this in mind, the role of flexible organizational design becomes increasingly clear: the aestheticized organizational flexibility described by Gold, Weick, and others is best understood as a means to optimally enable exceptional individuals to exercise their own creativity, unobstructed by organizational bureaucracy, as visionary leaders within a loosely connected network. The collective intellectual energy of that network is then directed towards the foundational corporate goals: instrumentalized innovation (either of products, services, or systems) and profit.

At this point, you have likely noticed that there isn’t much to choose between these different Arts-Based Initiatives. Whether jazz improvisation, poetry, the orchestra, or really any other artistic modality, the management lessons to be learned from the artistic metaphor tend to be fundamentally the same. As Thomas Frank wittily observed in a recent piece from *Harper’s Weekly* (reprinted on online news website, salon.com), “[We’re] talking about the literature of creativity, for Pete’s sake. If there is a non-fiction genre from which you have a right to expect clever prose and uncanny insight, it should be this one. So why is it so utterly consumed by formula and repetition?” (Frank).

To understand the “formula and repetition” that is an ironic hallmark of the literature on creativity and arts-based management, we would do well to recall Max Weber’s argument in his foundational 1905 treatise, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, namely, that profit and material accumulation are not sufficient in and of themselves to motivate generations of human beings to buy into capitalist ideologies. People require a compelling moral imperative, a conviction that the drive to accumulate assets can potentially be directed toward both an individual and a common good. Steeped in the language and logic of aestheticism, arts based management literature and consultancy offers just such a moral imperative by striving to transform the erstwhile mundane tasks of organizational design, administration, and labour into modes of artistic self-expression.

Indeed, in many respects, “artistic self-expression” has largely supplanted the dominant moralistic themes of earlier neoliberal rhetoric. Through the late 1970s and into the 1980s, the official political rhetoric positioned neoliberal economic policy as a necessary moral *corrective* to a society rendered indolent by Keynesian economics, with its densely-woven social safety net, robust corporate regulatory regime, and its strong, centralized state. The major political movers behind the institution of neoliberalism in the United States and the United Kingdom—President Ronald Reagan, Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Paul Volcker, and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher—characterized the new policies (often draconian in their austerity) as crucial steps towards crushing a national parasitic dependence on the welfare state that had led to the greed of labour unions and the general profligacy of the working classes. While Reagan told stories of a black woman using her welfare cheques to buy a Cadillac (Packer 207) as evidence of both the evils of welfare and the ease with which it could be exploited, Thatcher demonized unions, their leaders, and their membership; both leaders essentially blaming the victims of global market deregulation for their own plight. Neoliberalism, they argued, could purge the laziness, dependency, and greed bred by the Keynesian welfare state, while inculcating a renewed sense of human dignity, individual freedom, and self-determination.

This scolding tone would only go so far, however, in justifying neoliberal deregulation and austerity measures to a recession-weary populace in the early 1980s. This is where ABI consultancy and management literature has historically made an important contribution to the legitimization of neoliberalism as a social good. By adding an aesthetic valence to neoliberal policies, ABI consultants and theorists helped to radically transform the goals that

Reagan, Volcker, and Thatcher had linked to the themes of “dignity, freedom, and determination” from crude economic ambitions to lofty artistic aspirations.

With this in mind, it is important to note that in much of the literature, aesthetics and morality are presented as being densely interwoven. This is certainly true in David Whyte’s seminal 1994 book, *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*, where he suggests that leadership is not merely a mode for artistic self-expression; it presents the real possibility of total self-actualization, the complete fulfillment not only of one’s capitalist potential, but of one’s potential humanity in all of its complexity and beauty. Whyte places this as the central goal of his book, and his ultimate aspiration on behalf of his readership:

The Heart Aroused is written for those who have chosen to live out their lives as managers and employees of a postmodern Corporate America, and who struggle to keep their humanity in the process. [...] This split between our work life and that part of our soul life forced underground seems to be at the root of much of our current unhappiness. This book attempts to look at the stress this split causes in the human psyche and the way the soul attempts to heal and preserve its life amid the pressures of schedule and ambition. (*Heart* 4)

For Whyte, healing this schism between “work life” and “soul life” will produce not only happier, more fulfilled people, but also more profitable industries as humanity and human capital merge in perfect, productive harmony. McGill University management scholar Nancy J. Adler refers to this as “leading beautifully.” In her work, she proposes to “[go] beyond the dehydrated language of management”—the ossified, worn out ideas associated with the old capitalist regime and its outmoded “spirit”—in order to move towards “an economy in which people combine an aspiration for ‘the beautiful’ and the use of extreme creativity, with huge market potential, to solve problems worth solving; solutions worthy of our humanity” (209). Like Whyte, Adler paints an enticing picture of a leadership style—and an economic system—that blends the moral imperative with the market imperative, providing the moral impetus that is so essential to capitalism’s sustaining spirit.

Aestheticizing Inequity

Whereas leadership literature tends to focus on artistic *vision*, in terms of the everyday lives of regular workers, the key components of the ABI management rhetoric are those that deal with dynamism and risk-taking. Prior to the 1970s corporate downsizing was largely unconscionable as a method of coping with financial challenges. While neither labour practices nor corporate policies were necessarily flexible or dynamic, they were reasonably stable and secure. By the 1990s, however, lay-offs and downsizing were widely seen to be a necessary evil and a fact of life in the new global economic order (Boltanski and Chiapello 89). As we have already seen, George Lipsitz and many others have noted the effect that neoliberalism has had on the working classes, with dramatic decreases in salary, benefits, and job security.

This is all part and parcel of what economic anthropologist Richard Sennett has called “the casualization of labour.” As he describes in his book, *The Culture of New Capitalism*, project-based temporary and part time work have increasingly eclipsed the long-term security of the career throughout North America and Europe: “Temporary labor is the fastest growing sector of the labor force in the United States and Britain; all found, temp-work accounts for 8 percent of the U.S. labor force today. If we add to this number people employed on a short-term, benefits-avoiding basis in retail sales, restaurants, and other service work, the percentage would climb to something like a fifth of the American labor force” (49). Boltanski and Chiapello offer similarly alarming statistics from their research (primarily in France), noting that in that country “The number of temping establishments went up from 600 in 1968 to 1500 in 1980, and then 4883 in 1996. In 1997 – a year when the volume of temping activity increased by 23 per cent – 1,438,000 people were reckoned to have performed at least one temping assignment; this represents the equivalent of 359,000 full-time jobs. The temporary work enterprise Adecco thus became the premier private employer in France in 1997” (224).

This rapid dissolution of job security is directly symptomatic of the flexible, “improvising” organization that many ABI consultants and theorists advocate. Certainly, the image of networked “autonomous building blocks” that Karl Weick proposed in 1969 affords corporations significantly more flexibility and mobility as they improvise their way through the global market. What Weick does not mention explicitly, however, is that a task-oriented “autonomous building block” is much easier for a corporation to eliminate—along with all of its autonomously-operating improvising leaders and employees—than a division that is more densely integrated into the foundations of an organizational edifice. The necessary counterpart to flexibility, then, is insecurity.

In the language of ABI consultancy and management literature, on the other hand, this insecurity is reconfigured as dynamic, aestheticized, high risk-high reward improvisation. While the *livelihoods* of labourers in this paradigm may

be ontologically tenuous, their *lives* will be varied and exciting as they encounter new challenges, develop new relationships, and learn new skills whilst transitioning from short-term project to short-term project. The corporation's obligation to its employees is therefore not so much to provide a stable life and a steady income, but rather to ensure that they have every opportunity to learn, grow, and create. In lieu of stability and security, they offer individual fulfillment and self-actualization (if only on a comparatively short-term basis) that will ideally position the employee well to achieve ever greater success on future projects, even if those projects are with a different employer. As Boltanski and Chiapello put it, "While it is not able to avoid redundancies, or promise careers, a firm will be regarded as offering a certain form of security when it does not destroy the employability of its wage-earners, but enhances it instead" (93).

This peripatetic lifestyle will certainly look familiar to working musicians, who are often used to living from gig to gig, band to band, and paycheque to paycheque. In essence, under this aestheticized characterization of the neoliberal economic regime, all labourers are expected not only to think like artists, but also with increasing frequency to live like artists. The fundamental difference, of course, is that musicians and artists typically opt for a lack of job security so that they can pursue artistic goals. Mainstream workers, on the other hand, are increasingly being forced to deal with this same job insecurity as their labour is directed towards corporate, capitalist goals that are couched in artistic language. To quote once more from David Whyte,

There is a good practical reason for encouraging our artistic powers within organizations that up to now might have been unwelcoming or afraid of those qualities. The artist must paint or sculpt or write, not only for the present generation but for those who have yet to be born. A good artist, it is often said, is fifty to a hundred years ahead of their time, they describe what lies over the horizon in our future world. We still have not reached the generation for which Shakespeare ultimately wrote. The artist, of whatever epoch, must also depict this new world before all of the evidence is in. They must rely on the embracing abilities of their imagination to intuit and describe what is yet a germinating seed in their present time, something that will only flower after they have written the line or painted the canvas. The present manager must learn the same artistic discipline, they must learn to respond or conceive of something that will move in the same direction in which the world is moving, without waiting for all the evidence to appear on their desks. To wait for all the evidence is to finally recognize it through a competitor's product. (Whyte, *Crossing* 241, 242)

Significantly, Whyte's depiction of the market as an essentially unknowable, irrational force is strongly reminiscent of the Kantian Sublime as outlined by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. For Kant and the Romantic aesthetic philosophers who followed him (most notably Friedrich Schiller) the idealized aesthetic experience was understood to be a kind of heroic struggle with the Sublime—an attempt to give some form to the formless, and some reason to the irrational. As Schiller wrote in his 1793 treatise, "On the Aesthetic Education of Man," "[In the aesthetic state] alone we feel ourselves swept out of time, and our humanity expresses itself with purity and integrity as if it had not yet received any impression or interruption from the operation of external powers" (38).

It is therefore not just leaders or employees under neoliberalism who are artists: the leader's artistic sense is necessary precisely because the neoliberal market *itself* is seen to be an aestheticized terrain. No longer merely a complicated network of overlapping (and often competing) state and corporate systems and regulations that provide the framework for international transactions of commodities, services, and other material and nonmaterial resources and assets, the free market becomes a manifestation of the immeasurable Sublime—a territory that defies maps, requiring would-be travelers to navigate on instinct alone. Indeed, there is a certain kinship between the aestheticized leader and the aestheticized market: just as the leader must be liberated from the institutional constraints of hierarchical corporate bureaucracy in order to give her autonomous creative will the free reign it needs to succeed, so too should the market be left unfettered—*free*—in this case, from state regulation. As Milton Friedman and the other influential Chicago School economists saw it, any attempt to overregulate the market would invariably result in fiscal calamity—recession, stagflation, the Great Depression. The only reasonable government response, then, should be to ease regulation so as to maximize the potential flow of capital and to optimize the flexibility and mobility of organizations so that they can compete for their share of that capital. The market is healthiest and strongest when it is allowed to realize the full extent of its aesthetic dimension—when it becomes a shifting, tumultuous artwork for the improvising business leader to "play on," albeit an artwork where the chord progression is never the same and the meter changes without warning.

With that in mind, this species of management literature and consultancy, far from using jazz improvisation and other the artistic practices to point out cracks in the aging capitalist façade, in fact provides *neoliberalism itself* with a fresh veneer in the form of a previously unimaginable aesthetic dimension. By adding an aesthetic valence to neoliberal policies, ABI consultants and theorists help to reconfigure the goals of neoliberalism from crude economic ambitions to lofty artistic aspirations. Thus, even as it gives neoliberal capitalism and globalized corporations an aesthetic gloss,

ABI consultancy and management literature—jazz-based or other—seldom has any impact whatsoever on the foundational profit imperative. Meanwhile, it works to obscure the most socially destructive elements of neoliberalism.

Lessons From the Fringe

It is tempting to conclude this article with a revolutionary call for the total erasure of neoliberal policy and the overthrow of the institutions that have created and sustained it. However, I am fully aware that changes in ideological and economic regimes are necessarily incremental. Moreover, while the kind of problem-naming that I have been doing throughout this piece is unquestionably important, it is not the same as problem-solving. Hence, while a call for revolution might be idealistic, it would not be especially pragmatic or realistic. On the other hand, the expansion of ABI consultancy and management literature clearly speaks to the fact that corporate leaders are increasingly aware of the voices of artists—even if they are not always attuned to the nuance and specificity of the arts, especially those like improvised jazz music that are very much located on the popular fringe. I want to suggest, therefore, that despite the deep-seated problems with the consultancy paradigm and the arts-based framework, ABI consultants themselves are extraordinarily well positioned to have a real, lasting impact not only on the smooth day-to-day functioning of capitalist organizations, but also on the very foundations of neoliberal economics and ideology.

In this context, it is worth considering business consultancy as a species of pedagogy, albeit a highly contingent one. Indeed, it is worth noting that parallel to the burgeoning practical work and academic literature on “improvising organizations” is another expanding pool of writing on “learning organizations.” As Mary Crossan explains, “Organizational learning can be conceived of as a principal means of achieving the strategic renewal of an enterprise. [...] Renewal requires that organizations explore and learn new ways while concurrently exploiting what they have already learned” (Crossan, Lane, and White 522). In the new economic world order, where organizations must be creative, agile, and spontaneous, a pervasive openness to new ideas—and new metaphors—is critical to sustained “value creation.” ABI-oriented consultants like Jazz Impact and the others have therefore stepped in as the pedagogues of the learning organizations.

Of course, business consultancy is a uniquely skewed kind of pedagogy (notwithstanding discussions we might have about the neoliberalization of higher education more globally) in that the “learning organizations” are not simply students of ABI consultants—they are also clients. The authority of the consultant-cum-pedagogue, therefore, is dramatically destabilized. In a twisted sense, corporations represent the kind of critical students that a Paulo Freire might dream about—students who are empowered enough to be willing to challenge the decentred pedagogue at every turn. The obvious difference, of course, is that rather than merely challenging its teacher, a corporation can fire her or him and ensure that she or he never works again. For this reason, consultants are of necessity rather circumspect in how they apply their metaphors. While their task is undoubtedly to bring new perspectives to organizations, out of self-preservation—and congruently, out of a desire to ensure that their audiences remain receptive—ABI consultants in particular are often reluctant to propose anything too drastic or dramatic. Moreover, Michael Gold, Brian Hayman of *Getting in the Groove*, and Topher Stott of *League of Rock* all explained that most arts-based consultants rarely spend more than six hours at the absolute longest with a given corporation, so there’s no possibility of developing an idea in a gradual and nuanced way over the course of a sustained engagement. Moreover, as Georgina Born pointed out in her excellent ethnography of the UK-based McKinsey consulting firm’s work with the British Broadcasting Corporation in *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke, and the Reinvention of the BBC*, consultants are seldom around long enough to see through the changes that they have put into motion, however incremental they may be. The message, therefore (as Michael Gold emphasizes), must be clear, concise, and focused. If there are aspects of the metaphor that don’t fit neatly, they should be glossed over (recall Gold’s oversimplified depiction of the string quartet) or set aside entirely—regardless of how urgent or unsettling those aspects may appear to those of us outside of the field.

The first step, therefore, in enabling improvisers (and the improvised music model) to have a real, lasting effect on corporate operations and policy is to change the terms of engagement between consultants and corporations. Communicating complicated and controversial new ideas requires time—certainly considerably more time than the two to six hours commonly afforded ABI consultants. In order to be impactful, consultants must be able to make repeated visits over the course of months. While this may seem far-fetched, there is precedent for long-term—even permanent—relationships between corporations and individuals (or small collectives) who serve a consultancy role. For instance, to respond to growing concern over the globalized market, many corporations have created permanent “Diversity and Inclusion” officers or offices. According to Rebekah Steele, a former Diversity and Inclusion officer with Research in Motion (now Blackberry), the role of a D&I office has traditionally been “focused on achieving alignment with equity and human rights principles” by spurring organizations to consider gender, sexual, racial, and ethnic diversity when they make decisions about hiring and promotion (Steele). While this role is somewhat limited, the D&I office is nevertheless an example of an integral part of many corporate structures where ethics—rather than a

singular focus on innovation and profit—is of paramount concern. Perhaps, then, there could be a similar role for arts or improvisation-based consultants, akin to an Improviser in Residence.

Furthermore, even in those many, many instances where corporations are unwilling or unable to fundamentally shift their focus (and indeed, their *raison d'être*), MBA programmes can play a key role in educating future generations of corporate executives in ways that align with the lessons and conclusions from improvisation studies. Indeed, a growing number of schools of business are beginning to incorporate the arts into their curricula in different ways. Since 2007, Michael Gold has been teaching a short intensive module on jazz and improvisation at the prestigious Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University in Chicago. Keith Sawyer teaches in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina. Mary Crossan brings her work on improvisation and leadership ethics to her students at the Richard Ivey School of Business at Western University in London, Ontario. The Fowler Center for Sustainable Value, housed at the Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University, teaches students that the interests of shareholders and “external” stakeholders are fundamentally aligned, and that wise business decisions must serve economic, social, and environmental interests all at once. And visual artist-cum-management scholar Nancy J. Adler is the S. Bronfman Chair in Management at the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill University in Montreal. As teachers, all of these individuals have opportunities to dramatically impact their students’ outlook over the course of a one-to-two year degree programme. They have the chance to complicate the metaphor, to make it less simple and easily digestible, and hopefully to thereby provoke the kinds of ideas and conversations that can spur change.

As an aside, there might be room for an alignment between progressive management schools like those described above and the creation of “Improviser in Residence” positions. Evidently, not all improvising artists will be equally equipped (not to mention equally inclined) to navigate the corporate world. For those who are so inclined, however, institutions like The Fowler Center, or other schools not mentioned above—Social Innovation Generation at the University of Waterloo or the Center for Positive Organizations at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, for instance—might provide a training ground for improvisers interested in bringing their knowledge to socially and environmentally progressive organizations. After all, passion and ethical commitment alone would likely be insufficient; the ability to spark transformative conversations is a skill that must be cultivated.

But what should those conversations be about? Unconstrained from the exigencies of conventional consultancy, what kinds of lessons should improvisers teach? I asked several individuals in the consultancy game to speculate on this question, and several intriguing, interrelated themes emerged. Key among these is the understanding of what constitutes value for most jazz musicians—and artists more generally. Management and organizational behaviour discourses are largely unambiguous about this issue: when Giovanni Schiuma and other writers talk of “value creation,” they are referring specifically to expanding monetary profit. As many readers will no doubt recognize, this a concept entirely foreign to most jazz musicians. While many of us aspire to make enough to pay our bills and feed our families (and, as an aside, the corporate dollars expropriated by the Jazz Impact and Getting in the Groove musicians go some distance to helping them achieve this aspiration), profit—let alone a capitalist notion of expanding profit—is generally beyond contemplation. If and when there is a little bit extra, as League of Rock’s Topher Stott points out, it is almost invariably reinvested into music-making in some fashion—new equipment, a tour, or a recording project. Needless to say, this is not a universal truth about musicians and artists, but it is certainly a strong tendency.

With this in mind, value in the jazz band typically differs in three fundamental ways from corporate concepts of value—all of which could and should be instructive for corporations. First, value is primarily equated to artistic production; money is simply a means of achieving that end. As Getting in the Groove guitarist Kevin Barrett told me, “I’m much more interested in the pursuit of beautiful art for the sake of beautiful art as opposed to, you know, finding ways to help make money with that.” By contrast, the monetaristic understanding of value that undergirds capitalist logic is ontologically manifest in the ABI phenomenon. Whether tacit or explicit, according the foundational logic of the ABI, the intrinsic value of art (at least in the ABI context, if not in the world at large) lies in its ability to increase corporate profit margins. In the opening sentences to his book, *The Value of Arts for Business*, Giovanni Schiuma explains “Organisations have, traditionally, considered the arts, at best, as something nice to have and to support for socio-cultural reasons, an accessory with little impact on organizational value creation. *The Value of Arts for Business* discloses the relevance of the arts as a means by which management can enhance organizational value-creation capacity and boost business performance” (1). Schiuma makes it clear that the titular value is to be understood in terms of profit—in how readily it can be translated to and monetized in the corporate world. Hence, just as capitalism dehumanizes the human subject by reducing him to the value of his labour (as Marx argued), so too do the ABI and other areas of management inquiry into the arts reduce and essentialize both artistic value and human creativity by fixing them to the profit metric.

The second difference in the way that value is understood in a jazz and improvised music context lies in the manner in which money circulates. In the jazz and improvised music fields money circulates cyclically and reciprocally within

a community of musicians so as to enable the creation of further, future artistic value. In other words, when a musician reinvests money in order to make new music, she generally pays other musicians for their time and labour. Reciprocally, those musicians will quite likely hire her when they are ready to develop *their* new artistic projects. In this way, new value is created from essentially the same pool of capital as it cycles through the community of musicians.

Somewhat ironically, Karl Weick seemed to have recognized—albeit perhaps intuitively—the integral nature of value circulation in the jazz community in his very first exploration of the metaphor: his 1977 study of the Utrecht Jazz Orchestra, co-authored with Michel Bougon and Din Binkhorst. Weick, Bougon, and Binkhorst were attracted to the UJO as a research subject not because of the kind of music that they played, but rather because of the ways in which the UJO as an organization was largely insulated from market logics and market forces. The authors wrote, “The UJO had several characteristics that made it useful for exploring the concept of a cause map. First, it was small. Its 19 members made it tractable to a two-man (Weick and Binkhorst) data-collection team. Second it was an independent organization. Since it was voluntary and predominantly amateur, it depended little upon outside resources. For example, its financial objective was to minimize losses, which were eventually covered by its members” (607). In other words, the UJO operated as an essentially closed economic system. However, whether Weick recognized it or not—or whether or not he and his management studies colleagues simply choose to reject it as part of the uninteresting detritus of the metaphor—the jazz and improvised music fields writ large function in precisely the same economically integral fashion as the UJO, wherein their “financial objective [is] to minimize losses, which were eventually covered by [their] members.” While these fields are inevitably impacted by market forces, they are often immune to market logics.

Thirdly, and related to the first two points, the creation of value within the jazz band is not ontologically tied to capital competition—a compelling premise that Peter Johnston pursues in this issue. Value is created cooperatively, and once created is (ideally) shared through the system of reciprocity described above amongst the entire community and beyond. Growing out of this, I would argue, is often a heightened awareness of communal and global responsibility (notwithstanding the competitions that I perhaps hypocritically bracketed a moment ago). Barrett—a longtime labour activist, charity worker, and community organizer—described an unarticulable intuition that his community work was somehow tied to his music making. At the risk of putting words in his mouth, I would hazard that Barrett (like many of the musicians engaged in this work) understands that when value is created and shared cooperatively within a community—when one person’s profit is no longer predicated on a competitor’s loss—there is a coterminous sense of mutual responsibility and obligation. Writing of the idea of the gift in his seminal 1925 essay of the same name, Marcel Mauss proposes that a sense of obligation to reciprocate is the intrinsic counterpart to the receipt of a gift: “What imposes obligation in the present received and exchanged, is the fact that the thing received is not inactive. Even when it has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him. Through it the giver has a hold over the beneficiary” (11-12). By extension, when artists create and share value together, they simultaneously create a sense of obligation and responsibility to each other and to their shared community. Obviously not all improvisers or all artists respond to this emergent sense of obligation in precisely the same way—if at all; nevertheless, this tendency towards reciprocity is sufficiently common to identify it as a trend, if not a universal fact.

It is important to note that similar discussions about the ontology and distribution of value are in fact starting to emerge in progressive management and leadership literature. Just as most musicians tend to work towards the relatively equitable distribution of money throughout a band and a community, Roger Martin (former Dean of the Rotman School of Business at the University of Toronto) is one of a number of voices in management studies calling for a serious rethink of executive compensation. Throughout his recent work, he calls for a return to “real” valuation of companies, as opposed to the speculative valuations driven by the Chicago School logic of shareholder investment. In his 2011 book, *Fixing the Game: Bubbles, Crashes, and What Capitalism can Learn from the NFL*, Martin writes, “Stock-based compensation creates a powerful incentive to do something that executives have come to understand is undoable—keep expectations rising continuously. The result is that executives are pushed toward managing expectations more so than real performance [...] We must eliminate stock-based incentive compensation and create new models that focus executives on real and meaningful goals” (38).

The character of “real and meaningful” goals has also begun to shift, with ABI-oriented management scholars and educators like Nancy J. Adler and Mary Crossan encouraging the next generation of corporate executives to be increasingly mindful of the so-called “externalities” of capitalist enterprise: the often unanticipated environmental and social degradation wrought by misguided labour policies and dirty manufacturing processes, for instance. Adler writes,

Aspiring to beauty challenges us to imagine a world in which no child dies of hunger; it rejects our temptation to settle for a world in which the number of such senseless deaths is merely reduced. Aspiring to beauty requires that we aspire to a flourishing environment, not one in which pollution is simply

lessened. Aspiring to beauty exposes 'less ugly' as blatantly not good enough. To lead in the twenty-first century, we need to re-ask ourselves how we can reclaim our ability to yearn for and to envision a world filled with beauty. (214)

Such idealism is ultimately meaningless by itself, however. Despite all the aspirational discussion of "leading beautifully" or "developing leadership character" (as Mary Crossan puts it) —even though it may be genuine—many corporate leaders are structurally impeded in their social idealism by the expectations of shareholders and corporate boards that the corporation will continually, exponentially increase its profit margin. Hence, as Joel Bakan argues in this issue and throughout his work, real economic and ideological change requires a return to a considerably more robust state regulatory regime that rejects the inherent steaming mess of misdirection, mendacity, and malfeasance in which the illogic of neoliberal aesthetics is rooted. While it may be profoundly complicated, the free market is *not* irrational, it is *not* aesthetic, and it is fundamentally *not* Sublime: as Joel Bakan reminds us in his 2006 book (and subsequent documentary film), *The Corporation*, markets and corporations alike were created by state legislation, and can therefore only truly be controlled through a clear state regulatory framework that is developed in conjunction with progressive, socially-minded corporate leaders.

Clearly, these ideas are neither simple nor snappy nor easily consumed at a corporate retreat—and evidently, the question of value is one of many set aside by corporations and consultants alike. These ideas grow out of the grey areas of the jazz-management metaphor—the awkward places where the metaphor doesn't quite work, and where the pedagogue-consultant risks discomfiting and losing his or her audience. But then again, if the very premise of the "improvising business" is that we need to listen to unexpected voices and seek opportunity in impossible places, shouldn't the grey areas be the most important? By the same token, creativity theorists—including those like Keith Sawyer and Roger Martin whose work is directed primarily at business leaders—have argued forcefully for the importance of simultaneously seeing the details and the big picture—seeing both the forest and the trees, as Jonah Lehrer puts it. If there is usefulness to be mined from the jazz-business metaphor, we must consider the entire relationship in all of its elements and aspects, not just those that are the most digestible or the least likely to lead to uncomfortable questions. After all, if we ignore such a great many trees, how can we expect to have a clear and accurate vision of the forest?

Notes

¹ See Adler ("Leading Beautifully").

² See Whyte (*The Heart Aroused*).

³ See Crossan ("Improvise to Innovate").

⁴ Lehrer fabricated quotes that he falsely attributed to Bob Dylan in the first chapter of the book.

⁵ Pink fully acknowledges the skewed, instrumentalized character of his reading of the neuroscience research, suggesting that he treats fMRI results metaphorically to serve his point about management, rather than to postulate a neuroscientific hypothesis.

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