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**DOING FREE JAZZ AND FREE ORGANIZATIONS, “A CERTAIN EXPERIENCE
OF THE IMPOSSIBLE”? ORNETTE COLEMAN ENCOUNTERS JACQUES
DERRIDA**

Abstract

Many scholars have attempted to make jazz relevant to an organizational audience. We seek to extend this literature by considering a more radical version of improvisation associated with the jazz musician Ornette Coleman. Inspired by an encounter between Coleman and the philosopher Jacques Derrida, we juxtapose the radical collective responsibility associated with Coleman’s Free jazz improvisation and Derridean deconstruction. We especially emphasize a phrase used by Derrida, ‘a certain experience of the impossible’ as an expression of a particular experience of doing management. The overall contribution of the paper is to explore the possibility of responding to issues within organizations in more participative and improvisational ways, without losing an appreciation of the inherent impossibility (perhaps even absurdity) of the managerial condition.

Key words: Coleman; Collective improvisation; Deconstruction; Derrida; Free jazz; Organizational democracy.

Speaking of Free jazz, once in Paris I [the speaker is Jacques Derrida] appeared in public with Ornette Coleman. We met in a hotel. There was a big discussion and he told me he was interested in my texts, so we met. Then he invited me to come to one of his concerts and to say anything I wanted and he would accompany me, improvising. So, I was quite scared. ... Finally, I said yes. Although against it, I said yes. So I prepared a text, and Ornette Coleman started the concert and, as we agreed upon, at some point he called me onstage. And once onstage, I started reciting this special text that I’d written for this occasion as he accompanied me, improvising. But his fans were so unhappy with this strange man coming onstage with a written text that they started, uh, whistling? [He was eventually booed off stage] it was a very painful experience. But finally it turned into a happy event because the day after, in the newspapers, everyone mentioned this as something interesting. (in Dick and Ziering Kofman, 2005, p. 115)

A CERTAIN EXPERIENCE OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

It is common, perhaps typical, for managers in their day-to-day work to experience several conflicting, yet equally legitimate demands at the same time. In other words, they often find themselves in ‘no-win,’ ‘damned if I do, damned if I don’t’ situations (Hoggett, 2006, p. 186). In such circumstances, recourse to an ethical framework, code of conduct or a more

pragmatic solution proves deeply unsatisfactory, for there is *no* one, clear and straightforward course of action (Becker, 2004; Jacobs, 2004). Perhaps the easiest response to such a troubling situation is to pretend you are improvising, and then stick to a familiar path. As we shall elaborate later, two of us have been managers in the past, and both of us have indeed stayed with the familiar many times. More challenging, however, would be to undergo what Derrida calls ‘a certain experience of the impossible’ (Derrida, 1992a, p. 328) to work through the conflicting demands. But what might a certain experience of the impossible mean in an organizational context? What might it feel like for those involved? How might individuals and groups respond? And anyway, what is the point of attempting to work through such a discomfoting experience? These are the sorts of questions our paper seeks to explore. And it does so, in the main, via a re-enactment – we compare a certain experience of the impossible with a radical form of collective musical improvisation: Coleman’s *Free jazz*¹ – inspired by the above encounter between Derrida and Coleman (Coleman and Derrida, 2004; Derrida, 2004; Lane 2013; Malabou and Derrida, 2004).

We are not the first to make jazz relevant to an organizational audience (see especially the 1998 Special Edition of *Organization Science* as well as, for example, Bastien and Hostager, 1988; Hatch, 1997, 1999; Humphreys, et al., 2012; Kamoche et al., 2003; Lewin, 1998; Mantere et al 2007; Moorman and Miner, 1988; Weick, 1989, 1993). Similarly, we are not the first to consider deconstruction and Derrida’s wider work in the context of management and organization studies. The implications of Derrida’s work for praxis have been developed by Laclau and Mouffe who emphasise the emancipatory potential in Derrida’s championing of ‘the impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning ... [to allow] the flow of differences’ (2001, p.112). As Laclau has argued,

[i]f people think that God or nature have made the world as it is, they will tend to consider their fate inevitable. But if the being of the world which they inhabit is only the result of the contingent discourses and vocabularies that constitute it, they will tolerate their fate with less patience and will stand a better chance of becoming political ‘strong poets’ (1996, p.122).

Deconstruction is particularly interesting in the context of management scholarship, therefore, because it aims to produce a tension between what a text purports to claim (its intended meaning) and a double or multiple range of meanings that cannot be contained within the text’s intended meaning. This tension is what creates an experience of the impossible. Such debate has occurred in the pages of this journal (e.g. Weiss, 2007; Weitzner, 2007), as well as, of course, more widely (e.g. Boje, 1995; Cooper, 1989; Kilduff, 1993; Kilduff and Kelemen, 2001; Kilduff and Mehra, 1997; Learmonth, Lockett and Dowd, 2012; Martin, 1990).

We seek to extend both these literatures by making a new contribution that combines the radical collective responsibility we see in Coleman’s Free jazz with the ‘experience of the impossible’ explored by Derrida. Through this juxtaposition, there is a sense that we shall be working (or to use a more musical [indeed, perhaps a more Derridean] metaphor: *playing*) on the margins – the margins of Derrida’s philosophy (though see Royle, 1998) – as well as on the margins, perhaps, of both jazz and organizations (though see Cobussen, 2003; Cobussen 2001; Rhodes, 2007; Subotnik, 1996). Nevertheless, we trust that, in the end, to play on these margins will be to do the kinds of things Derrida did – as well as to perform something new, in our own language and in our own voice (Derrida, 1996, p. 217/8). By reflecting on the

experiences two of us have had as managers, our particular contribution is to combine shared responsibility with free collective improvisation in ways that may be (we hope) both radical and ethical in organizational life (see also Cunliffe, 2002; Hansen et al., 2007). In so doing, we have tried to remain faithful to Derrida's work in being able to show:

a future which [like Free jazz] does not allow itself to be modalised or modified into the form of the present, which allows itself neither to be fore-seen nor programmed; it is thus ... the opening to freedom, responsibility, decision, ethics and politics [while it is] ... also the *experience of the impossible* ... the least bad definition of deconstruction (Derrida, 1992b, p. 200; italics in original).

IMPROVIZATION, COLEMAN AND DERRIDA

Hatch (1999, p. 78), in her paper on the value of the jazz metaphor in the study of organizations, argues that improvisation 'constitutes the distinguishing feature of Jazz'. She goes on to describe a typical performance as:

structured around the playing of tunes which themselves are loosely structured via partial musical arrangements called heads. The head of a tune defines, at a minimum, a chord sequence, a basic melodic idea, and usually an approximate tempo... Improvisation centres around the head, which is usually played through 'straight' (without much improvisational embellishment) at the beginning of the tune, then improvised upon, and finally returned to and played again as the ending. The head gets a tune started by suggesting a particular rhythm, harmony and melody. The tune is then built from this starting point via improvisation

within which different interpretations of the initial idea are offered and new ideas and further interpretations can be explored.

This description represents the broad structural context of improvisation within a range of jazz styles variously described by critics as New Orleans, Swing, Be-Bop Hard-Bop and Modern. Furthermore, individual numbers would generally be structured in a way in which each member of the band would in turn take improvised solos while being supported by the rest of the band “comping.”² The musician soloing would effectively be the leader of the band – for that moment at least.³ However, as Hatch (1999, p. 84) notes, ‘with the advent of Free jazz, structure became so subtle as to be practically undetectable to any but the most sophisticated listener, including many traditional jazz musicians’. Berliner explains the distinctiveness of Coleman’s Free jazz approach when compared with other forms of jazz improvisation. He argues that ‘Free jazz groups express concern for democratizing jazz [and] minimize or eliminate the distinctions between soloists and accompanists at times involving band members in constant simultaneous solos throughout performances’ (1994, p. 338). In other words, unlike other types of jazz there is no one leader in the performance of Free jazz.⁴

Ornette Coleman is an African American musician, who (eventually) found fame in the late 1950s and early 1960s with landmark recordings such as *The Shape of Jazz to Come* and the eponymously titled 1960 album *Free Jazz: A Collective Improvization*. In a rare (and brief) article in the jazz magazine *Downbeat*, Coleman expressed his approach to music (and life) as, ‘one’s own logic made into an expression of sound to bring about the musical sensation of unison executed by a single person or with a group...harmony, melody, speed, rhythm, time and phrases all have equal position in the results that come from the placing and spacing of ideas’ (Coleman, 1983, p. 54). Thus, Coleman’s free improvisation approach to music seeks

to offer ‘an aesthetic (but not aestheticized) democracy like that which operates within his performing ensembles’ (Murphy, 1998, p. 90). This approach offers the opportunity for a collective improvisation which enables a shared responsibility for the outcome. As Heble further explains:

Coleman came along and swept away⁵ the set harmonic structures and tightly knit patterns ... which had dominated the music of his contemporaries (2000, p. 49) ... Melody, then, [in Free jazz] is privileged over harmony to the extent that the tune itself becomes the pattern of the composition. (We might be tempted here to make an analogy with Derrida’s *différance* ...) [because] Coleman’s jazz is a proliferation of meanings, a valorization of the signifier’ (2000, pp. 50/51).

Indeed, just as it may be possible, however tentatively, to link Free jazz with Derrida’s neologism *différance*, we might also be tempted to make a range of other analogies between the two figures themselves. For example, both have a substantial fan base (let’s use that term for each of them) across the world – just as both have also attracted deep controversies within their respective “mainstream” communities.⁶ In biographical terms, too, there are similarities, some of which they discussed during their meeting prior to the gig. Both were born in 1930 within marginalized communities (Coleman grew up in an underprivileged black family in Texas, USA; Derrida was an Algerian Jew) and, perhaps significantly in terms of their later political and ethical stances, both suffered from the effects of racial prejudice as young men. (For biographies of Derrida and Coleman, see Peeters (2012) and Litweiler (1992) respectively.)⁷

On the other hand, it is equally possible to see *contrasts* between the two figures. For example, unlike Derrida, Coleman has produced little written output.⁸ Derrida’s interview

with Coleman is therefore different in tone when compared, say, to the published conversations between Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim (Barenboim and Said, 2002). Barenboim has written on music and its relationship with wider political issues, and one gets a sense of the meeting of similar minds – conversations between two individuals who share comparable orientations toward, and understandings of, the world (see also Guimaraes-Costa et al., 2009).⁹ Derrida and Coleman, however, appeared to have had less in common – at least in terms of their respective temperaments and approaches to life. For example, in his interview with Derrida, Coleman emphasizes the importance of *doing*: ‘[f]or me, being an innovator doesn’t mean being more intelligent, more rich, it’s not a word, it’s an action. Since it hasn’t been done, there’s no use talking about it’. Derrida then says ‘I understand that you prefer doing [*faire*] to speaking’ (Coleman and Derrida, 2004, p. 327). One detects the same kind of contrasts in Coleman’s response to the following question from Derrida:

...last night I read an article that was in fact a conference presentation given by one of my friends, Rudolph Burger, a musician whose group is called Kat Onoma. It was constructed around your statements. In order to analyze the way in which you formulate your music, he began from your statements, of which the first was this: “For reasons I’m not sure of, I am convinced that before becoming music, music was only a word.” Do you recall having said that?

OC: No. (Coleman and Derrida, 2004, p. 328)

We enjoy Wills’s (2006, p. 36) wry aside, then, in which he suggests of their encounter, that ‘one can imagine ... the serious philosopher preparing himself early in the morning ... while the Bohemian musician gets up just in time for the meeting, presuming he can take it as it

comes.’ Indeed, it is of interest to note, that in the context of the others who have collaborated with Derrida (ordinarily, academics or writers with broadly similar interests and orientations) Coleman’s particular understanding of, and emphasis on, *doing* is unusual, indeed, almost alien. This contrast seems to have been noticed by Derrida; in a letter to Catherine Malabou, written shortly after the gig, Derrida told her that the encounter with Coleman: ‘[w]as in Paris, [i.e. in Derrida’s home city] but no voyage will have ever taken me so far away, myself and my body and my words, onto an unknown stage, without any possible rehearsal or repetition.’ (Malabou and Derrida, 2004, p. 97(n)). It appears to us, then, that both figures were facing an experience of the impossible in their onstage encounter. Derrida tried to deal with it by intense preparation – he had a written text and would have preferred to rehearse; whereas Coleman risks the intrusion of a French philosopher (of all people!) into his gig but seems rather more relaxed about any outcome, negative or positive.

Coleman, in contrast with Derrida, appears to have had little if any, fear of embracing an experience of the impossible playing the violin and trumpet in live performance even though he lacked expertise on the instruments. In many respects, an experience of the impossible manifests differently for Coleman, energising him and leading him to try new things. This innovation was not appreciated by other musicians such as Miles Davis who recorded his reaction in his autobiography:

I don’t know what’s wrong with him. For him – a sax player – to pick up a trumpet and violin like that and just think he can play them with no kind of training is disrespectful toward all those people who play them well. And then to sit up and pontificate about them when he doesn’t know what he’s talking about is not cool, man... if you don’t know how to play the trumpet, it sounds terrible. People who

know how to play it can play it even when it's all stopped up. As long as you play in rhythm, even if the horn's all fucked, as long as it fits, you can do that. You have to play a style. If you play a ballad, you play a ballad. But Ornette couldn't do that on trumpet because he didn't know anything about the instrument (Davis and Troupe, 1979, p. 240).

In any event, we think that Coleman's preferences – for doing and action (a preference that Derrida acknowledged, and with which he complied by actually appearing onstage with Coleman) will resonate with many managers facing similarly impossible situations (Byers and Rhodes, 2004; Mintzberg, 1975). That Coleman *is* different from a more typical Derridean collaborator as a doer (as opposed to a writer) represents a reason in itself for suggesting that Derrida's encounters with him may be of special significance for readers faced with the impossibilities and responsibilities involved in managing organizations. So, in the next section we consider how *doing* free collective improvisation – as understood by Coleman and Derrida – might inform the way we might *do* management in organizations.

A COLLECTIVE IMPROVISATIONAL MUSIC LESSON FOR FREE ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

Doing – making things happen – is what any kind of jazz (or organizational) performance is all about. As Hatch (1999, p. 82) puts it, '[j]azz happens. It is an activity, not just an abstract category. As an activity, jazz is something to be entered into, participated in, experienced'. In this section, therefore, we move to discuss how Coleman's encounter with Derrida might inform how we do things (and experience things) differently in organizations – even though the experience may well be a discomfiting one, as it was for Derrida. Indeed in the lyrics of

his own performance with the Coleman group, Derrida started by talking of his uncertainties and fears, along with the necessity of improvisation in this context. He also emphasized what is *happening*:

Qu'est-ce qui arrive? What's happening? What's going to happen, Ornette, now, right now? What's happening to me, here, now, with Ornette Coleman? With you? Who? It is indeed necessary to improvise well ... I knew that Ornette was going to call on me to join him tonight, he told me so when we met one afternoon last week. This chance frightens me, I have no idea what's going to happen. It is indeed necessary to improvise, it is necessary to improvise but *well*, this is already a *music lesson*, your lesson, Ornette, (Derrida, 2004, pp. 331/2; italics in original).

Derrida's emphasis on being unsure – even frightened – and his consequent need to improvise well is resonant of the kind of dilemmas which can similarly frighten us in their production of a certain experience of the impossible. We briefly illustrate the kind of dilemma we have in mind in an organizational context through retelling stories of our experiences in the following vignettes (Figure 1). The first comes from a time (almost 20 years ago) when, as a health care manager Mark was asked to introduce a computer system into clinical areas; an introduction that involved changes to the way that nurses worked (See also Learmonth 2007, 110). The second example is Mike (from over twenty years ago) illustrating his fear of being placed in a senior management role.

Insert Figure 1 about here (see page 32)

We think these situations –where you are damned if you do and damned if you don't – are commonplace in organizational life. In other words, they might be seen as experiences of the impossible. But in an effort to make sense of such experiences, we believe it may be productive to reflect on the potential for collective improvisation and shared responsibility (à la Coleman) in the face of impossibility (à la Derrida).

In this light, it now seems clear that one of the central problems with Mark's story was that the nurses had no participation in the decision-making process. The concerns they raised had not been listened to, nor had they had any recognizable influence on the outcome. Mark was acting like a conventional jazz soloist with a pre-determined composition, imposing his will on the group with no consideration for the implications on their working lives. The nurses had seen through his act and the resulting feeling of powerlessness had led to the level of spite and anger levelled at him. Perhaps an alternative route would be one in which the nurses could be listened to and influence the nature of the overall decision. If we continue the analogy with jazz, conventionally, what a skilled manager might have been expected to do in such a situation is to come up with a brilliant solo that brings everyone back into the groove.

However, a more radical approach – allowing everyone to improvise, at the same time, together – to which Coleman's Free jazz approach aspires – may have been a better option in providing shared responsibility. Perhaps it would have had the potential to break down the barriers between groups and enable the nurses to have an equal and fair contribution – along with responsibility for – the overall decision. Coleman's Free jazz is a helpful illustration of the kind of collective improvisation we believe could occur in such an environment and why it might be so valuable (but also risky) for managers encountering an 'experience of the impossible'. Free improvisation suggests that an alternative action to Mark's experience of

the impossible would have been an improvised response that was collective and one that involved shared responsibility. In other words, in our example, a free improvisational jazz ethos would have suggested working with the nurses and the other people involved to explore different alternatives – where all of them would be allowed to be soloing at the same time – even when they disagreed: an experience of the impossible?

What might a free improvisational approach have meant if Mark had acted following its inspiration in this particular situation? We suggest, most fundamentally, that it would have necessarily involved getting all those in the situation together – the minimum condition of being able to jam. And if they *had* all improvised together in the radical way implied by Free jazz, this would suggest the encouragement of a *free* exchange of views. We think that such an exchange might well have felt deeply emotional – like the painful experience Derrida underwent when onstage with Coleman. Doubtless, it would have involved arguments, shouting, tears as well as prompting a consideration of systems, efficiency and other more codifiable issues (Griffin 2012). As Hatch (1999, p. 89) argues, ‘[t]he jazz metaphor suggests that whenever we interact, communication rests as heavily upon emotional and physical feeling as it does on the intellectual content of the messages involved’. The shared risks of such improvisation and collaboration are vividly evoked by Mengelberg (1995) who argues that:

Part of improvization, of the act of improvizing, playing with other people, has very much to do with survival strategy. You have, of course, all your expectations and plans destroyed the moment you play with other people. They all have their own ideas of how the musical world at that moment should be. So there are two, three, five, six

composers there at the same time destroying each others' ideas, pieces. (Mengelberg in Corbett, 1995, p. 236)

Similarly, Mike would have preferred a free improvisation approach in dealing with his own experience of the impossible. He would have been much more comfortable recruited into a 'free improvisation collective'. He plays alto sax in a seven piece band and is very happy improvising as part of the collective horn section, but is extremely reluctant to take solos, preferring to stay in the background comping. Just like his management dilemma he wants to avoid the limelight, but in doing so he disappoints other members of the band. He would be much happier, therefore with a free, collective improvisational response. It would be a response allowing for the possibility of everyone soloing together. In organizational terms Mike was invited by the Dean to take on the role of a high-profile soloist. But he would have preferred a collective organizational role where free improvisation was the norm – a situation where everyone was in the spotlight simultaneously. But isn't everyone being in the spotlight simultaneously something that is impossible, even absurd? Perhaps; but in any case, in Free jazz (or in Free organizations) there will also always be a significant element of risk involved, which is to say that improvising may well not succeed – and so there is necessarily a need to trust to the future. Not, as Derrida explains,

a future which is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But....a future, l'avenir (to come) which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable (Dick and Ziering Kofman, 2005, p. 53).

So, in Mark's example of the MIS system, would a resolution necessarily have been found? Would the computer system have been implemented more quickly – or at all? In Mike's example, would it have been possible to have a fully participative and Free jazz-improvising Head of Department role in which multiple individuals shared responsibility, accountability and decision-making duties? Well, we just don't know – the future would have been a future to come. The important point is that the managerially-defined aspects of the problem would have not been allowed to solo over the nursing or the other lecturers' interests. In other words, free improvisation is self-consciously an experience of the impossible, as well as a way of taking and sharing responsibility. It is not a way of finding definitive 'answers' – such improvisation cannot replace uncertainty with confidence; indeed, free improvisation *always* has a high degree of risk and uncertainty.

DISCUSSION

In recognition of this unpredictability, we suggest that Derrida and his concept 'democracy to come' may have something to offer. It proposes a participatory space where the 'experience of the impossible' is not buried or managed away, but embraced. The idea of a 'democracy to come' (perhaps in a similar way to Coleman's album *The Shape of Jazz to Come*) is built around the uniqueness of the notion of democracy, in that it is 'the only system...in which, in principle, one has or one takes the right to publicly criticize everything, including the idea of democracy, its concept, its history and its name' (Derrida 2003, p.127). Derrida calls this criticism 'auto-immunity' or the 'strange behaviour where a living being [or system], in quasi-suicidal fashion, "itself" works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against its "own" immunity' (Derrida 2001, p. 94). This tendency towards constant self-critique is what makes radical forms of democracy in organizations seem so impossible (i.e. chaotic, difficult and fragile), especially in comparison to authoritarian alternatives. But self-critique

is also what enables democracy's improvement over time, towards a betterment that would not otherwise come ('a democracy to come').

It could be argued that in free improvisation, musicians similarly take a 'quasi-suicidal' leap into the unknown with their fellow players in an improvised and democratic fashion.

Inevitably the chance and the promise that this leap opens up can just as easily end with failure as with success. And, of course, whatever happens, not everyone will like it. As one reviewer of a Coleman group recording suggests:

“collective improvisation?” Nonsense. The only semblance of collectivity lies in the fact that these eight nihilists were collected together in one studio at one time and with one common cause: to destroy the music that gave them birth. Give them top marks for the attempt (Tynan in Walser, 1999, p. 255).

For many people in organizations, the risk of such destruction may seem too great, and so, either traditional hierarchical management will be retained or more subtle normative controls introduced. But for other organizations (often, but not exclusively, smaller ones) the risks involved are considered lower than the potential for creativity that can be delivered through fully democratic systems. For example, organizations such as Valtech (Denmark) and Davita (U.S.A.), both have regular town hall meetings involving staff in which they can discuss and challenge company policy. Thus, all staff take key decisions through democratic votes – votes that could directly go against the wishes of senior management. Other companies such as Nearsoft (U.S.A) and Semco (Brazil) allow staff to take the responsibility for hiring fellow workers through collective and participative democratic means. They integrate staff members into the hiring process, by asking them, for example, to write the job description and set the

wages so that new members of the group can be found that fit with existing members and needs. Other organizations such as Taf'eel (Malaysia) give all employees full access to company accounts and salaries, and share profits equally depending on involvement in various projects. (For all of these examples of democracy in the workplace and more, see www.worldblu.com).

Indeed, it is also apparent that there are a growing number of people who are more sensitive to issues of employee power, participation and control within the workplace (cf. Reedy and Learmonth, 2009). And many of the strongest ideas relating to autonomy and control involve the explicit introduction of democratic or participatory procedures (Griffin and Learmonth, 2013). These procedures can be used in different ways, and to varying extents, within an organization. Indeed, Pateman (1970, p. 68-70) suggests that there are (broadly speaking) three different types of workplace participation – types that seem to us to have parallels in improvisational jazz.

First in Pateman's list is pseudo-participation. In this mode of management, participation (allowing questions and discussion about what might be done) is used as a way of convincing workers to accept a decision that has already been made. This occurs in many organizations today where management encourage employees to provide feedback on strategy and policy documents in specially organised meetings. These are often constructed as relaxed and informal "staff consultation" events which give the impression that management are listening and responding to the concerns of their employees whilst manipulating and controlling outcomes (Heller 1998). Such pseudo-participation in the world of organizations has parallels in jazz, where one can sometimes observe the tyranny of a soloist who invites suggestions on what will be played but ultimately imposes his or her will on the group and does what he or

she prefers (see Humphreys, Ucbasaran and Lockett 2012). Thus, this approach to organizational democracy (and its parallels in jazz) allows managers to achieve a semblance of freedom and collective responsibility while masking increased managerial control – though we doubt many workers are that easily fooled (Harris et al, 2010).

Pateman's second type of workplace democracy involves 'partial participation'. In this model, two or more parties (composed of management and employees) can influence decisions but ultimately the final 'prerogative of decision making rests with the permanent supervisors, the management' (Pateman 1970, p. 69). Again, there may be parallels in jazz. Here, just as in work organizations, partial participation might involve the lead musician genuinely listening to, and being influenced by, his or her fellow players, while retaining power over what is finally played. We might see this approach exemplified in the music of Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins or John Coltrane. These artists were incredibly innovative and achieved their innovations, at least in part, by being able to use and respond to the ideas of their fellow musicians. But they, like most conventional managers, retained (artistic and managerial) control of their bands.

A third type of workplace democracy identified by Pateman (1970, p.70) seeks to minimize managerial control by offering 'full participation', a 'process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions' (cf. Barross, 2010). In this type of organization there are no longer two opposing sides but a group of individuals who deliberate and make work-related decisions democratically. To continue the jazz parallels, we think that a fully participative workplace of this kind would most resemble Coleman's free collective approach to improvisation where everyone is

soloing together. The role of the manager in an organization where there is full participation would, perhaps, be to ensure that these procedures work and are carried out according to pre-agreed rules such as upholding norms of equality of participation and freedom of speech.

However, it is important to note that as well as identifying three different types of participation in the workplace, Pateman also identified two different levels of management where these can be applied. The lower level of management 'refers broadly to those management decisions relating to control of day-to-day shop floor activity, while the higher level refers to decisions that relate to the running of the whole enterprise' (Pateman 1970, 70). Thus, there may be a mix of pseudo, partial or full participation at the higher and lower level of management that complicates the overall position. To apply the jazz analogy, the higher level management may refer to the style of music the group plays and the make-up of the group itself. The lower level, on the other hand, might refer to the choices made by individual members in terms of the composition that they play or improvise upon. So it could be argued that Coleman allowed full participation on lower-level issues of responsibility, such as the improvisation on his musical composition, while maintaining a firm grip on the higher-level. For example, his band was always referred to as the "Ornette Coleman group"; all releases have his name and face on their covers and he seems to have control over the nature and musical direction of the group. Indeed, we wonder why Ornette Coleman uses his name to identify the band at all. Are we to believe that he is permitted to play democratically, even if he wanted to? Perhaps then, the band could be called 'Free Ornette Coleman'.

In many respects, then, the example of Coleman further illustrates just how difficult (we might say impossible) it can be to be fully participative at both levels in *any* organization – even a jazz band. An organizational example of this difficulty is provided by Fleming and

Sturdy (2011) who discuss a call centre in which employees are asked to “just be themselves”. This request was made in relation to their sexual identity, the way in which they dress and various other lifestyle differences – things that might ordinarily be designed out of the workplace. They suggest that while these ‘fun’ features of the job are presented as altruistic and liberating, they are actually employed to increase normative control and distract employees from poor working conditions. In instances where informal mechanisms are used, then, what we tend to find is that there is an illusion of worker autonomy rather than anything substantive that would challenge traditional management practices (see also Costas 2012 or King and Learmonth, 2014). Perhaps Coleman, in controlling the business side of the group, finds himself in ‘an experience of the impossible’, as he promotes and markets himself in various ways while trying to uphold his free improvisational ideals.¹⁰

There appears, in other words, to be an ongoing tension between free expression and collective responsibility on the one hand and getting things done on the other. This is because the manager (or musician) is torn between a freedom to make decisions and a desire to treat their collaborators as equals in the act of creating – and perfecting something as a collective – another experience of the impossible? Interestingly, Derrida addresses this experience of the impossible in democracy by suggesting that there could be a process of ‘taking-in-turns’ (Derrida 2003, p.46). It is here that he also invokes the idea of a ‘free spinning wheel’, by suggesting that even in taking turns and curtailing our freedom of expression to get things done, we are in fact doing so of our own accord and therefore continuing to act out a certain kind of freedom (Derrida 2003, 46-47). Each of these Derridean concepts of ‘taking-in-turns’ and the ‘free spinning wheel’ can act as metaphors for the type of democratic improvisation we might find within Free jazz and free organizations, leading to the promise (if also the risk) of something entirely new. A system in which there is a circulation (rather than an abolition)

of hierarchy, perhaps involving rotating leadership roles and individuals sharing the spotlight simultaneously. In these circumstances, it will be necessary to avoid *preferential* access to valued symbolic and material resources that sustain traditional hierarchy in organizations, so that these resources can be utilised by multiple individuals and groups as they engage in free exchange. This would clearly be a difficult (perhaps even an impossible?) form of organization to sustain over the long-term. However, we feel it offers a potential method of experimentation that could be invoked and applied either temporarily within organizations or even more permanently within organizations that are less reliant on hierarchy and more interested in cultivating risk and creativity.

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Doing something about these sorts of experiences of the impossible in a Free jazz-inspired Free organization, therefore, might achieve a shifting and an opening-up of our settled modes of thinking and feeling (Argote 2005; Bailey, Ford and Raelin, 2009). Free improvisation, after all, involves trying really hard not to try too hard – which is to say that it calls for us to be both active and passive (i.e. to ‘do’ and to be open to others ‘doing’). Preparedness is absolutely necessary yet it is also the case that, for it to be successful, Free jazz improvisation is a collective activity which requires that the musicians share collective responsibility for their music and are surprised by the music that emerges.

Free improvisation in organizations, then, has two necessary conditions: it can occur only if we have prepared for it, and yet it will work only if the event of the improvisation exceeds our preparations and takes us unawares. As Coleman told Derrida:

What's really shocking in improvised music is that despite its name, most musicians use a "framework" ... as a basis for improvising. I've just recorded a CD with a European musician, Joachim Kühn, and the music I wrote to play with him, that we recorded in August 1996, has two characteristics: it's totally improvised, but at the same time it follows the laws and rules of European structure. And yet, when you hear it, it has a completely improvised feel. (Coleman and Derrida, 2004, p. 321)

As managers who have had experiences of the impossible in many situations, we commend aiming for a similar 'completely improvised feel'. We hope that free improvisation, read in the light of deconstruction, might inspire a move towards what one might call Free organizations – places which have a completely improvised feel, while still following the 'laws' and 'rules' of conventional organizational forms.

Notes

1. Readers of Derrida might be particularly sensitive to the possibilities for double readings of the formulation “Free jazz”. For example, “free” can be read both as an adjective and a verb. Murphy (1998, p. 88) points out that read as a verb: ‘the title would act, not as a description of the performance, but as the guiding purpose of the performance: the musicians do not play “Free jazz” they play in order to “free jazz”. But to free jazz from what? From itself, I would claim, from its presumed identity’. Furthermore, in our contemporary music-downloading culture, “Free jazz” might also imply free in the sense of free-of-charge. While his recordings are not free in this sense, Coleman, nevertheless, has a complex relationship with the commercial aspects of his work.

2. Hatch (1999, p. 79) explains comping as follows: [w]hile one musician solos, others may accompany them ...providing rhythmic or harmonic support to the soloist's improvisation, and occasionally offering (or feeding) the soloist ideas which may or may not be incorporated into the solo.

3. The nature of leadership in jazz has received critical attention in Humphreys et al (2012).

4. In leadership terms, Coleman appears to have an entrepreneurial vision (but in sound) of how instruments can be used to do something different. To make this happen, he requires other musicians to grasp and fulfil that vision.

5. We would not entirely agree that Coleman ‘swept away’ the musical structures of his contemporaries. The majority of current young jazz musicians are much more influenced by the music of the Hard Bop musicians of the 1950s and 1960s and the music of Duke

Ellington, Charlie Parker and Miles Davis, than the music of Ornette Coleman. We suspect that Heble's statement is something like saying of deconstruction's influence on the social sciences, that it has 'swept away' positivism.

6. Coleman has been publicly castigated by his peers for allegedly lacking technical proficiency in basic musicianship and advocating an "anything goes" approach to improvisation (Wills, 1998). As Collier (1978, p. 462) commented on Coleman's early career 'his attempts to sit in with jazz bands...were met with hostility. Sometimes musicians walked off stands when he came on to play. Dexter Gordon once peremptorily ordered him off the stand' (cf Ake, 1998). Such stories echo the *ad hominem* attacks Derrida received from the analytical mainstream in philosophy when the University of Cambridge proposed to award him an honorary degree (Derrida, 1995, pp. 399-421). Indeed, the cat-calling Derrida received from Coleman's fans are reminiscent of similar attacks on Coleman. As the translator's note to Derrida's performance at the Coleman event points out: '[t]he irony of this [Derrida being jeered off stage] was undoubtedly not lost on Coleman, who has himself been the object of more abuse and ridicule than perhaps any other musician in the history of jazz' (Derrida, 2004, p. 331).

7. It seems likely that both Coleman and Derrida might be seen as radicals who were driven by their shared experiences as marginal outsiders. Thus, as Nettlebeck (2004, p. 199) observes, Coleman and Derrida are 'outsiders' who, paradoxically, have come to be seen as highly representative of the cultures they have attempted to reform. Coleman, as the principal voice of the Free jazz, 'New Thing' movement, had reclaimed for jazz its territory of radical creativity. Derrida was not just France's leading revolutionary philosopher, but a

thinker whose theories of deconstruction and difference (sic) had helped to redefine, globally, the parameters of epistemology in the humanities and social sciences.’

8. Even in the jazz community, Coleman is seen almost as an anti-intellectual. According to his contemporary, saxophonist Steve Lacy, for example: ‘when Ornette hit the scene [in the late 1950s], that was the end of the theories. He destroyed the theories [about jazz improvisation]. I remember at that time he said, very carefully, ‘Well, you just have a certain amount of space and you put what you want in it’’ (in Bailey, 1992, p. 55)

9. It is interesting to speculate as to the potential conversation Derrida may have had with another contemporary Free jazz pioneer Archie Shepp who was “[a] college graduate with a special interest in literature...a spokesman for the young black avant-garde musicians of his time” (Collier, 1978, p. 471).

10. Arguably, Coleman has become confined within his own singular vision, and wrestles with expectations of what it is and how it should be realized. Miles Davis, in contrast, confounded his fans by changing his vision and continuously challenging audience and critical expectations, leading to greater commercial and financial success. The contrast can also be seen Davis’s autobiography (Davis and Troupe 1989, 241) where he describes Coleman’s musicianship as ‘a lot of notes played for note’s sake ; somebody showing off how much technique he had’ and then describes Free jazz pianist, Cecil Taylor’s, belief that he (Davis) ‘plays all right for a millionaire’ – something which Davis himself found rather amusing. In this way then Davis’s artistic freedom (and his relaxed attitude to his commercial and financial success) may have become less imprisoning than Coleman’s. So, perhaps a truly democratic Free-jazz leadership has something more to do with openness and flexibility. In this way the leader needs to accept a ‘bottom up’ approach in terms of trusting others and

being prepared to support their learning rather than requiring them to follow 'My' vision.”

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FIGURE 1

Mark: Health Care	Mike: Education
<p>As a health care manager I had been tasked with implementing a new ward-based MIS system. What I had assumed would be minor changes in nurses' work in exchange for substantial gains in terms of the management systems was seen very differently by the nurses themselves. They argued that looking after patients would be seriously compromised, to an extent that far outweighed what they thought were the cosmetic gains in having a slicker administrative system. Whatever the rights and wrongs, it was clear that the political benefits to the top managers in being seen as leaders in MIS meant that there was no question of not implementing the new system. During the implementation, I happened to overhear two nurses expressing to one</p>	<p>After a career as a teacher I had progressed to a senior lecturer post in a teacher-training institution. My role was managing all the science postgraduate staff. After being in this role for five years or so I felt comfortable, in control of my section and generally that I was doing a pretty good job. Unfortunately my senior managers also seemed to think that I was performing well and I was approached by the faculty Dean who offered me the position of Head of Department – a much bigger management role with responsibility for many more staff and students, as well as financial and resource accountability. I asked for time to think about it and the Dean rather reluctantly gave me 24 hours. If I accepted the offer I knew I would face</p>

<p>another their strong personal animosity against me because of my involvement. The realization of their hostility left me quite shocked and hurt. I had not anticipated it, and at the time, could not work out why it should have been so vociferous.</p> <p>From Learmonth (2007) p.111.</p>	<p>staff meetings full of conflict, endless committees and difficult encounters. If I turned it down I would alienate the Dean and senior managers. The next day I turned down the promotion, permanently souring my relationship with the Dean.</p>
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Figure 1: Management vignettes: experiences of the impossible