**Music at work: An introduction**

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**Introduction**

Stop reading this form a moment. Close your eyes and listen to the sounds of the space you’re in. Try and forget what you have seen, feel or smell. Instead listen to the aural landscape - what some researcher called the soundscape¹ or music-scape (Altman, 1992, Oakes, 2002). Is this soundscape organized? Is it managed in some way? If you’re in a library, a café, a shopping mall or restaurant then the soundscape is likely to be monitored, and possibly conditioned with music or some aural backdrop. Or perhaps you or your group are producing the soundscape. There might be singing or some kind of musical performance underway. Or perhaps you’re wearing a Walkman or iPod that creates your very own soundscape and possibly drowning out the ambient noise around you.

There are many ways in which music and the management of work, space, time, bodies and feelings are linked and there is a small but rich tradition of academic research that has attempted to explore these connections. This special issue aims to contribute to this work. Our introduction identifies existing work, introduces the three articles that make up the substantive contribution of this special issue, and points to opportunities for researchers to make further contributions.

¹ The term ‘soundscape’ was coined in the late sixties by Canadian composer, writer and music teacher R. Murray Schafer (Schaffer, 1969)
Connecting music and management; three directions

For us there appears to be three literatures that address the relations between music and work. The most extensive, and perhaps most significant for managers, is the empirically-focused literature on the role and impact of recorded music in work environments (see for example, Korczynski et al, 2005, Oakes, 2000; Oldham et al, 1995; Sterne, 1997, Jones and Schumacher, 1992; Uhrbrock, 1961). Alongside this is a smaller literature that asks us to consider what scholars can learn from music about managing and organizing (Albert and Bell, 2002; Humphreys et al, 2003, Hatch and Weick, 1998; Barratt and Peplowski, 1998). This work use musical concepts, metaphors and representations of work in music genres as resources for analysis. The third literature meanwhile asks what structures and processes pattern both music and work (e.g. Weber, 1947; Adorno, 1962; Attali, 1990). We suggest here that all three strands offer numerous opportunities for researchers interested in extending and contributing to research in and around music at work. The three papers in this special edition contribute in different ways to the first two strands of work – what we identify loosely as ‘empirical’ and ‘methodological’ forms of inquiry. Two papers represent this methodological strand. The first from Carl Rhodes entitled ‘Outside the Gates of Eden: Utopia and Work in Rock Music’ provides a vivid and engaging response to the question of what rock music tells us about the popular understanding of work and organizations. The second paper, ‘Making it, By Keeping it Real’, by David Sköld and Alf Rehn, approaches Hip Hop music with a similar question. The authors provide a rich and fascinating exploration of the problematics of entrepreneurship as it is articulated in rap and hip hop music. The third paper in the special issue contributes to what we term the empirical literature – the impact and use of actual music in work.
organizations. In ‘Management and Music; The exceptional case of the IBM Songbook’, Amal El-Sawad and Marek Korczynski unravel the complexities, use and significance of the IBM songbook by this icon of US business, during the 20th Century.

Before discussing these three literatures in more detail we should note here what our discussion does not include. There a rich and engaging tradition of academic work that uses the music industry as a site of empirical analysis (e.g. Cameron, 2003; Nelson, 2005; Negus, 1999; Serwer, 2002; Watson and Anand, 2004; Bowen and Siehl, 1992). This work broadly takes the music industry to an empirical site for the analysis of business and management processes. It tends to assume that the music industry is much like or analogous to other industries. This work is not addressed here. Our focus is on research that sees something distinctive in the use of music either as management or organizational practice or as the basis for understanding work and organization (e.g. as a metaphor or analogue).

Music at work- empirical instances

Before we explore the three literatures we noted above we first want to offer some sense of the range of instances in which music is used to manage space, time, relations and identities in contemporary settings (and thus some of the research opportunities available for those interested in connecting music and the study of organizations, management and work). Let us start with instances where music is used to condition work and service environments. Some of these of course have a distinctive therapeutic purpose. In her wide ranging book ‘Music in Everyday Life’, the sociologist Tia de Nora (2000) describes for example the playing of recorded
music to premature babies in some hospitals in an effort to regularize their heartbeats. In the same vein, but with a more mature client group, organizational well-being initiatives aimed at combating obesity and reducing workplace stress have (in some cases) filled office stairwells with recorded music. The music combines with art, bright colours and encouraging signs that aim to encourage desk-bound workers to take the exercise offered by climbing the stairs rather than riding the elevator (Boutelle et al, 2004). Such efforts are akin of course to the ubiquitous telephone queue music, and the muzak piped into service environments (Radano, 1989). And these in turn as analogous to instances where music is used to enhance the aesthetic appeal of particular environment, and to drown out undesirable noise and sounds. Laura Kruska reports in her ethnography of Japanese corporate environments, for example, that toilet paper dispensers have been designed to play tunes when touched (1998:190). Kruska explains that this ‘dispenser music’ is designed to disguise or conceal un-lady-like noises that might be emitted from the toilet stall.

If we look beyond these aesthetic and motivational instances we can note family resemblances with more brutal and martial uses. Albert and Bell report in their study of the US Federal Bureau of Investigations siege of the Branch Davidian complex in Waco Texas (Albert and Bell, 2004) that the authorities used, among other things, high volume popular music (Barbara Streisand) to weaken and disable their targets. More recently US Marines are reported to have used loudspeaker broadcasts of AC-DC rock music (along with the sounds of screaming cats and crying babies) at ear-splitting intensities as they stormed the Iraqi city of Fallujah during the US-led invasion of that country. And, at the time of writing, a Cruise ship attacked by
Somali pirates in the Indian Ocean is reported to have used a high frequency acoustic weapon to ward off the attackers\(^2\).

Of course attempting to manage an environment with ‘rough music’ is not new. The social movement historian Charles Tilly and Marxian historian E.P. Thompson both identify the charivari – or noisy protest – as an important popular protest practice from the Middle Ages onward. The charivari was put to work to voice discontent with authorities and toward those whom the community considered moral transgressors (Tilly, 1986; Thompson, 1968, 1993). Contemporary examples of charivari abound. Aside from silent protests of course, most major protests and demonstrations include marching bands, such as ‘Infernal Noise Brigade’\(^3\) (INB). The INB, which was mobilized at various high profile protests in recent times (e.g. Republican Party Convention in New York prior to the 2004 election and the WTO protest in Seattle), is a 15-piece drum-based marching band that, as the band notes, aims to ‘provide energy and motivate crowds to do whatever it is that they want to do’ (Frizzell, 2005).

**Music regulating work**

These examples are of course just instances of the innumerable ways that performed and recorded music is engaged to achieve particular social and political objectives. If we turn to work and its management, and take a long historical perspective (calling on a wide range of literatures – including folklore studies, social history scholarship, industrial psychology, sociology, and management scholarship), it is clear that, under particular conditions and at particular times, music has played a crucial role in the regulation of work. Table 1 lays out the broad pattern of the role of music in the


\(^3\) See [http://www.postworldindustries.com/audio/cd_inb_insurgentselections.html](http://www.postworldindustries.com/audio/cd_inb_insurgentselections.html)
regulation of work in four periods – pre-industrialisation, industrialisation, Fordist industrialisation, and post-industrialisation. The state of existing research for each period is briefly outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Role of music in the regulation of work</th>
<th>Extent of music’s role and typical forms of work affected</th>
<th>Main body of research</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-industrialisation</td>
<td>Workers sing as they work, sometimes to co-ordinate and pace labour.</td>
<td>True for many manual occupations. Examples include sailors’ shanties and slave songs.</td>
<td>Research of social historians and folklorists.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industrialisation</td>
<td>Tendency to associate imposition of industrial discipline with musical silence.</td>
<td>Evidence of isolated examples of musical culture existing in some factories.</td>
<td>Research of social historians.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fordist industrialisation</td>
<td>Centrally distributed broadcast music serves to relieve boredom in Taylorised workplaces.</td>
<td>Widespread introduction of broadcast music in factories with low skill work from 1940s onwards in UK and USA.</td>
<td>Research of management-oriented industrial psychologists. Largely ignored by industrial sociologists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-industrialisation</td>
<td>Individualised modes of music consumption allow individuals to use music in a range of ways at work. Broadcast music in service settings.</td>
<td>Limited research suggests that iPod use more prevalent in hi-tech workplaces among ‘knowledge workers’.</td>
<td>Extremely limited extant research on individualised listening. Research in service settings primarily centres on music’s effect on consumers rather than workers.</td>
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Table 1: The broad pattern of the role of music in the regulation of work and the types of research in four periods

Pre-industrialisation. Research by social historians and folklorists has shown that work songs, ie. songs sung by workers as they labour, were commonplace among a number of the most populous occupations in pre-industrialised Britain – weavers
agricultural labourers (Palmer, 1979; Pickering, 1982; Flora Thompson, 1954), drivers of horses, cattle and wagons (Palmer, 1979, p.19; Clayre, 1974), miners (Lloyd, 1967), sailors (Hugill, 1961; Proctor, 1992), hawkers (Palmer, 1979; Cohen, 1993) cobblers (Porter, 1995), tailors (Richards and Stubbs, 1979, p.57), those employed in tweed waulking (Campbell and Collinson, 1969), and those undertaking domestic labour (Clayre, 1974; Pickering, 1982). Research in North America has also documented the work songs accompanying non-mechanised manual labour in the case of slaves (Fisher, 1954; Epstein, 1977), prison work-gangs (Jackson, 1972) and lumber-workers (Doerflinger, 1951). In many of these cases, work songs appear to have been functional to the labour process in terms of pacing and co-ordinating labour. In addition, it is clear that work songs could function as a form of voice for workers, allowing them to articulate grievances in ways that were proscribed in written or spoken modes of communication.

Industrialisation. A number of social historians have argued that singing was one of many folk customs that were seen by many employers as inimical to the discipline demanded in the factories of the industrial revolution (Thompson, 1968; Thomas, 1964; Watson, 1983). With machinery increasingly pacing and coordinating labour, the functional role of work songs fell away after industrialisation (Lloyd, 1967). For many workers, the noise of machinery would have provided a formidable obstacle to singing in the workplace. The imposition of musical silence by many employers can be seen as a wider development of management increasingly seeking to control the soundscape of the workplace. At its most extreme this took the form of management
seeking to ban talking in Ford’s first factories. Yet there is also evidence of intriguing cases of factories where strong singing traditions among workers were still able to flourish (Messenger, 1973; Cooper, 1992, also see argument by Biggart, 1994). There were also cases, such as that of French manufacturer and financier Jaques Vernes, who in 1913 attempted to start a national movement to introduce music into factory. According to Cornell work psychologist Richard Uhrbrock Vernes argued that ‘industrial efficiency was low because factory workmen were not ‘singing at their benches’ (1961:12).

Fordist industrialisation. Jones and Schumacher (1992) and Korczynski and Jones (2006; Jones, 2005) have documented how music was re-introduced into workplaces in the form of music broadcast through loudspeakers in many factories in the USA and UK in the 1940s. Research by industrial psychologists into the effects of broadcast music on various work-related outcomes such as productivity and tiredness mushroomed with the growth of broadcast music in factories (see references in Oldham et al, 1995). It is also clear that this industrial psychology research informed the decisions of management regarding broadcast music in private and public sector workplaces. For instance, Wyatt and Langdon’s pioneering study of the effects of music on fatigue and productivity in 1937 played a key role in informing the agenda of policy-makers in the UK (Korczynski and Jones, 2006). With music commonly played in factories, we might have expected ethnographic and factory-based qualitative research by industrial sociologists to have uncovered more about the way in which music worked on the factory floor. However, with only a few minor exceptions (Morgan, 1975; Garson, 1994; Delbridge, 1998), what we find is the

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4 As Beynon (1983) and Corbett (1994) report workers were able to get round this by developing the ‘Ford whisper’ – a mode of talking without moving one’s lips, so that supervisors could not visually observe the transgression.
casual disdain of the industrial sociologist towards broadcast music in factories. For instance, see Pollert’s (1981, p.132) dismissive reference to music in her ethnography of life in a cigarette factory:

Twice a day there was a reprieve from the grey sameness of a working day: Muzac... it was... keenly looked forward to:

Val: It’s the best part of the day when the records come on.

Stella: 12 o’clock! Jimmy Young! They missed him twice last week!

Underpinning the lack of interest of industrial sociologists in the topic is perhaps an implicit agreement with Adorno’s characterisation of popular music as offering little more than an affirmation of the hierarchical relations of capitalism (see discussion below). Whatever the reasons, this research lacuna still persists today. It, in part, underpins Grazian’s (2004, p.206) identification of ethnographies of ‘the consumption of music in real time and space’ (for instance, on the factory floor) as one of the key research opportunities in the sociology of music.

*Post-industrialisation*. With the hollowing out in advanced economies of much of the manufacturing settings where broadcast music had flourished, we have to turn to broadcast music in service settings and the opportunities afforded individuals to regulate their work through the use of *iPods* and personal stereos to find major roles for music in the regulation of contemporary work. Again, there are important research opportunities here. Such work would sit alongside a rich genre of experimental and more interpretive forms of research on the conditioning and consumption of music in work and consumption environments (see Oakes, 2000; Oldham and Cummings et al, 1995). Primarily the preserve of psychologists, this
work often provides guidance on how to use music to extend control over workers and consumers. Experimental studies of consumers subject to music, for example, show that background music has a positive effect on consumer spending and turnover (North et al. 1999; 2003). Background music tends to reduce frustration at queuing and waiting and supports the adoption of helpful forms of behaviour (e.g. offering to do volunteer work). Experimental work that uses the notion of ‘musicscape’ on retail environments (Oakes, 2000) shows that differences in type, tempo, complexity, and volume of music can have a bearing on a consumer’s experience of time in a particular space, and have a positive impact on consumer spending. And in relation to workers music can increase work performance on relatively non-complex tasks, reduce workplace turnover and enhance in general terms the mood of those subject to it, or using in portable devices (Oldham and Cummings et al, 1995).

The implication for managers is of course quite clear. Particular types of music together with demographic factors allow managers to alter to some degree the experience and thus to some degree control the experience and behaviour of workers and consumers. Much of this experimental work has been done by psychologists (Reybrouck, 2004: Hagen and Bryant, 2003). Some of this work is based on the assumption that music’s effect is a result of the extra cognitive work done by listeners. As Oakes notes, if listeners ‘devote a greater attention to liked music, increased cognitive processing could lead to the perception that more happened during the time spent listening to the liked music and thus augmenting the perceived duration’ (2003:667-668).
Researchers working in the interpretive sociological tradition offer us a different view of the impact and effect of consuming music in these settings. For example De Nora and Belcher’s field work (2000) in a range of retail sites explores the symbolic processes engaged by consumers and workers. They argue that music provides a set of cues for particular kinds of social performance by both customers and staff. For example customers and staff were seen to ‘strike a pose’, ‘hone a vague desire’, dance and swagger to the particular genres of music in the store. In other words the music provided a resource for the performance of consumptive identities and as well a sense of form, timing and pace for the consumptive and service practices (2000:95-98 see also de Nora, 2002).

The more critically orientated literature meanwhile explores the power relations and politics that organize and produce such conditioning. For example, Jones and Schmacher’s work on Muzak (1992) and Sterne’s analysis of the shopping malls (1997) shows the various forces that music conditioning signifies. These authors argue such conditioning is one element in the broad range of ideologically powerful practices prevalent in post-fordist accumulation regimes.

Alongside this managerial, interpretive and critical work on recorded music, there is a small literature on the history, practice and nature of performed music in work places (Korczynski et al, 2005; Korczynski, 2002; Nissley, 2002; O’Neill, 1998). Such work highlights the importance of social bonds and community building in work environments and the often ambivalent or resistant approach taken by management to workers’ musical performance. In some settings of course managers have moved in the opposite direction and explicitly used music performance (of corporate songs and
anthems) to develop company culture (El-Sawad and Korczynski, this volume; Nissley and Taylor et al, 2002; Nissley, 2002; Lynn, 2002:49-54).

In our view there is considerable scope for further research on music as it is used in and around work environments. Such work might explore further the use and effect of music on service workers or the impact of individualised listening to music in contemporary workplaces. This work would for instance go beyond studies by Oldham et al. (1995), and the references made by Bull (2000; Bull, 2005), and explore the use of new portable music technologies in the workplace (e.g. iPod).

This overview of the changing role of music in regulating work has necessarily focused on the broad patterns identified by different bodies of research. This should not preclude researchers from examining cases which do not sit easily with these broad patterns. El-Sawad and Korczynski’s work on the IBM songbook in this special issue is a case in point. The songbook is regarded as a ‘extraordinary case’ that casts light on the ordinary. The extraordinary is the widespread singing of corporate songs by managers and workers in an iconic USA firm. The ordinary is the widespread absence of Western employers using music to actively engage workers in the terrain of meaning-making. This suggests a wider point for future scholarship – we should be as concerned with understanding absences of music as much as with analysing the presence of music in the regulation of work. Meanwhile the presence of actual musical recordings or performance in work environments is only one way to explore music at work.
Connecting music and management methodologically

The founding figures of social science took an interest in music. Freud, as might be expected, had something of ambivalent relationship to music. As Neil Cheshire notes (1996) the great theorist of the unconscious boasted of his ‘disability’ with music but maintained an in-depth knowledge and admiration of the great operas of his time (e.g. Wagner). On occasion this knowledge was used metaphorically by Freud. For instance he referred at times to patients as ‘the instrument [which] responds willingly to the instrumentalist’s [Freud] confident touch’ (1996:1135). Marx also played with musical metaphors. In his celebrated chapter on cooperation among workers in the first volume of Capital, he alludes to the similarities between the manager and the conductor.

All combined labour on a large scale requires, more or less, a directing authority, in order to secure the harmonious working of the individual activities, and to perform the general functions that have their origin in the action of the combined organism, as distinguished from the action of its separate organs. A single violin player is his own conductor; an orchestra requires a separate one. The work of directing, superintending, and adjusting, becomes one of the functions of capital, from the moment that the labour under the control of capital, becomes co-operative. (1976:448-449)

This metaphorical approach to the relationship between music and management has been developed in recent years by a range of organization analysts. Examples draw lessons from Jazz or music theory to analyse organization and management problems and issues (Albert and Bell, 2002; Humphreys et al, 2003, Hatch and Weick, 1998; Sudin, 2002; Mantere and Sillince et al, 2002; Hunt and Stelluto et al, 2004). In the midst of this literature there is a stream of work that treats music as a resource for unpacking popular understandings of work and organizing. Here, we can point to: Clayre’s (1974) suggestive and wide-ranging analysis of images of work in ballads...
and folk-songs; Porter’s (1992) systematic examination of English occupational songs; and Foners’ (1975), Roscigno and Danaher’s (2003), and Lynch’s (2001) analysis of labour movement songs. If we turn to more contemporary genres of popular music there appears initially to be a striking absence of references to work. Frith, for instance, noted that music with ‘its intimations of fun, irresponsibility and fulfillment’, had come to act as ‘an implicit critique of work’ (1981, p.265). The first two papers in this special issue pick up this point.

Building in part on Charles Conrad’s analysis of country music lyrics (1988), these two papers, by Carl Rhodes, and by David Sköld and Alf Rehn, explore the presentation of management, business and work themes in the lyrics of prominent Rock and Hip-Hop artists respectively (see also Rhodes, 2004). Skold and Rehms’s explore the work of hip-hop stars for their engagement with the problematics of entrepreneurship, business practice and authenticity, while Rhodes offers a mapping and analysis of the position of work and utopian themes in rock lyrics. Both Rock and Hip Hop present work and business in complex and contradictory ways. The argument here is that while some prominent researchers have turned to jazz and orchestral music of inspiration in understanding management and organisations processes, popular music genres also offers resources (see Hatch and Weick, 1998) and these two papers, we hope, set the scene for further scholarship in this area.

Connecting music and management theoretically

Alongside these empirical and methodological strands there is a third strand of work that we wish to highlight here. While not represented in the three papers in this special

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5 See also MacInnes’ (1967) discussion of the relative absence of references to work in the songs of the British music hall.
edition, we suggest that this strand provides an important backdrop, grounding and site for the development of research into the relations between work and management.

Above we mentioned the cursory metaphorical points found in the writing of Freud and Marx. The more potent and enduring treatment of music and management (understood broadly as a social and political phenomenon) are found in the writings of Max Weber, Theodor Adorno and Jacque Attali. Weber’s analysis of rationalization of music (1958) as an exemplar of the same processes underway in other social realms, along with Adorno’s critique of mass music culture (2002), and Attali’s (1977) predictive analysis of the relation between musical forms and social structures all provide important theoretical guides for further work. Attali, for example, argued that music acts as a kind of barometer for the social and political structures emerging in any one society. Music is simply the institutional field where such movements and changes appear before it is possible to achieve their articulation elsewhere. Of course the work of these authors has significance beyond management and organization studies/ But contributions to the problem of the relation between music and work, that draw lessons from these key works (and extend and refine them), are possible. For instance these themes can be found in Niina Koivunen’s recent paper on listening and organization (2002), in Leanne Warren’s work on the importance of the ‘score’ in the creation of organization (2001), and Martin Corbett’s paper entitled ‘Sound Organization’ (2003). Each of these suggests important epistemological and theoretical moves that could be further explored and extended.

Underpinning these papers is a common element: the critique of our epistemological dependence on the ‘eye’. Corbett (2003) argues that organization scholars have been
bewitched and enslaved by a single epistemological organ – the eye. The consequences of ocular-centrism are plain to see (see!). Our attention to image, perception, and figure has *tuned-out* the ear as an epistemological ‘organ’. The ‘ear’ meanwhile with its preference for rhythm, harmony and temporality seems much better placed to address the complex, chaotic and multi-layered character of organizing. While the ‘eye’ locates us in space, in things, visions, perceptions, inscriptions, foregrounds and backgrounds, the ‘ear’ tunes us ‘in’ to routines, performances, cycles, relations, resonances, speaking and listening. The ‘ear’ is no less interested in patterns than the ‘eye’ but suggests a different register that is more attuned to flow, movement, noise, rhythmicity, synchronicity and, in some cases, harmonic structures where particular set of practices, relations, and processes could be said to resonate (or not) with each other.

An example and of this kind of work is Dale Cyphert’s ‘Learning to ‘Yo!’ (2001, see also Cyphert, in press). Cyphert offers a rhetorical analysis of the work of a concrete laying gang. Interestingly Cyphert began her study as an observer armed with a video camera but ditched the camera and became a participant when the gang was short-handed. This change of positioning proved a revelation. She writes that after a while:

> We quickly settled into a rhythmic harmony, the beat of the laborer’s signal coordinating each individual’s actions and decisions into the collaborative action of a concrete pour. An assertive, "Yo!" directed everyone in the group to coordinate their various measurements, adjustments, and actions. (ibid.)

Cybert’s work highlights the musicality of cooperative effort and challenges scholars to explore the rhetorical communities created by the rhythms that work groups
achieve or develop when they engage in complex, coordinated tasks. Here music is understood in its broadest sense as a property of work and organizing. Of course ‘musicality’ refers to our ability (or not) to coordinate our movements or responses to actual music being broadcast or performed (to dance or sing along to a tune or rhythm). Organizational musicality we would suggest has a similar meaning but refers instead to our ability to adjust or adapt the character of our practices, e.g. their rhythmicity, tonality and resonance in ways that make up or are defined the group or organization in which we are embedded. Here the object of analysis is not music as an aural ingredient added (or removed) from a particular workplace to enhance, dull or provoke a particular experience (monotony, tedium, resistance etc). And neither is music treated as an autonomous sphere of activity that hold’s metaphorical, symbolic or representational clues to the nature of work and organizing. Rather in this stream of work researchers might address our learned ability to be tune-in to (or not) rhythms, codes and interactional processes involved in working with others. As already noted Marx made much of the astonishing productive forces unleashed by cooperative human effort (1967). His analysis assumes that ‘capital’ brought workers together and the cooperative effort unleashed was largely a free gift to capital. Clearly cooperative effort under capitalist relations is only one of the many modes of organization in which the productive effort is realized through the power of cooperation. While some economic organizations clearly appropriate the surplus effort produced by

This same dynamic would appear to be found also in the work of other scholars using different conceptual frameworks: in Engstrom’s activity theory (1987), Weick and Roberts’ work on collective mind/action (1993), in some aspect of actor network analysis, and recently in Hoskin’s Foucauldian analysis of timing and spacing systems as the basis of management (2004). In Weick and Robert’s presentation of the ‘collective mind’ for instance they explore our ability to act in concert where organizational reliability is demanded. Their empirical example case is the flight operations of military aircraft carriers. As part of their illustration of this complex activity system they note how pilots continually ask themselves ‘Does this feel right’, ‘Is the rhythm right’. Here coordinated activity is accomplished by monitoring in a heedful way the rhythm, flow and synchrony of the various decision and material processes as they unfold. In our terms we might suggest that such participants both affirm and explore the musicality of the flight operations system.
organizational musicality, the reverse is also the case. As Hoskin (2004) notes organizing processes create ‘in us’ an embodied sense of timing and spacing that includes tempo, anticipation of others, and a sense of how to improvise around routines. In other words, organizing processes create a sense of ‘organizational musicality’. This dynamic is at once cultural, task and routine specific, embodied and unconscious. It is in part what makes ‘organization’ more likely, if not possible in the first instance.

Our brief discussion of these three streams of work aim at challenge researchers and practitioners to exploring such themes and ideas. Yet at the core of this is, in our voice, the challenge to the ‘ocular-centricism’ of organization studies. This special issue contains a modest number of contributions and each in different ways is both a part of this challenge, and a step toward the development of engaging forms of sonorous management and organizational knowledge. While the theoretical challenges to developing these forms of knowledge are significant, the epistemological first move is quite modest. Rather than using one’s eyes and looking for organization, we suggest that the first move is to explore the soundscapes of work and organizations, and through this to take the epistemological step offered and start listening to organizing.
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