Music –abilities: Narratives of Employee Engagement Through Music Listening

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by

Randolph S. Kravette

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Abstract

This research examines the question, “How might music listening, as an opportunity for reflection, inform employees narratives of engagement?” Concerned with alienation in the workplace, Chapter One presents the utility of the arts in enhancing our understanding of workplace engagement. Chapter Two provides a philosophical framework for investigating narrative and musical perspectives related to workplace engagement. Chapter Three provides the music listening and narrative methodology this research relies on for interviewing six employees from various workplaces in the Boston area. Chapter Four demonstrates and discusses musical qualities of workplace engagement participants shared in the research. And Chapter Five summarizes how this research fits in with workplace engagement, education and scholarly praxis. Narratives of preferred musical recordings consistently described spaces between personal values and alienating contentions in the workplace. A unique quality of engagement associated with non-judgmental acceptance, personal vulnerability and compassionate action surfaced in conversations relating music listening to workplace engagement. It is speculated that musical recordings’ abilities to immerse listeners in non-propositional yet meaningful shared experience worked to catalyze these descriptions.

Keywords: Music Listening, Narrative Psychology, Performativity, Employee Engagement, Organizational Learning, Organizational Development
Dedication

The last remarkable conversation I had with my brother, Sanford Marlow Kravette, I sat on his bedside. He was in the final stages of pancreatic cancer. After discussing family matters, our discussion turned not toward the great composers, musicians or bands that had enhanced our lives as listeners or performers, but to some of the many music teachers whom we both had the privilege of studying with in high school at the South Shore Conservatory of Music and at the Massachusetts Youth Wind Ensemble, and then as undergraduates at the Boston Conservatory of Music. Jim Simpson, Hal Jenks, Attilio Poto, William Grass and Frank Battisti, to name just a few. We recalled going two-hours overtime in a chamber music coaching session with William Grass where we did nothing except to focus on playing the first note of the composition with the intent that the music demanded – a shared breathing and being together, a common identity at the outset of our musical journey. We recalled Frank Battisti reading to the entire high school wind ensemble from T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* to build a shared inspiration for the meaning of the music we were about to play. We recalled Attilio Poto’s gentle yet uncompromising mission to hear and bring forth music through the hearts, minds and bodies of his students.

In my brother’s eyes, music remained the pathway for each of us to connect with each other and to express our humanity. This work is dedicated to Sandy, in our common search for what is true and meaningful.
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If I am not for myself who will be for me?  
Yet, if I am for myself only, what am I?  
And if not now, when?  (Hillel, Avot, 1:14)

I. Workplace Observations – Opportunities, Justifications and Pathways

Opportunities

Six participants from the metro-Boston aria each worked with me to compare their personal narratives of workplace participation with their narratives of music listening. Participants shared a musical recording with me and reflected upon personal workplace engagement practices, particularly as related to interpersonal listening skills. Because music listening is fully embodied (music takes place inside the body of the listener), and because art functions to allow individuals access to others’ ways of thinking about and perceiving the world, from the outset I hoped to better understand if and how a music listening frame of reference might invite a more inclusive, less alienating workplace participation than currently enacted in many settings. Because music may be invoked to engage any system of values, a distinction between systems of value and engagement was drawn at the outset. My hope is that this research draws attention to the systems of values participants engage in at work.

For the purposes of this research, employee engagement is broadly defined as active participation in the core values, principles and practices of the workplace. Music is broadly defined as the aural art of temporality. This research is intended for employees. Knowledge generated from this study is intended to inform employee engagement and organizational learning practices among the research participants and those who read this work. Reciprocally, this research may provide contextual insight to music educators, scholars and performers. This
study may also inform education policy and curriculum development as it applies to preparing students for engagement in the workforce.

**Employee engagement: problem, practice or disease?**

Gallup research estimates that just 33 percent of US employees are actively engaged at work; 51 percent are “not engaged” and the remaining 16 percent are “actively disengaged” (Clifton, 2017). While 94 percent of global business leaders agree that employee engagement is critical to business outcomes, less than 20 percent believe that organizations are effective in improving it (CEB, 2016). The manifest problem facing employers and employees is that overall, the workplace seems inhospitable to employee participation.

However, the latent underlying problem is more complicated than these numbers suggest. Four structural concerns point toward just how deeply rooted, broadly encompassing and socially entwined the engagement problem is.

1. **Scholarly and practical definitions of “employee engagement” obscure utility.** While engagement measures are indeed worrisome, current measures provide little internal or external validity consistency (Saks & Gruman, 2014). The seminal definition of engagement – “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (W. A. Kahn, 1990, p. 694) – is at best, difficult to measure. As a result, different surveys about engagement, using definitions based on Kahn (1990) provide strikingly different information. Additionally, any one employee from one day to the next might fill out the same survey substantively differently (Saks & Gruman, 2014). But perhaps the most vexing engagement problem for organizational leaders has been identified in a recent
study. By looking person-by-person (intra) rather than across research subjects in the aggregate (inter), current research of 1,085 U.S. employees finds that many highly engaged employees are either burnt-out or quickly burning out (Moeller, Ivcevic, White, Menges, & Brackett, 2018). “Nearly half of all employees were moderately to highly engaged in their work but also exhausted and ready to leave their organizations.” (Moeller et al., 2018, p. 32).

2. *The means and ends of employee engagement exceed the bounds of the workplace.* Increasing external market and technological pressures on organizations are putting increased psychological and physical stress on the workforce (Siegrist, 2014). Employee engagement must be considered as part of an overall ecosystem of organizational fitness and employee wellbeing (Hellebuyck, Nguyen, Halphern, Fritze, & Kennedy, 2017; Siegrist, 2014). Not only does the external environment affect organizations, but the world outside of work affects employees as well. The Job Demands-Resources model convincingly shows that internal as well as external resources and demands on employees mediate engagement (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Gallup’s research over the past 25 years finds that full personal engagement in the workplace requires *career, social, financial, physical, and community* wellbeing (Robison, 2013). Employee engagement is not simply between the workplace and worker. Workplace engagement is a broader social phenomenon.

3. *In the United States, employee engagement is actively being separated away from the civilian workforce.* According to the Council of Economic Advisers (2016) in 1954, 98 percent of American prime-age men participated in the workforce and by June 2016 only 88 percent were participating. The steady decline has not been explained
by the increase of women in the workforce (Council of Economic Advisers, 2016). With only 65 percent of the overall civilian workforce participating in 2016, the United States’ rate was lower than it had been since 1980. While cyclical economic events and an aging population account for two thirds of the drop-off, the remainder of the decline was systemically unexplained (Braun, Coglianese, Furman, Stevenson, & Stock, 2014). While our unemployment rate is at historic lows, by comparison, the United States had the third lowest workforce participation rate of any of the 34 economically developed countries and the highest male workforce dropout rate of any economically advanced country (Council of Economic Advisers, 2016). Possible explanations include the fact that 7-8 percent of working age men in the United States – disproportionately black men (Alexander, 2012) – have been incarcerated at some point in their lives, effectively truncating employment options (Council of Economic Advisers, 2016). Another possibility is that our education system has not prepared men or women for available jobs (Braun et al., 2014; Council of Economic Advisers, 2016; Mazumder, 2011). Entwined with these issues is the ongoing unconscionable disparity in economic mobility in the United States where black populations continue to be less upwardly mobile and more downwardly mobile than white populations (Mazumder, 2011, 2014). Overall, in the United States our values and principals about work are driving at least some of the labor force out of, not in to, employee engagement.

4. *Employee engagement, as it is practiced today, appears to be contributing to a catastrophic epidemic of despair.* Although, as noted above, mid-life white non-Hispanic Americans are not among the first demographic group that generally come
to mind when considering the negative effects of hegemonic workplace engagement practices, since 1999, for the first time in a century, the all-in mortality rates for this population has been steadily rising. Their mortality rate is now higher than any other demographic group in the United States. The increased mortality rate is due to an overwhelming increase in deaths of despair (Case & Deaton, 2015, 2017). The white non-Hispanic American increase in drug overdose, alcohol related morbidity and suicide was an anomaly among other economically stable countries and was also unique across the other demographic groupings in the U.S; all other groupings and stable countries continue to see overall declining mortality rates (Case & Deaton, 2015). Case and Deaton (2017), looking closer at their 2015 findings, show that those without a college education, and women over men by a ratio of more than three to one, make up most of the increase in mortality rates. “Ultimately, we see our story as about the collapse of the white working class after its heyday in the early 1970s, and the pathologies that accompany that decline” (Case & Deaton, 2017, p. 22).

Obviously the loss of work can be devastating (Clark, Diener, Georgellis, & Lucas, 2008). Those of us employed with work are part of a system of engagement that includes some and excludes others. Clearly, we cannot afford to look at employee engagement in terms that account for only the faces of the employed. How we have become engaged with a system of employment that includes some while excluding others, and the ramifications of such pervasive bias, must be considered as part of the overall crisis.

National mortality rates and declining workplace participation rates do not happen to ‘them,’ to ‘others’: these phenomena are something that we enact together. These problems are
the presenting symptoms of our contemporary system of values and principles that every workplace participant puts into practice. Progressive values and principles are eloquently summarized by the Job Demands-Resource model and its extensions (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Exemplifying this framework, Bauer and Hämmig (2014) suggest:

> In practice, employees need to be prepared for increasingly complex tasks, technological developments, a demanding job pace, and demanding customer relationships. Further, they need to be enabled and motivated to deal with continuous changes in their jobs, social relationships, and organizational environment. They should be empowered to act for their own personal needs – e.g., for recovery, self-determination, self-actualization, and work-life integration. All these needs require much broader capacity building approaches for employees in the future, reaching from traditional training to active involvement in participatory improvement processes in organizations. (p.9, emphasis in original).

Another compelling statement of principles regarding engagement, consistent with this sentiment comes from the Brooking Institute’s promotion for their May 20, 2018 education and innovation online seminar:

> Experts predict that, by 2030, 825 million children in low- and middle-income countries—half of today’s youth generation—will reach adulthood without the skills they need to thrive in work and life. More worrisome still, it will take approximately 100 years for the most marginalized youth to achieve the learning levels that the wealthiest enjoy today. Confronted with these pervasive and persistent inequalities, we must make room for bold new approaches that have the potential to deliver quality learning for all children and youth, not in a century, but today. (Brookings Institute, 2018)

> As compelling as these egalitarian values and principles sound, a step back is called for.

What type of employee engagement are we preparing workers and the world’s children to participate in? Will they become part of a system with declining participation rates and the highest increases in despair in 100 years (Case & Deaton, 2015, 2017)? Given the current state of employee engagement, the tendency to think that to be engaged is good and to be disengaged is bad is far too simplistic. A closer look at the definition of engagement suggests that
engagement, as it is currently understood and practiced, may itself be responsible for some of the alienation and broad-based affliction.

**Built-in alienation?** Kahn’s (1990) seminal definition requires the “harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles” (p. 694). This is no different in structuring power relations than Weber’s (1948) iron cage of bureaucracy. Although Kahn (1990) accounts for employee self-actualization and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982, 2001; Wood & Bandura, 1989), in both Kahn and Weber, every employee remains systemically “harnessed” to their organizational role as a “single cog in an ever-moving mechanism which prescribes to him an essentially fixed route of march” (M. Weber, 1948, p. 228). Further, our bureaucratic organizations seem to take on and embody a mind of their own, transcending the intentions of management and executive direction, “After all, bureaucracy strives merely to level those powers that stand in its way and in those areas that… it seeks to occupy” (Weber, 1948, p.231-232). This structural hegemony would seem to explain the burnout, participation dropout rates, and despair. But, what can we do about it? “More and more the material fate of the masses depends upon the steady and correct functioning of the increasingly bureaucratic organizations of private capitalism” (Weber, 1948, p.229).

Although organizational ‘climate’ (Albrecht, Breidahl, & Marty, 2018), and self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) have been added to the equation as employee and organizational resources, as apparent in the Job Demands Resource Model, little has changed in the last seventy years. Engagement remains a cyclically generative faceoff between the burndown³ of employees’ personal, organizational and social resources, pitted against the build-up of the organization’s environmental survival needs (Albrecht et al., 2018; Byrne, Peters, & Weston, 2016; Hellebuyck et al., 2017; A. S. Patel, Moake, & Oh, 2017;
Rana, 2015; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Customary practice defines engagement as a dynamic power struggle between organization and employee. Moreover, considering the harnessing of the employee to the organization, and an educational system forged to provide harnessed labor, the colonizing nature of employee engagement seems all encompassing (Stanfield, 1985).

Even as social media pushes organizations aggressively into the digitally disruptive Age of the Customer (Bernoff, 2011), engagement is still practiced as the mutual consuming and provisioning of resources between employer and employee, focusing the entire workplace ecosystem inward upon itself. Engagement in these self-centered terms presents a systemic narcissism (Hatch & Schultz, 2002) consistent with early Marx (1844) concepts of alienation between object, labor, identity and social meaning. With a focus on winning the motivation game with employees and winning the market game with competitors, many employees are, more than 170 years after Marx’s pronouncement, still estranged – not engaged. Given that since 2001, 57 to 62 percent of U.S. middle-aged households have held corporate capital (Ravikumar & Karson, 2018), we cannot blame the capitalists for the problem. A faceless organization, in its provision of roles and encapsulation of the work assignments, still alienates the employees from labor ownership (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2004), as well as from responsibility and accountability for the work (Roberts, 2009).

From a pathological psychology point of view, Carl Jung (1960) made clear that, “We know only the surfaces of things, only how they appear to us – and here we must be very unassuming” (p.93). From his perspective, there are times when a presenting problem is seemingly evil or wrong; however, the perceived problem may actually be providing a much-needed lesson to the afflicted, particularly if there is an element of hubris or entitlement involved (Jung, 1960). From this perspective, employee engagement research cannot be approached with
the intent to increase or to better participation rates, especially given the foreboding shadow cast by the current constructs and practices of engagement.

Equal caution is required in terms of seeking to redefine engagement or to find some underlying truth about engagement in political, psychological, philosophical or even pragmatic terms. Wittgenstein (1953) warns, “One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it” (p.48). In this light, the concerns raised in this introduction tell us not so much about employee engagement but more about the frames through which we look at the practice of employee engagement.

Because our frames for perceiving the world are performed individually, it is incumbent upon each of us to step back and assess to what extent the twin institutional and personal narcissisms of today’s employee engagement practices are applicable to our own situations and listen carefully to hear the ramifications of our actions.

This research will investigate the problem with the tentative perspective that employee engagement represents active participation in the core values, principles and practices of the workplace. The concern is that these values and principles enact a broader social way of being that has reciprocally alienated our organizations and employees. This alienation of employees has led to exhaustion and decreased participation as well as increased economic pain and emotional suffering at the macro social level. In looking at these workplace values and principles, “We must bear in mind that a principle exists long before us and extends far beyond us” (Jung, 1960, p. 91).
Justifications and Pathways

Engaged companies outperform their competition. (Sorenson, 2013)

Competition is for horses, not artists. (Bela Bartok, quoted by Battaglia, 1962, p. 31)

The purpose of this research is to bring a music listening frame of reference to employee engagement experience, and to bring an employee engagement frame of reference to the music listening experience. This section responds to the question: why would anyone want to do such a thing? First, the problem is briefly reiterated. Then, after discussing why a traditional approach is inadequate, the demands of the research problem are reviewed from social, cognitive and neurological perspectives. Finally, music listening is presented as an approach to meet the demands of the research problem.

As defined here, employee engagement represents active participation in the core values, principles and practices of the workplace. If not a majority, still some employees in the United States are happily engaged (Aon Hewitt, 2017; Clifton, 2017; Moeller et al., 2018). However, my research is concerned that the values and principles of employee engagement have enacted a broader social engagement practice that in a contemporary reimagining of Marx (1844) has reciprocally alienated organization and employee from each other and from the actual work. At personal and organizational levels this causes employee exhaustion and burnout (Moeller et al., 2018), and at the broader social levels it decreases participation, increases economic pain, dropout rates and demographic disparity (Council of Economic Advisers, 2016; Mazumder, 2011). And, it appears to contribute to terminal emotional suffering (Case & Deaton, 2015, 2017). With increasing exhaustion, mortality rates, disparity and withdrawal from the workforce,
this crisis cannot be left unattended. The problem presents itself as a ubiquitous social disease embodied by every participant in the system.

**Not simply a pragmatic problem.**

In contrast to the approach that I will advocate, I will first present a pragmatic (Dewey, 1938), strengths-based (Heath & Heath, 2010; Rath, 2007) approach that could be argued as the most “justifiable” path toward “fixing” the engagement problem and note why I do not take this approach.

In a purely pragmatic study, I would interview top performers who are happy and engaged in the workforce. In my data collection I would gather and transcribe anecdotes and narratives about their superior engagement profiles. Then I would code the interviews (Saldana, 2016). Relying on the Job Demands-Resource model (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014) or Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) as a conceptual framework, I could reduce the discourse to themes, analyze the thematic distillation, and document the best practices for employee engagement. If I kept the research localized to one institution and contained in terms of the demographic intersectionality of participants, I could meet current ethnographic best practices by not extrapolating findings beyond the limits of the local and cultural praxis (L. Patel, 2015). Arguably, this would provide ideal local solutions within a legitimazed phenomenological research framework.

Three related issues thwart this approach. First, researchers do not gather data, as though data was already there like fruit growing on trees ripe for the harvesting (Riach, Rumens, & Tyler, 2016). The presumptions of the research determine the data. In this case the presumptions would be that there is something called engagement that some employees are better at than others; and that either organizational and personal success, happiness or self-actualization is the
end game and materially related to this form of positive engagement. Through these assumptions, the researcher would be generating data – compliant with assumptions – rather than gathering unbiased responses (Riach et al., 2016). Note that these assumptions would persist even if we were to alter the research to interview ‘low engagement’ employees. And would also persist if we were to try to rate or define baselines for employees’ levels of engagement.

Second, even assuming we could generalize a positive sense of engagement, the researcher would now be in a position of promoting the underlying values of so-called *positive engagement*, no matter what the broader social costs. At the same time, the research would commodify the collected data, effectively colonizing the research subjects (L. Patel, 2015). Note again that this issue would be further exasperated if we were to alter the research to interview ‘low engagement’ employees.

And third, even if these two concerns were accepted in stride as a cost of doing research, in the United States, the employee engagement problem is pan-cultural, structural, and is not resolvable among its incumbents. The problem is not to get engagement better in the terms we know. By sticking with known standards of engagement the core issues are as intractable among those ‘succeeding’ at engagement as those who are exhausted, burned-out and outcast. Less than 20% of executives believe that organizations can improve engagement (CEB, 2016) and fully half of engaged employees are ready to quit (Moeller et al., 2018).

This is not a traditional question of best practices or of developing curriculum for outcome improvements. Nor is this a singular matter of redistribution of vulnerability. As Judith Butler (2012) remarks in considering Adorno’s (2001) assertion that “a good life cannot be lived in a bad life” (p.1), “one does not want everyone to have an equally unlivable life” (Butler, 2012, p. 15).
Three faces of alienation.

While the constructs of alienation are beleaguered by a host of criticisms, employee alienation still seems like the foremost suspect in the engagement problem. Specific criticisms include the claim that alienation only exists within a paternal grand narrative of Marxist materiality (Jaeggi, 2014; L. Patel, 2015). And as a related issue, within the Marxist (1844) framework the construct is epistemologically circular (Jaeggi, 2014). In other words, rational logic rejects the claim that one can be alienated from the work one is doing.

In response to these criticisms, at least for the purposes of this study, constructs of alienation must move beyond the presumption that there is a purely external alienating force. In effect, although we are at the point where forty-two percent of the nation’s wealth is owned by one percent of the population, and the middle class is rapidly shrinking, and as a group younger workers are well on track to attain less wealth over their lifetime than their parents (K. Kahn, 2018), contrary to Marx’s (1844) narrative of an alienation perpetrated by ‘the capitalists,’ in the U.S. most of us are capital owners (Ravikumar & Karson, 2018). Whether or not the capitalists are the problem, we need to look internally rather than externally.

We need introspection. “[W]e need an element not just of self-criticism, but the criticism of that underlying, inexorable something that sets itself up in us” (Adorno, 2001, p. 169). In these terms it is not so much that alienation as a construct is circular reasoning, but more so that alienation is particularly insidious to the extent that something causing alienation has “set itself up in us” as a hegemonic way of our being together. We need to consciously experience what it is we are in the process of becoming. To bring awareness to this ‘something,’ a cursory look at the social, cognitive and neurological factors of employee alienation are considered, and then aligned with music listening perspectives.
**From a social perspective.** Leigh Patel (2015) describes the intractability of social structuralisms in terms similar to Weber (1948) and Foucault (1977). Because as scholars we are backed by capital intensive academic institutions, when seeking workplace engagement solutions to fulfill the ‘American dream’, we are likely to colonialize and institutionalize – send our children to college, asylum or penitentiary – rather than otherwise support them in their pathways (see also, Alexander, 2012; Council of Economic Advisers, 2016). Institutional tunnel-vision includes academic researchers in that, “It is perhaps much easier to believe in the American Dream or perhaps more palatable to use it as a frame for necessary research on those who have not succeeded within the United States” (L. Patel, 2015, p. 62). While I am not suggesting that we abandon liberal progress (watch Pinker, 2018, on TED Talks), this investigation requires a means of looking at the *qualities* of life in the wake of data that supports institutionalizing liberal progress. We need to critically question *what has set itself up in us* as “progress,” “liberalism,” and “institutionalism.”

**From a cognitive perspective.** In our push toward progress, self-efficacy and success, what might we be leaving behind? When assessing whether Jesuit students, having just studied the text of the Good Samaritan, would stop and help a person in obvious pain and need on their immediate pathway, Darley and Batson (1973) showed that the single determining factor for offering assistance was how much time pressure there was on the research subjects to get to their destination. In our rush toward the American Dream, to keep our organizations competitive, there is something about workplace engagement that has realized its potential for moving us away from a kind of participation that includes those who have other equally valid dreams, and continues to exclude those for whom the American Dream has a long history of inflicting hegemonic pain (Alexander, 2012; Council of Economic Advisers, 2016; Mazumder, 2011; L.
Patel, 2015). Conscious of the Jesuit students rushing past those in obvious need and pain on their pathway because they are late for delivering a lecture on the Good Samaritan, this investigation requires a research method that can evaluate the ways in which we have set up within ourselves a sense of manifest destiny in our rush toward an American Dream at the expense of those around us who may have different dreams or express shared dreams differently.

From a neurological perspective. When we are engaged, how do we see each other? What does it really mean to be engaged? Neurologist Erik Kandel, in The Age of Insight (2012), leverages Greene’s (2009) investigation of the Trolley Problem to show that when we look at a work of art, multiple neurological pathways are stimulated to animate our emotional and cognitive experience. In Greene’s research of the Trolley Problem, one idiomatic question is asked in two separate ways: (a) If there was a run-away trolley, would you flip a switch in the control room to divert the trolley with the guaranteed outcome that one person would be killed rather than five? And, (b) if you had to push one person from the platform into the path of a runaway trolley with the guaranteed outcome that it would stop the trolley and five lives would be saved, would you push the person off the platform?

Most people find an affirmative answer to question (b) to be morally reprehensible, while with equal consequence an affirmative answer to question (a) is morally justifiable. In contrast to immediate personal value decisions (pushing another person into an oncoming train) which are assessed through automatic emotional neural pathways, thoughtful utilitarian decisions (activating a control panel) are assessed using control based cognitive neural pathways (Greene, 2009; Kandel, 2012). In effect, each of us is of many minds. It is precisely the question of embodiment that explains why automatic emotional neural pathways would direct an adult to jump into shallow water to save an unknown drowning child, but would not inspire the same
adult to spend even less effort to support or participate in relief efforts to save children in famine or to aid refugees (Greene, 2010). Non-physically confrontational decisions are thought through and rationalized, not felt through. This principle extends to punitive punishment, and condemnation of harmless acts (Greene, 2010).

So, it is not just a matter of embodying decisions. Decisions stemming from the fight or flight reactions of the cerebellum and emotionally embodied reactions of the amygdala tend to be ‘irrational,’ and decisions formed in the control tower of the frontal cortex tend to be ‘blind.’ The engagement problem, even at the individual level, must deal with a complex of intra- and inter- personal systems that even within the individual may be paradoxical and often fully contradictory.

Bringing social, cognitive and neurological perspectives together, current research on personal embodiment of culture also suggests that each of us have a multiplicity of personal selves (Hermans, 2001; Toarniczky & Primecz, 2006). Not only do cultural queues (emblems of culture such as flags and other nationalistic iconography made apparent in the immediate environment) mitigate how multi-cultural research participants respond to culturally sensitive questions (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000; Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015); but further, neurological research shows that these different systems of reasoning follow different synaptic pathways. Consistent with Kandel (2012) and Greene (2009), we practice many different physiological ways of cultural reasoning (Kim & Sasaki, 2014), resulting in radically different perceptions of reality and consequent decision and meaning making outcomes.

Moreover, it is this cultural construal of self and social wiring of identity that defines human engagement:

[T]he way the self-architecture is set up in the medial prefrontal cortex and the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, it also serves a more duplicitous purpose that we are
generally unaware of in daily life. The self-system serves as a Trojan horse, sneaking in the values and beliefs of those around us under the cover of night without our ever being the wiser. (Lieberman, 2013, p. 301)

Because ethical decisions may follow different synaptic pathways depending on circumstances, and because multiple systems of cultural values co-exist within each self, consciously as well as unconsciously, this research must find methods that take into account that it is possible for one person to participate in the same workplace situation from a multiplicity of deeply sociologically rooted, frequently conflicting and consequentially significant perspectives.

**Remapping self-efficacy.** In effect, this research abandons the constructs of somehow locating a beneficent engagement practice centered on a mythical personal authenticity or authentic will. While I must be for myself, I am a social self; now and forever. Hillel – quoted at outset – was not speaking just parochially from an epistemological frame of reference, but also, as it turns out, neurologically. Ontologically, we do not exist in isolation.

The abandonment of an *authentic* self cannot be taken lightly. It does more than simply throw cold water on theories that propose workplace engagement problems can be solved by appealing to employees’ motivation toward self-actualization. With this multiplicative view of personhood comes the loss of a fully comprehensible personal narrative and a deep fear of “a certain kind of death, the death of a subject who cannot, who can never, fully recuperate the conditions of its own emergence” (Butler, 2005, p. 65). In place of a self-certainty set up within us, this research asks: According to *what principles and in whose terms* has my experience of personal authenticity been construed?

This research must consider that within our multiplicative selves, what we attest to as ‘employee engagement’ may be so thoroughly socially conditioned that we no longer recognize how our participation repeatedly (at least since Marx, 1844) produces the same reprehensible
consequences of alienation. Again quoting Butler (2005), “Surely, there is a certain desperation there, where I repeat myself and where my repetitions enact again and again the site of my radical unself-knowingness” (p.79). This research must address “the site of [our] radical unself-knowingness.”

So, why music listening?

In a word, divorcing humanistic and artistic qualities from the study of the social sciences perverts the wholistic [sic] character of empirical realities which cannot be reduced down to humanistic or social scientific. (Stanfield, 1985, p. 410)

This study recommends, as John Stanfield (1985) suggested in his critique of the racially alienating forces of western ways of knowing, that art can provide a resource to help bring awareness to our “radical unself-knowingness” (Butler, 2005, p.79). As summarized above, this unself-knowingness is characterized as an employee engagement practice fractured socially by institutionalization, obviated cognitively by competitive tunnel-vision, and made invisible neurologically in our pursuit of a false sense of authenticity within a multifaceted socially functionalized brain. In justifying this research, I turn briefly to how music relates to each of these characterizations.

Music from a social perspective. Bourdieu sees music as a class indicator (Bachmayer, Wilterdink, & van Venrooij, 2014; Bourdieu, 1986, 1989; Susen, 2011); Adorno sees music as culturally commodified (Adorno, 1981; Heathwood, 2013; Susen, 2011; Zuidervaart, 1990); and the positivist community still widely accepts Stephen Pinker’s (1997) declaration of music in evolutionary terms as “auditory cheesecake” (p. 534), similar in function to pornography and an excessively high fat diet. From Rap to Reggae, Ragas to Gamelan, and from Throat Songs to Western Classical to Acid Rock, a cursory glance at the institutionalization of music genres indicates that music can indeed be used to institutionalize social standing, commoditize aesthetic
participation, and engage in narcissistic self-gratification. Music is so well endowed in its ability to institutionalize because fundamentally, across all its genres, music is simply structuring universal elements of relatedness that promote social harmony and synchronization (Cross, 2001). No matter what type of music we are listening to, it is constructed by assembling socially integrative elements: harmony, rhythm, counterpoint, inflection, timbre, call and response, accompaniment, etc.

For any who doubt the galvanizing effect of melodic harmony, join the 8.6 million viewers to watch Bobby McFerrin (2009) entrance the audience at the *Notes & Neurons World Science Festival* with the pentatonic scale (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ne6tB2KiZuk). As McFerrin states, no matter where he is in the world, audiences “get it.” That is, in every country the audience will in unison and without error sing/compose notes of the pentatonic scale with only implicit instruction and awareness. Because pentatonic scale harmonics occur naturally within the human anatomy (Helmholtz, 1885), it is likely that this organization of relative pitches began taking shape as early as 700,000 years ago when humans began gesturing vocally (Nikolsky, 2015). Among countless examples, in addition to providing the foundation of the blues scales, the pattern of the pentatonic scale is found in western folk songs like Amazing Grace, in the Ethiopian Tezita and Bati qenet (scales), and in the 2,500-year-old bells of Marquis Yi in Hubei, China.

Separately, in psychosocial experiments, whether in walking together (Miles, Nind, & Macrae, 2009), rocking together (Valdesolo, Ouyang, & DeSteno, 2010), or tapping together (Valdesolo & DeSteno, 2011), interpersonal rhythmic synchronization builds rapport and compassion. If in the struggle between embodied and rationalized participation we tend to
normalize, isolate and alienate the other (Foucault, 1977), music listening attends to the ways that we embody – harmonize and synchronize – our relatedness (Dewey, 1934).

Among those who have provided empirical research on these phenomena, Lewis (2016) and Amir (2012) provide clear examples. Lewis (2016), in her brilliant dissertation, shows how critical reflexivity can help fourth grade students come to terms with their social realities through collaborative music listening and criticism. And Dorit Amir (2012) shows through her phenomenological methodologies that by having participants publicly present their preferred music, unconscious personality and behavioral traits can be brought to consciousness and purposefully examined.

Music from a cognitive perspective. At least since Plato, many have defined music in terms of its prowess in communicating emotion (Levitin, 2007; Meyer, 2008; Nikolsky, 2015). However, while music is undoubtedly capable of evoking emotion, this is more a consequence of what music entails than a defining attribute. Music lacks physical permanence. An instrument, digital recording, manuscript, lead-sheet or score, or even musician or dancer cannot be considered music. Music is embodied. Ultimately, whether performer or audience, music only exists within the doing. “Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do” (Small, 1998, p. 1). Even though a musical work or performance may become reified and take on a life of its own, music is a verb not a noun (Small, 1998). In music engagement – listening, dancing or performance – cognitive understanding is an embodied experience. Notably, we participate in and critique a mutually embodied cognizance.

Returning to the example of Jesuit students rushing past a person in physical pain and suffering to deliver kind words about the Good Samaritan (Darley & Batson, 1973): it is incumbent upon us to ask what separates the embodiment of the Good Samaritan from the idea
of the Good Samaritan. Or, literally: what keeps us from walking the talk? As Judith Butler (2012) argues, our interpersonal physical vulnerabilities must be made political. “This is a politics in which performative action takes bodily and plural form, drawing critical attention to the conditions of bodily survival, persistence and flourishing within the framework of radical democracy” (Butler, 2012, p. 10).

However, we cannot stop here. We have yet to answer an obvious, but seemingly untended question. As we rush down our hurried scholarly pathways, just how is it we come to embody our experience of other, these “performative actions” that “take bodily and plural form?” Or, in Foucault’s terms, in resisting alienation, how do we embody “the processes that are peculiar to an experience in which the subject and the object ‘are formed and transformed’ in relation to and in terms of one another” (Foucault, 1994, p. 462)?

The arts, and music in particular, provide such an embodiment. Artistic activity reports on what is inside the subject, materializing the performer’s experience as an artistic object; while at the same time, the artistic moment situates the observer as the object of the expressive act and reflexive subject of their own personal experience6. In so doing, the arts intrinsically provide a means of sharing and embodying the dynamic capabilities and vulnerabilities of seemingly routine relatedness that all too often is passed by unattended (Dewey, 1934). The arts bring us to an aesthetic appreciation of what is otherwise routine. “It gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, p. 166).

Documentary film producer and scholar Stephen Linstead and his colleagues exemplify these constructs explicitly in their films and ethnographic research.

[A]esthetics can make us aware of paradox and pain as well as pleasure, and looking at the aesthetics of a particular group can reveal powerfully how identity is sustained by the symbolic revalorisation, within the group, of phenomena, tasks, objects, activities etc. that are devalued by other groups or wider society. (Linstead, 2006, p. 475)
Linstead’s (2015) documentary, *These Fragments* ([https://vimeo.com/154350270](https://vimeo.com/154350270)), provides a poignant example of how music surfaces the everyday aesthetic of work relationship, making its humanity visible, viable and comprehensible. The depiction is not of an ends-means production of social, cultural and economic capital, but of human dignity and vulnerability.

Among the many artists at the forefront of embodying art as a site of active resistance, consider the performance art of Nari Ward (2014, 2017), the instigative political work of Tania Bruguera (2018), and the active becoming of protest as theater, dance, music and installation of Okwui Okpokwasili (2017, 2018). In terms of bringing the artistic power of the written voice to the workforce, consider *Pen America World Voices Festival* ([https://worldvoices.pen.org/about/](https://worldvoices.pen.org/about/)) held in New York April-May 2018 (PEN America, 2018). And in terms specific to employee engagement, consider the humanizing work of Mark Nowak and the *worker writers* coalition ([http://www.workerwriters.org/](http://www.workerwriters.org/)). He and his colleagues give workers a poetic platform to author and embody their workplace valor and to protest the precarity of employment conditions (Nowak, 2017; Nowak & Capperdoni, 2018).

**Music from a neurological perspective.** As stated by musician and linguist Ray Jackendoff, “[T]he neuroscience of the aesthetic response is still a mystery. And… finding its location in the brain still won’t tell us how it works, nor why Brahms is so great” (Jackendoff, 2012, p. 241). Statements like this tell just how important it is to untangle assessments of Brahms’s greatness from our musical ability to internalize each other’s expressions about how the world is personally experienced. Neuroscience has helped us with this disentanglement and built strong cases to refute (1) the pervasive rationalization that the primary function of the arts and aesthetics is to beautify the world⁷, and (2) the view that the Kantian notion of aesthetic
judgment insists on a naturalistic universality of beauty (e.g., Jackendoff’s universalization of Brahms’s greatness) (Ginsborg, 2014; Kant & Pluhar, 1987).

Taking an integrative view of art, psychology, and brain functioning, neurologist Eric Kandel (2012) focuses the aesthetic conversation onto the observer and the ways the observer engages with artwork. Aesthetics concern not natural beauty alone, but also the biophysical embodiment of personal curiosity and wonder about our own and others’ experience of the world (Kandel, 2012). Art connects. “Our response to art stems from an irrepressible urge to re-create in our own brains the creative process – cognitive, emotional, and empathic – through which the artist produced the work” (Kandel, 2012, p. 393).

If the employee engagement problem in neurological terms suggests that the brain is multifaceted and there is no simple center of authenticity from which one is to engage, then in response, artistic expression provides participants a cogent means of sharing multiplicative subjective experiences. In both philosophic and pragmatic terms there is no question here about the value of objectivistic and functional reasoning. But the focus here is instead on the recognition that the limits of participation is always bound by norms of socially viable engagement practices (Foucault, 1970, 1973; Lyotard, 1979). So, where the brain requires social validation to trust that its observations are true (Lieberman, 2013), the arts provide the requisite, “Aha! moment, the sudden recognition that we have seen into another person’s mind, and that allows us to see the truth underlying both the beauty and ugliness depicted by the artist” (Kandel, 2012, p. 393). In terms of employee engagement and alienation as that something which has ‘set itself up within us’, we come to a startling proposition. From this approach, engagement can be observed as “being with another” in aesthetic terms that bring awareness to the bounds of
personal and social viability. Alternatively, alienation may be construed as ‘authentic’

participation as measured by the extent to which the employee is harnessed to the work role.

Where we have seen differences in neural processing of ethical and cultural stimuli, it
should come as no surprise that language and music listening have shared processing centers
within the brain, but follow different neural pathways (Fitch, 2006; Levitin, 2007; Mithen, 2009;
Peretz, Vuvan, Lagrois, & Armony, 2015). More to the point, music does not attend to the same
meaning making process as word-based languages. Music does hang together based on symbolic
form and social ‘vocabulary,’ but its core social utility is not its capacity to represent complex
intentions (Goodman, 1968)\textsuperscript{8}. For example, this sentence cannot be translated to music. So
while music may be representational in its aesthetic expressivity, its function is not to represent
complex propositions (nuanced locutionary, illocutionary or perlocutionary content and strength
(Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969)). As Dewey (1934) characterized it:

Music, having sound as its medium, thus necessarily expresses in a concentrated way the
shocks and instabilities, the conflicts and resolutions, that are the dramatic changes
enacted upon the more enduring background of nature and human life. The tension and
the struggle has its gatherings of energy, its discharges, its attacks and defenses, its
mighty warrings and its peaceful meetings, its resistances and resolutions, and out of
these things music weaves its web. (Dewey, 1934, p. 245)

As previously noted, music can certainly be commodified, be loaded with lyrics that
signify, and be deployed to create or dismantle implicit agreements about class structure. Music
is no more partial than words in terms of how it is used as a language. The point made here is
that even when deployed for nefarious purposes, music remains true to its core capacity to state
the aesthetic experience of relatedness. It is music’s ability to state relatedness in its own terms
that allows it to be deployed so frequently to signify belonging: when the national anthem of the
country of Olympic winners is played or when a national sports event begins; to give voice to the
oppressed in the face of racial hegemony (Hilal, 2015); and alternatively, to codify and embolden
fascism and white supremacy (Richardson, 2017). In other words, music may break the silences of alienation, but remains mute regarding on whose terms it breaks the silence.

The reason music is so vital to this dissertation as that in contrast to other art forms, music exists only in terms of its ability to depict relatedness per se. And it is precisely the qualities of relatedness it deploys – the harmonies, rhythms, counterpoints, inflections, articulations and timbres – that characterize our embodiment of engagement. Or, perhaps as stated much more simply by one of the elementary school students who participated in Judith Lewis’s (2016) critical music listening dissertation work, “What I mean about beat is a kind of beat that like moves me” (p.193). Following Lewis’s assessment of her students’ definition, I am suggesting that employee engagement has a beat that “gets you wanting to do something” (Lewis, 2016, p. 193). Within our workplace agreements, it is important for us to hear the beat. In a workplace beset with structural issues of alienation, musical qualities express our primary capacities for relatedness.

**Positionality**

I do not say the things I say because they are what I think, but rather I say them with the end in mind of self-destruction, precisely to make sure they are no longer what I think. To be really certain that from now on, outside of me, they are going to live a life or die in such a way that I will not have to recognize myself in them. (Foucault, 1971)

I am concerned about workplace alienation. In many regards, I author this dissertation to put “outside of me” my personal experience of workplace alienation, and to allow the text that results to speak of workplace alienation “in such a way that I will not have to recognize myself” in the completed text. This work is hence, an unfolding and an evolution. As much as this unfreezing of passed expressions of self is germane to my own positionality, I hold it equally relevant to the positionalities represented by those courageous enough to engage with me in this
research. Each participants spoke to test the limits of their own sensibilities, not to prove anything nor to claim an ownership of their positions. This testing of limits must now be read as living in these words, apart from the participants.

I am not getting paid for this research; to the contrary, I have given up a well-paid corporate management position to have the time and wherewithal to focus on this project. Besides my relationship with Northeastern University as an EdD student, there are no institutions committed to this dissertation. Indeed, the greatest ethical threat to this work is that I would execute it as an unmitigated act of personal narcissism.

However, my intent is to focus on the research participants: their experiences and their needs as expressed through the research methodology. While the literature review and methodology sections were written to contextualize the way the work was intended to unfold, the participants were an active force, helping to re-craft and re-contextualize the dissertation. As envisioned by artist Dana Schutz (2012), we were Building the Boat While Sailing. What the research, participants and dissertation committee uncovered constantly redefined the process, transforming biases and reshaping the work as it progressed.

Since this work continues to engage my biases, and because a complete accounting of my biases would require an impossibly complete accounting of my life, perhaps what is necessary, is not so much a statement of biases, but more a statement as to how the biases most related to this work have come to set themselves up within me (Adorno, 2001; Butler, 2012). This is a time and a place of reflection, not a complete accounting. Although I have attempted to write candidly and accurately, at 61 years old, there are too many truths to tell to find any one path that is inter-contextually honest. Of all possible ways to construe the past, this story attempts to be an appropriate account leading to the time and place – the ‘address’ – at which these words were
typed (Butler, 2005). This Positionality statement marked an initiation of a reflexivity that continued throughout the dissertation process, taking fuller shape as I worked with research participants, and has yet to conclude (Cunliffe, 2003).

**Institutionalized suffering.**

I am self-conscious that this dissertation looks at a form of hegemony that crosses racial lines. As such, this work is among those that are frequently cited as promoting white privilege. As indicated by Leigh Patel (2015), to speak of no race in a system dominated by a white male franchise, I am structurally marginalizing those already marginalized by not attending to the social structures that fundamentally shape my biases.

This is of course not to say that white people do not experience prejudice or suffering, but that this prejudice is not institutionalized and is not subject to the craven exponentializing forces that systematically marginalize populations of color, poor populations, and nongender conforming and nonnormatively abled bodies. Whites across class, gender, and sexual identity lines experience far less physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and spiritual violence than do their counterparts of color. (L. Patel, 2015, p. 61)

Coming from a home where at seven years old I could be found lying on the floor with fractured ribs, a black eye, bleeding lip, after being held at knife point and then thrown around the room like a beanbag, and upon the arrival of the police, have them politely ask my father to keep the noise down because the neighbors were complaining, leaves it difficult for me to believe that suffering among all people is not in at least in some ways institutionalized. Such treatment at home left me baring the physical and psychological marks of victimization at school, leading to further bullying and social ostracizing. To complicate matters, I was severely dyslexic. It was not until I was in middle school that I could consistently spell my name correctly. It seems reasonable to assume the name spelling may have been a symptom of my physical and emotional identity erasure at home.
While I had exceptionally high reading comprehension, going into high school with a third-grade reading score overall, and being completely unable to get through even a simple sentence in terms of spelling accuracy, I was relegated to the students in the “S” group. My cohorts and I were unsure if the ‘S’ stood for Simple, Stupid or Slow. Undoubtedly it stood for the kind of ‘Special’ no one wanted to be. In my white, male, upper-middle-class strata, extreme violence and highly stratified educational access were institutionalized.

So, while I have developed a profound appreciation for my own white male privilege, my personal racism and the social inscriptions historicizing racist praxis, after having my formative years grounded in physical and emotional abuse condoned by the courts and law enforcement systems, and my education framed by the partitioning of othered learners, I am also appreciative that some forms of institutionalized violence and segregation are not race or gender related. In terms of ‘what has set itself up in me,’ I have spent a lifetime learning how to engage beyond my learned terror of others and the self-shame that plagued my childhood.

My entry point into this discussion for the purposes of this dissertation is that the expression, “our employees are our greatest assets,” is profoundly wrong in every sense. Any pronouncement of one person as the asset of another triggers a physiological fight or flight response within me most associated with being held at knife or gunpoint by my father. I was his asset, his property; I was his collateral against my equally emotionally abusive mother. In school we were social assets (or deficits), to be polished in accordance with our ability to perform in step with the norms presented.

From a more cerebral perspective, not only do the constructs of human capital management institutionalize whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) – institutions that tend to use these words are primarily capitalized and controlled by white men – but equally importantly, this
praxis institutionalizes an egregious ends justifies the means performance of human relationship.

No! Human lives are not capital to be polished, managed, and consumed by others. I am committed to a more attentive, embodied and responsible way of being with others. I need to engage in ways of relating that do not as a matter of course legitimize my past; a past wounded by being owned and occupied by my parents’ psychoses. This dissertation is part of my commitment to a non-asset-based frame of employee engagement.

**Why here and why now?**

*By posing the questions ‘Why now?’ and ‘Why here?’, I foreground the responsibility to think about context... Attending to context, to place, to temporality, is perhaps one of the strongest ways that educational researchers can interrupt coloniality. Coloniality, with its thirst for universal truths, values placelessness, in part, because this implicitly justifies the seizure of land and the forced movement of people and resources for the interest of landowners. (L. Patel, 2015, p. 67)*

Over the past six years, my parents, my younger brother, my wife’s parents and my closest cousin have passed away. My experience working for a large finance corporation over the past twenty-four years is that employee engagement is fundamentally broken. With an increased awareness that my life is temporary, the question of what to do with the time I have left has become more urgent. The employee engagement problem needs attention. Here and now.

I am both in agreement and disagreement with Patel’s assessment that truth and knowledge are locally situated. For the past dozen years at my job, it was not unusual to be on a conference call with attendees from China, London, India and Boston. Not a day passed where I did not speak with coworkers from at least three different time zones. The team I managed was split evenly between Boston and Hangzhou. While many ways of knowing and many truths are geographically and culturally local, geographic locality does not attend to today’s truths that universalize and colonialize. Moreover, (1) if we are not already, we will all soon be pan-cultural. And (2), no one’s truths are strictly local (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A cursory look at our
natural environment or the U.S. 2016 presidential elections provides basic examples. As a person who has worked with global technology leaders for the past twenty-four years, my concern is not our geographic address, but the addressability of the personal subject. This is not a form of liberal individualism, but a concern that what is most urgently at stake in our knowledge-based society is mind-share, not real estate.

This is more in keeping with Judith Butler (2005), where to provide an account of one’s self, requires another who is addressable – able to listen and hear. Indeed, in the hearing and acknowledging of having heard, the other, even if silent, also exists in relation to the address of the speaker. Consistent with our neuropsychology (Lieberman, 2013), we exist in relation to each other.

We are embarking on a time when the common meaning of “address” refers to a Universal Resource Location (URL) on the World Wide Web. Through our technology – our computers, tablets and cell phones – we are node addresses on a network. What is being colonized today is not only the land, but addressable lives and the modes and channels of addressability. It is of the utmost urgency that the embodied fabric of human relationship be honored and given voice beyond the colonies of URLs that drive social, cultural and economic capital.

I am suggesting that one antidote is to attend to each other more specifically, to listen to each other’s harmonies, counterpoints, rhythms, pitch, timbres… to give voice to the details of how we are together, as people, not just as capital resources embodying the web. If this dissertation claims that employees are not assets of the firm, it states by extension that human minds are not the last green field for corporate colonization. There is much work to do to
dismantle the truths that allow us to hold each other as capital assets. I left a corporate job to be included in this work.

**Research Question**

*Given that* the employee engagement challenge requires us to reduce the alienation inherent in our employee-as-asset practice of participating in the workplace;

*And given that*, as neurologist Eric Kandel suggests, art provides that “Aha! moment, the sudden recognition that we have seen into another person’s mind” (Kandel, 2012, p. 393);

*And further*, because music provides a set of abstractions that deal directly and specifically with interpersonal relationship;

*The question for this research is*: How might music listening, enrolled as an opportunity for reflection, inform employees’ narratives of engagement?

The subtext of this question is: Do qualities of human relationship inherent in music—harmony, counterpoint, rhythm, articulation, accompaniment, etc.—when liminally and subliminally experienced during music listening, provide a means of deconstructing narratives associated with workplace alienation?

**Theory**

The guiding theoretical framing for this work is that within personal interactions, interpersonal aesthetics secure engagement. This work relies on a bricolage of three components that will be developed into a unifying framework in chapter two, the literature review.

1. *A performative-narrative conceptualization of organization* articulates how corporations create culture through performances of repeated words, symbols and

2. *An emancipatory concept of learning that includes aesthetic judgement (Biesta,* 2008; *Ranciere,* 2004a, 2010) and accommodates personal and social transformation through a performative-narrative practice*, provides a basis for dismantling destructive hegemonic frameworks that may be ongoing in organizational narratives. Even though we are born into social narratives and unwittingly perform these systems of understanding, we are not without recourse to change (Ball, 2013; Carey & Russell, 2009; Freedman & Combs, 2009; Murphy, 2013; Pare & Lysack, 2004; Riach et al., 2016; White, 2007).

3. *Finally, a theoretical concept of music as the aural art of temporality, abstracted from social interactions* is developed. The arts, and for the purposes of this study, music in particular, draw attention to an aesthetic practice that build trust in interpersonal relationship (Adorno, 1993; Cross, 2001; Dewey, 1934; Green, 1965; Husserl, 1964; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Ranciere, 2004a, 2010; Small, 1998).

From this theoretical framework, the research question can be interpreted as: As employee narratives of engagement are performed, what might be gained by looking specifically at the harmonies, counterpoints, rhythms, inflections and accompaniments inherent in these performances?
Method

The following provides a summary of the methodological approach taken with research participants. The protocol is fully developed in Chapter Three.

Reaching out through personal connections and social media platforms including Facebook and LinkedIn, six employees were solicited from the greater Boston area. One ninety-minute interview per participant was conducted with a short follow-up phone session to confirm understandings generated in the interview. All interviews except for one video conference were in-person. Participants were not required to be musicians nor to be music aficionados, nor was participation contingent on any employee role within the workplace. An effort was made to solicit participants differing in age, race, culture and gender. Ultimately, three men and three women volunteered. Participants were from early to late in their careers. One participant was a U.S. Citizen who had immigrated to the United States from the USSR; another was Chinese, working in China for a firm located in Boston; and four were Non-Hispanic, white U.S. Citizens. Three participants were in careers related to technology – architect, developer and project manager. The other careers included were law, nutrition and high-school IEP coordinator/counselor.

Prior to the interview, the participants were asked to select a recording of ‘preferred’ music and to select a workplace meeting considered to be ‘consequential.’ By ‘preferred’ music, I requested that participants bring a recording that they felt a ‘personal connection’ with. By ‘consequential meeting or discussion,’ a meeting was requested that ‘confirmed or challenged thoughts, feelings or behaviors about the workplace.’

We focused on the participant’s meeting during the first component of the interview. During part two we listened to and discussed the participant’s preferred music. In the final
component of the interview, the participant and I compared responses to the first two parts of the interview. Transitions between sections of the interview were informal with more attention given to following the participant’s train of thought than sticking to prepared prompts.

The primary questions for the first two components were parallel. After soliciting a background narrative on how the interviewee arrived at their current job for the work-related component and preferred music for the music interview, the core inquiry asked specifically: *What do you hear? How does that feel? What does that tell you?* In the music component of the interview, after soliciting a brief accounting of why the music was selected, the participant and I listened to the recording together before proceeding to the remaining research questions. In the comparative component of the interview the participant and I co-investigated, reflecting on and developing what had already been said in the interview. In the last part of the interview, although unanticipated in the protocol, invariably, the discussion turned to what it meant to the participant to listen musically. This construct of *listening musically* provided much of the underlying insight utilized in the analysis.

This study’s methodology was developed pragmatically, as a bricolage. Riach et al. (2016) provided an overall approach to developing counter-narratives of workplace engagement. Amir (2012) and Findlay (2017) provided phenomenological approaches to solicit open-ended insights on music from participants. Lewis (2016) exemplified the development of a critical approach to music listening. To compare music and workplace experience, a ready-at-hand semiotic framework was needed that would speak equally well to music and workplace experience. The core of the investigation was conceptualized and operationalized by applying the narrative psychology practices of *externalizing conversations*, the *absent but implicit* and *retelling the retelling* (Carey & Russell, 2009; Freedman & Combs, 2009; Pare & Lysack, 2004)
to scaffold conversations supportive of narratives about workplace engagement and sense making in music listening. The literature review explores this approach in depth.

**Audience and Stakeholders**

Direct audience and stakeholders include the research participants, dissertation committee and readers, and future scholars who read this dissertation as a resource. For participants, this research process allowed time to reflect on workplace engagement and music listening, and then to evaluate if there were any lessons to be learned by juxtaposing these understandings. From the outset, the primary goal of the research has been to bring musical aesthetic judgment to workplace consciousness and engagement. The hope remains to develop a process that provides participants and dissertation readers the opportunity to consider their engagement in more inclusive and conscious ways.

Dissertation committee and readers expressed their own personal interests in workplace engagement. This work has explored whether an alternative way of viewing engagement – not motivational, resource or productivity centric – might provide insight into employees’ experiences of alienation. One way to express my gratitude for all the assistance has been to continue to treat the dissertation process reflexively, learning, developing and sharing skills and resources throughout the research process to pay the generosity forward.

Readers will benefit from this research in that it develops concepts of engagement, aesthetics and art *apart from* promising organizations’ and employees’ greater productivity, creativity and competitive advantage. While this work acknowledges that these qualities of productive engagement express vitality, it views these as outcomes such that the ends do not justify the means. In other words, this research provides a means towards these ends that is not
self-serving: This work will not provide readers a ready-at-hand set of tools or best practices to ‘improve’ employee engagement. However, it will provide a clearly articulated journey exploring the intersections between workplace alienation, engagement, aesthetics and music listening.

More broadly, the audience and stakeholders include human resource management, corporate management and employees who are concerned about engagement. This work is particularly useful to those who acknowledge that there is something broken in the current ways of accounting for employees as human resource capital intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to produce competitive advantage. Additionally, this research is informative to artists and musicians who are concerned about how their craft affects those who participate in the arts as viewers and listeners. This work may also be a resource to those who develop curriculum focused on preparing students for workplace engagement.

Summary of Preliminary Observations

*Your first role ...is the personal one. It is the relationship with people, the development of mutual confidence, the identification of people, the creation of a community. This is something only you can do. (Peter Drucker, as quoted by Zak, 2013)*

Today’s employee engagement practices present ubiquitous issues similar to Marx’s (1844) concepts of worker alienation. Employee and organization are mutually alienated from the work. This problem expresses itself in four fundamental ways: (1) The seminal definition of employee engagement defies applicability, and its ‘harnessing’ of employees to roles replicates Weber’s Iron Cage and Marx’s alienating tendencies. (2) Employee engagement is both internal and external to the organization making the problem larger than any one firm or location. (3) In the United States, workers and employment have become increasingly separated, driving the
workforce dropout rates to levels not seen in over 30 years. (4) Separation of workers from the workforce seems to have contributed to a pandemic of despair.

The engagement problem’s defining features can be teased apart by looking at its social, cognitive and neurological properties. *Socially*, the alienation problem includes the practice of including some while excluding others in the workforce as a matter of course. Even among the included, current practices of engagement “harness” the individual to the organization. We tend to blame our companies and schools for not being able to harness and institutionalize employees fast enough and ‘inclusively.’ Broadly speaking, engagement in these terms means eliminating the white working class in the United States, incarcerating black men, and looking to the world labor market to continue institutionalizing the types of learning necessary to feed our workforce at a higher rate than we burn it out. *Cognitively* it is not so much a question of what we are conscious of but understanding what “has set itself up in us” in terms of our own alienating engagement practices. What and whom do we run past to participate in the workforce? And *neurologically*, we find that engagement is not a question of becoming more authentically motivated. We are multifaceted in our thinking and authenticity is, at best, elusive.

Art provides a lens for seeing not what is evidence-based in scientific terms, but what is elusive and subjectively internal to another’s consciousness. Art’s ability to transcend individual awareness helps us persist and externalize social consciousness and culture. Aesthetics provide this function explicitly in artwork, as well as implicitly in interpersonal relatedness. Awareness is obviously limited by our personal embodiment of consciousness. And because we do not work alone, our capacity for work has as an underlying requirement the need to be aware of others’ consciousness and to trust who and what we are becoming together. Art helps us see into the other and build this trust. Employee engagement is necessarily practiced based on this
underlying aesthetic process of becoming. As Peter Drucker claims, this social trust is our first
and primary responsibility (Zak, 2013). Music abilities work specifically to build this bond
within the harmonies, counterpoints, resolutions of dissonance, and rhythms of daily interaction.
The literature review now turns to how workplace engagement might be narrated in more
musical terms.

II. Literature Review

Framework

*How, in a world dominated by data generation and analysis can focus be shifted towards
another way of being? A musical way. A focus intent upon the composition of daily life at the
level where the workings of form and content, stripped of cumulative capital value, can be
understood as life-generative in their own terms?*

In this literature review, employee engagement is *not* something we are intrinsically or
extrinsically motivated towards (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Engagement is *not
about social, cultural or economic capital advantage* (Bourdieu, 1986). Engagement is *absent a
motivational hierarchy* in the needs if fulfills (Maslow, 1943). And, engagement is absolutely
not a “harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles” (W. A. Kahn, 1990, p.
694). Here, engagement is a way of being together, with “*no difference between a human life
and a word*” (*Benjamin, 1973, p. 13*). Engagement is a way of being with no difference between
pulling potatoes from the ground and viewing Picasso’s artwork. As described in Ranciere’s
(2004b) depiction of literature, engagement emancipates as a communicative act:

*Literature is this new regime of writing in which the writer is anybody and the reader
anybody. This is why its sentences are ‘mute pebbles.’ … The ‘mute’ letter was a letter
that spoke too much and endowed anyone at all with the power of speaking. …one can no
longer contrast those who speak and those who only make noise, those who act and those who only live. (Ranciere, 2004b, pp. 14-15)

Like Ranciere’s literature, artwork more broadly speaking, lives a life of its own. *Our participation is in the becoming of the words and artworks of our times.* In these terms, what it means to lead or to follow is subordinated to what it means to participate – to act and to speak. Whether the fashions we clothe ourselves within, the designs of our furnishings, the flavors of the food we eat, the words we occupy ourselves with, or the so called ‘great’ or ‘lesser’ works of art we admire or distain, the arts enact the finitudes that inculcate our lives as we contribute to their ongoing generative processes.

As framed by Kant, human participation relies not only upon practical and theoretical cognition, but also resides within our capacity for judgment, including aesthetic judgement (Hindrichs, 2018; Kant & Pluhar, 1987; Ranciere & Gage, 2016; S. Weber, 2008). In moving towards neurologist Eric Kandel’s (2012) ‘Aha! moment’ of having seen into another’s understanding, aesthetic judgment provides two avenues of sensibility. Not only does it provide the *disinterested delight* that allows us to externalize our internal experiences; e.g. to say, paint, dance or sing that, that sunset (external) is beautiful (internal). But in doing so, aesthetic judgement allows that external assignment of self to conjoin with our experience of others; that is, we engage in an experience of that sunset as beautiful for everyone. The lines between observed and observer are blurred. Paradoxically, aesthetic distance brings us closer (Ranciere & Gage, 2016). Arnold Berleant (2012) takes this construct further, suggesting a complete erasure of lines that delineate subject from object, especially intrinsic to how music acts:

> Not by translation, not by comparison, not by conceptualization is music grasped, but directly from musical experience, without any intermediary. Indeed, I would argue that because of such immediacy music may be considered the exemplary art, for it is in this respect that all the arts give us their unique grasp, an understanding that does not consist of abstract, conceptual objects but of direct awareness, a kind of resonance, to use an
acoustical metaphor. It is a knowledge achieved through a sympathetic participation in aspects of the world that we grasp immediately, by acquaintance, and not through concepts, definitions, or proof. (Berleant, 2012, pp. 19-20)

Can we consider the very embodiment of our workplace as an aesthetic praxis? This aesthetic immediacy, prior to capital or strategic management, is the focus of this study. Whether we consciously attend to it or not, engagement is an aesthetic process emergent from the immediacy of the arts. The arts render our voices as recognizable by enacting time, rhythm, harmony and counterpoint. If there is a lesson in art, if the seductive spell of alienation is to be broken through the arts, then within art’s workings, our quest for Truth must be surrendered to a passion for building trust in our practices of communicating. Towards these goals, this literature review presents a theoretical framework that integrates communicating, educating and music – abilities.

The first section, on communicating, reviews Foucauldian sensibilities regarding the relation of knowledge and power. Communicative acts are real, living forces, and yet are no less precarious and contingent than the lives of those who utter them. Three pragmatic examples from the literature demonstrate the performative frameworks reviewed. These discuss ethics (Roberts, 2009), embodiment (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012) and material-discursive (Hultin & Mähring, 2017) constructs of organization narrative enactment.

The education section is the most controversial and pivotal. I follow a propositional article of Biesta (2008) which rests on Foucault and turns toward Ranciere in establishing an emancipatory stance on education framed on aesthetic distance (Ranciere, 2004a, 2010; Ranciere & Gage, 2016). To provide a pragmatic handle for this section, narrative psychology practices in the traditions established by Michael White (2007) are integrated into the approach. White’s work is concerned with human relationship as a practice of narrative communication. The
narrative psychology focus in this dissertation is narrowed to three concepts that are directly extensible to both employee engagement and music—abilities: *externalizing conversations*, the *absent but implicit*, and *re-telling the retelling* (Carey & Russell, 2009; Freedman & Combs, 2009; Pare & Lysack, 2004).

The third and closing section of this review shows *music—abilities* as a narrative practice at the core of emancipatory education. Although music may or may not be ‘for its own sake,’ that is not of primary interest in this review. It is indisputable that dialogue is *harmonious* or *discordant*, high or low *pitched, loud or soft*, that vocal utterances are temporal and *synchronized*, that we have smooth or punctuated *articulations* and *inflection*, and that our physical and cognitive abilities to exist in process with these phenomena are true of both music and speech (Cross, 2001; Cucmmins, 2012; Fitch, 2015; Goswami, 2012; Honing, ten Cate, Peretz, & Trehub, 2015; House, 2012; Moore, 2012; Peretz et al., 2015; Philip, 2012; Reich, 2012). These cognitive conveyances lower music—abilities to the level of daily communicative practice. In other words, focus here is on *music—abilities* as an art, and not *music* as an artform. Specifically, music—abilities are attended to as a means of aesthetic participation: a focal point intrinsic to emancipated employee learning and engagement.

**Communicating**

*The blockage [Stauung] in the real flow of life, the instant [Augenblick] where its course comes to a standstill [zum Stehen kommt], can be felt [macht sich . . . fühlbar] as an ebb [Rückflut]: amazement is this ebb. Its actual object is dialectics at a standstill [Dialektik im Stillstand]. It is the cliff from whose heights one looks [der Blick] down into that stream of things, about which those in the city of Jehoo, ‘which is always full and where no one stays’ can sing a song, ‘which begins with:

Don’t cling to the wave,
Which breaks at your foot,
As long as it stands in water
New waves will break upon it.’*
When, however, the stream of things breaks on this cliff of amazement, then there is no difference between a human life and a word...

What is Benjamin (1973) referring to when he states the indecipherability between a human life and a word? Five constructs help unpack this quote. First, communication – of which words facilitate – is explored in terms of power relationships. Second, words are contemplated in terms of their ability to inscribe what we consider to be real. Third, the possibility that words might be living entities is taken at face value. Forth, the importance of interrupting the word is given consideration. And finally, for the purposes of this dissertation, all this is applied to workplace engagement practices.

Words and power. For the purposes of workplace engagement, Denis Mumby (2013) helps depict how close human lives and words actually are. In two ideological turns, Mumby asserts first that communication is essential to sense making. Communication is, “the basic, constitutive process through which people come to experience and make sense of the world in which they live” (Mumby, 2013, p. 14). As such, communication can be defined as, “the dynamic, ongoing process of creating and negotiating meanings through interactional symbolic (verbal and nonverbal) practices, including conversation, metaphors, rituals, stories, dress, and space” (Mumby, 2013, p. 14). In his second turn, Mumby asserts that communication – as our primary form of sensemaking – works to organize activity. He defines organizational communication as, “the process of creating and negotiating collective, coordinated systems of meaning through symbolic practices oriented toward the achievement of organizational goals” (Mumby, 2013, p. 15).

Mumby’s approach makes intuitive sense. We are not alone in the world. We seek agreement and reassurance from those around us to confirm that what we sense and how we
interpret those sensations are reasonable in the grand scheme of things. By saying ‘in the grand scheme of things,’ we stipulate agreement. We mean in accordance to how others behave and see the world. In these respects, Mumby (2013) follows Foucault by suggesting that how we make sense of ourselves in the world is always entwined within power relationships – the power of our agreements.

For Foucault, power is not objectified as a concept of control over others, but is alternatively theorized as a verb, as a becoming: Communication powers community. In this way power and knowledge are bound together and communication is an ongoing act of becoming (Ball, 2013; Foucault, 1971, 2008). Understanding power from this perspective requires deconstructing three aspects of social relations: agreement, behavior and recognizability. As Foucault (2008) states, understanding power entails three axes of investigation:

that of the formation of forms of knowledge and practices of veridiction; that of the normativity of behavior and the technology of power; and finally that of the constitution of the subject’s modes of being on the basis of practices of self. (Foucault, 2008, p. 42) Importantly, from this perspective, knowledge itself is not the source of power.

Communication is the becoming – ‘powering’ – of knowledge. Communication powers organizational engagement as it iterates the normative ‘practices of self’ possible within the limits of community understanding. Foucault’s “constitution of the subject’s modes of being on the basis of practices of self” (Foucault, 2008, p. 42), casts the individual as an agentive participant, but ‘constituted’ within the organization’s ongoing communications. In short, ‘practices of self,’ are communicative. Communication powers employee engagement as employees embody the ongoing creation of organization.

Words as real. According to Gadamer, “The essential relation between language and understanding is seen primarily in the fact that the essence of tradition is to exist in the medium of language, so that the preferred object of interpretation is a verbal one” (Gadamer, 1989, p.
In these terms we see dialectic as the ‘medium of language.’ It is attended to like the ebb and flow of breathing, something unconscious and permanent, in effect, a breathing ‘essence of tradition.’ In living together, communicating, and building shared understandings and intentions, ‘the preferred object of interpretation is a verbal one.’

However, this still seems fundamentally different from Benjamin. In Benjamin’s verse there is actually no distinction between a human life and a word. For Gadamer, it seems that historicity is held within language, “the essence of tradition…exist in the medium of language,” to be shaped and observed, as an “object of interpretation” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 391). The hermeneutic process in these terms objectifies understanding of the text. To be clearer, it is not the text or even the intentions of the author or reader, but the dialectic itself, the conversation, which Gadamer objectifies. Through ongoing interpretation, verbal exchange becomes the object of inquiry. “Normative concepts such as the author’s meaning or the original reader’s understanding in fact represent only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 397). Gadamer’s (1989) treatment of the text as a centrifuge for history brings a sense of living to the dialogue, and indeed, even the text itself is animated in its behavior. But even this historicizing within the texts seems very distinct from Benjamin’s metaphysical conjoining. Gadamer seems closer to Wittgenstein (1953) in the sense that language exists in its utility. “Language is an instrument. Its concepts are instruments” (Wittgenstein, 1953, n. 569). And yet, even for Wittgenstein, the instrumentality of language is far from passive. “A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” (Wittgenstein, 1953, n.115).

Even so, Wittgenstein’s animation of language in its agentive ability ‘to repeat it to us,’ does not match the intention of the Benjamin quote where the word and a human life are
*identical*, physically bound by definition. Although in Benjamin, Gadamer and Wittgenstein *a life* and *a word* are instrumental, teleological and animated in their ability to historicize, and as such, *bound*, neither Gadamer nor Wittgenstein takes Benjamin’s leap, *equating* human life and the word so profoundly in their naked forms.

Why would such concerns – words as being real, living on their own – be of interest to employee engagement? Robert Taylor (2005) addresses this question succinctly. His response is as applicable to the space of conversation as it is to memoranda, e-mails, presentations, proposals, etc. In the life of words:

> What occurs there matters because it is there that the fate of the organization is settled. Why can’t we have peace in the Middle East? Because the two sides are unable to establish the right kind of dialogue. Why did the management-union negotiation break down? Because they couldn’t agree on an agenda. And so on. (Taylor, 2005, p. 212)

Because words are of *real* consequence to our organizations, the teleology of language, what the substrates of communicate permit and foreclose – *the music of how our words interact with our intentions* – is of the utmost importance to employee engagement.

**Words as living.** Undoubtedly, the equating of human life to the word is enmeshed within Benjamin’s adherence to the Jewish tradition. “As Derrida observes, the only form of groundedness known to Jews is that of words and writing” (Escudero, 2015, p. 35). If in the Heideggerian tradition, *truth springs from the land and the caring transformation of its nature* (Heidegger, 1962, 1971), for Benjamin *life springs from the Word* (Escudero, 2015). In the Jewish tradition, *The Truth*, the essence of acts of loving kindness, that is, the Name of God, is unspeakable (Adorno, 1993; Jay, 2014). Like humans, spoken and written words engaged in the hermeneutic process of the texts, always approaching, reaching toward the unnamable, the unutterable, but never enunciating the Name of God (Adorno, 1993). For Benjamin, *in their reaching for*, literary texts – works of art in general – are explicitly living beings. “The idea of
life and afterlife in works of art should be regarded with an entirely unmetaphorical objectivity” (Benjamin, 1969, p. 71). Benjamin takes Gadamer’s (1989) insistence that language embodies tradition a step further, explicitly insisting that by actively embodying historicity, the text – the art – is alive. “[T]he range of life must be determined by history rather than by nature, least of all by such tenuous factors as sensation and soul” (Benjamin, 1969, p. 71).

Alternatively theorized, Foucault (1970) describes classical period grammar. The verb to be – I am; you are; he, she, it is; etc. – underlies grammar and language. To apply language is to animate with the verb “to be” – to give being. The inculcation of being within the spoken word underlies all that is said (Foucault, 1970).

The entire essence of language is concentrated in that singular word. Without it, everything would have remained silent, and though men, like certain animals, would have been able to make use of their voices well enough, yet not one of those cries hurled through the jungle would ever have proved to be the first link in the great chain of language. (Foucault, 1970, p. 102)

Words assert existence – act to impart meaning – they evoke intention (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969; Wittgenstein, 1953). Their intentions are refutable, translatable, impartible (S. Weber, 2008). As such, language intends on its own accord. In language words proclaim their own truth or untruth. “Language is, wholly and entirely, discourse; and it is so by virtue of this singular power of a word to leap across the system of signs towards the being of that which is signified” (Foucault, 1970, p. 102). And so, once asserted, for Benjamin and Foucault at least, the assertion in its ‘being’ still breathes on its own, independent of its original speaker, able to cast its own shadow in the history of things. In our assertions, speaking names our humanity: no difference between a human life and a word.

Benjamin collected books, and then quotes (Arendt, 1969). His goal in providing books a new home, was to give words new life. “Not that they [the books] come alive in him [the
collector]; it is he who lives in them” (Benjamin, 1969, p. 68). By “living in them” the ownership is not of capital possession, as a form of control and wealth. This practice is more like traditional wedding vows, ‘to have and to hold,’ to be possessed and animated by a being in and belonging to a form of hermeneutics that approaches the Name of God. Benjamin approaches Being in the most direct sense of allowing oneself exist with “no difference between a human life and a word” (Benjamin, 1973, p. 13).

**Interrupted words.** Returning to Mumby’s (2013) definition of communication as, “the dynamic, ongoing process of creating and negotiating meanings through interactional symbolic (verbal and nonverbal) practices, including conversation, metaphors, rituals, stories, dress, and space” (Mumby, 2013, p. 14). It is apparent from Foucault, Wittgenstein, Gadamer, and Benjamin that verbal and nonverbal communications exert their own force. Our symbolic practices, assert themselves through our behaviors, utterances and gestures, and live on through our arts, text, and even our software and technologies (Hultin & Mähring, 2017).

These practices – performances – form the norm-setting vectors that we derive our identities from within. As stated by Judith Butler (2005):

> The norms by which I seek to make myself recognizable are not fully mine. They are not born with me; the temporality of their emergence does not coincide with the temporality of my own life. So, in living my life as a recognizable being, I live a vector of temporalities, one of which has my death as its terminus, but another of which consists in the social and historical temporality of the norms by which my recognizability is established and maintained. These norms are, as it were, indifferent to me, to my life and my death. (Butler, 2005, p. 35)

Whether Buttler’s “social and historical temporality of the norms” (Butler, 2005, p. 35) or Adorno’s, “what has set itself up in us” (Adorno, 2001, p. 169) the question emerges as to how the water we swim in, the substrates of our identity, become recognizable to ourselves and to
others. In the leading quote, Benjamin suggests that “dialectics at a standstill” provides the opportunity we seek (Benjamin, 1973, p. 13).

Indeed, hermeneutically we can view awareness as “an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 397). Which is to say, to actually see what we are becoming, there must be an interruption in the dialogue. A break in the action so that the action becomes observable in its unfolding. As each frame of a film must stop for a split second to give the illusion of being present. So too, the wave of our becoming must be held at a standstill for us to see where we stand – what is real. Again, quoting Butler:

Because norms emerge, transform, and persist according to a temporality that is not the same as the temporality of my life, and because they also in some ways sustain my life in its intelligibility, the temporality of norms interrupts the time of my living. Paradoxically, it is this interruption, this disorientation of the perspective of my life, this instance of an indifference in sociality, that nevertheless sustains my living. [emphasis added] (Butler, 2005, p. 35)

From this perspective, “this interruption, this disorientation of the perspective” illuminates our positionality. These interruptions inform us as to what norms, in which employees engage, are living within our interactions. These interruptions reveal the insistence that we are, or are not, corporate assets. These interruptions make possible our awareness as to where and with whom and what texts we participate in becoming recognizable subjects. Note too, the transcendent role of ‘indifference’ in Butlers’ “indifference in sociality” and Kant’s “disinterested delight.” Both open identity’s unfolding – emancipation – through aesthetic praxis.

Implications for organizations. The word as a life construct has profound implications when we look at art, music and the workplace. In these terms, the word, art, our communications do not exist apart from us, but with us – we through them as much as they through us. Lev
Vygotsky’s (1978) depiction of childhood integration of speech into perception is an apt starting point. Through our personal embodiment of speech, communication embodies our perceptions.

By means of words children single out separate elements, thereby overcoming the natural structure of the sensory field and forming new (artificially introduced and dynamic) structural centers. The child begins to perceive the world not only through his eyes but also through his speech. As a result, the immediacy of ‘natural’ perception is supplanted by a complex mediated process; as such, speech becomes an essential part of the child's cognitive development. [emphasis added] (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 43)

Two constructs stand out in Vygotsky’s comment. First, speech is not neutral: it is form and content that has been selected with bias and reiterated with and against the grain of our assumptions (Gadamer, 1989). Accordingly, speech is not a passive tool; it acts (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969; Wittgenstein, 1953). To see the world through our speech is never neutral. And secondly, this non-neutrality is embodied. Our existence, including existing in our organizations is mediated by communication, and in particular, dialogical communication. To be more precise, this inculcation of communication is not ‘mediated’ so much as it is ‘immediate’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 43); aesthetically, ‘immediated’ (Berleant, 2012). Embodied. As Mumby (2013) suggested, this embodiment structures our organizations. We embody organizational engagement as communicative agents. As we name, so we become (Hacking, 2004). Judith Butler (1988) remarks, in her seminal deconstruction of gender:

The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries and from one’s embodied predecessors and successors as well. (Butler, 1988, p. 521)

As we ‘do our bodies’ the question is always of doing our bodies in such a way that our bodies are recognizable to others. We live within the generative force of our communications – our gestures, words, arts, actions, technologies.
The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies. Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives. (Butler, 1988, p. 526)

Judith Butler’s (1988) work describing performative acts of gender has been pivotal in expressing gender as a construct of social enactment rather than as a physiologically binary reality. The repetitions of clothing choice, stylized actions and tone of voice are all performances of identity, symbolic signaling not only of gender but also communicating identity more generally. Butler (1988) demonstrated that by repeating hegemonic narratives that insist that physical body parts are deterministic of performative acts of gender we come to physically embody socially acceptable manifestations of self. Identity is not some idea, but embodied.

As in Foucault’s (1977) *Discipline and Punish*, those who do not physically – in our utterances, gestures, clothing, etc. – comply with social norms are subject to exile and isolation. As these bonds are social as well as physical, those who engage in non-conforming narratives may become “more deeply shackled than originally thought” (Butler, 1988, p. 530). We are born into narratives that shape our social experience of personal identity before we have the wherewithal to choose or commit to our own understandings (Butler, 1988, 2005, 2014).

Pragmatically speaking, Roberts (2009), Cunliffe and Coupland (2012), and Hultin and Mähring (2017) demonstrate how these Foucauldian constructs, extended by Butler, have been applied to workplace engagement practices.


Roberts (2009) applies Butler’s work (specifically, Butler, 2005) to the finance industry, analyzing the financial liquidity crisis of 2007-2008. Where history is constantly being re-written
into contexts yet unknown, most financial institutions intentionally limit the way the organization is enacted by implementing performance and audit standards. Through these standards we name and become what is recognizable. We perform within stories that focus on our inadequacies, feeding systems of marginalization, including marginalization of the self.

“[A]ccountability by turning measures into targets... by means of incentives and sanctions, transforms a mere making visible into a norm against which I will be judged and should judge myself” (Roberts, 2009, p. 962).

At the same time, in the process of codification, we constrict our ideals, limiting their intent to the letter of the law. These policies that make compliance measurable leave us susceptible to unexpected, and potentially catastrophic events entirely outside the scope of what has been legitimated as either ‘ideal’ or ‘risky,’ as became painfully clear in the ‘black swan’ financial market events of 2007-2008 (Roberts, 2009).

Roberts (2009) suggests that we are not simply perpetually inadequate sites of probable monetary loss. A more promising alternative would be to understand our selves as being vulnerable in our subjectivity. That is, organizations could exist as viable frontiers for building interpersonal trust. We need a “more realistic conception of ethics as humility and generosity towards both oneself and others in a process of accountability that embraces rather than seeks to deny that I never quite know what it is that I am doing” (Roberts, 2009, p. 962).

*Cunliffe and Coupland (2012): Embodied narratives in professional sports*

Cunliffe and Coupland (2012) describe the fluidity of personal authenticity in terms of the embodied drama and politics of work. Although their context is professional sports, they suggest that these explorations are extensible to any engagement setting including “senior managers’ teams” (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012, p. 84). Embodiment is defined as “an emotional,
personal, felt and sensed bodily experience embedded in words, gestures, facial expressions, ‘body language’ and so on, through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology” (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012, pp. 68-69). As such, employee engagement is a performance of selves, woven together in a messy gestalt, contentious and conflicting both personally and socially. Integrity, personal and interpersonal, is hard won through ongoing personal and collective contention and conflict. “Thus, sensemaking is not always the deliberate, collaborative, unemotional process often assumed” (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012, p. 68).

Sense making through our narrative unfoldings is not static. “Thus, coherence, legitimacy and causality are often attributed retrospectively as we look back and try to make sense of events” (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012, pp. 67-68). The struggle for and surrender to ‘authenticity’ exist as Gadamer (1989) suggested, only within the dialectic itself. Within the entanglement of our bodies our stories breathe, ebb and flow, and even storm (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012).

This ebbing, flowing and storming of dialectic yet again brings to mind Benjamin’s (1973) waves breaking at our feet. Narrative immersion, at one with conflict and contention, brings to mind Berleant’s (2012) construct of music: our experience is immediate as opposed to mediated. “[W]e cannot separate ourselves from our body: who we are, our thoughts, feelings, body, speech, response to others are interrelated and play through lived moments in which we try to make sense of our surroundings” (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012, p. 69).

**Hultin and Mähring (2017): Material-discursive narrative in healthcare**

Narratives of organizational engagement are not static, but actively embodied and living, not only as in the ethical performances represented in Roberts (2009) and entwined human body
performances depicted by Cunliffe and Coupland (2012), but also in our engagement practices performed by architecture, equipment and technology systems (Hultin & Mähring, 2017).

This means that, in a post-humanist account of performativity, we do not primarily attend to what actors do, think or say, but to what provides them with their actions and intentionality, namely what is already assumed as appropriate and legitimate ways of acting by the circulating flow of agency through material-discursive practices. (Hultin & Mähring, 2017, p. 574)

Hultin and Mähring (2017) assert that traditional forms of sense-making treat humans, our bodies, words and actions, as props to stand narrative accounts of ‘change’ upon. For example, consider Weick and Quinn (1999) where it is “things” that “appear” to “change.” “Thus, while some things may appear not to change, other things do. Most organizations have pockets of people somewhere who are already adjusting to the new environment” (Weick & Quinn, 1999, p. 9). If human bodies are props to be ‘adjusted’ by ‘the new environment,’ whose story is being told? Here we come to the crux of the matter.

Is the narrative act one of intrinsic motivation toward or away from ‘change,’ resulting in estrangement and alienation of someone or another? Or is narrative an act an engagement of intrinsic participation? If participation (rather than motivation) is intrinsic, can we respect the participative web of living agents, including the material-discursive texts, arts, artifacts and staging that encompass intelligibility?

Hultin and Mähring (2017) bring these questions of material-discursive performativity to empirical reality in their investigation of a Lean implementation of a control board at a medical institution. Material-discursive intelligibility “can be understood metaphorically as if the medical staff and the flow board simultaneously ‘pose questions’ such as ‘who are you?’ and ‘what are you doing?’ to each other” (Hultin & Mähring, 2017, p. 574). Agency reverts to the holistic system of knowing. “When the flow nurse looks at the flow board to coordinate the
practices of the ward, she sees not individual patients with unique stories and needs, but a standardized unit of three patients to be ‘produced’ within an hour” (Hultin & Mähring, 2017, p. 582).

As in Judith Butler’s work, the dominant discourse (here, “patients to be ‘produced’”) may always be challenged, but hegemonic privilege always reverts to the sensibilities of the systems in control. “Butler suggests that if state legitimization and legibility grant visibility and designate what will be considered ‘real,’ then that which remains true to what cannot and will not be granted visibility, is lost, perhaps unrecoverably” (Borgerson, 2005, p. 72). As in Benjamin’s (1969) work, the hegemonic discourse includes living and breathing text, art, material objects and technology, even when they insist that humans are assets to be managed by human resource capital management systems and patient control boards. The unanswered question in Hultin and Mähring (2017) is whether the counter narrative – a triage process that unfolds in its own time honoring patients with human stories and needs – is ‘unrecoverably lost’.

**Summarizing organizational implications**

Vygotsky (1971) suggests that through language “the immediacy of ‘natural’ perception is supplanted by a complex mediated process; as such, speech becomes an essential part of the child's cognitive development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 43). This at once seems to conflict with Berleant’s (2012) notion of an immediacy of musical expression “considered the exemplary art…that we grasp immediately, by acquaintance, and not through concepts, definitions, or proof” (Berleant, 2012, pp. 19-20). In what way might both these concepts hold true?

Through embodiment.

Roberts (2009) suggests that an emancipated ethics requires that we recognize our selves as other than perpetually inadequate sites of probable monetary loss. A more promising
alternative would be to understand ethics in terms that recognize relationships in terms of physical, mental and emotional vulnerability. Cunliffe and Coupland (2012) insist, narration is a communal dialectic, messy in its entwinement and embodiment. And, Hultin and Mähring (2017) suggest, the dialectic entwinement and embodiment includes material discourse. If narrative embodies ethically, personally and in material discourse, and if music is in fact immediate, I suggest that narrative embodiment is enacted musically – through the harmony, dissonance, rhythm, articulations, and melodic inflections of daily life.

This has profound implications for education. I suggest that embodiment of discursive narrative, because it is a dialectical temporal phenomenon, leaves not only its semantic trace – its story in words, text, artifacts, and behaviors, but also that the narrative’s very semantics depend on aesthetic performance. The harmonies, counterpoints, rhythms and articulations of music are the artistic renditions of the harmonies, counterpoints, rhythms and articulations of everyday dialogue. These music–abilities are profoundly implicated within our constructs of emancipatory education. As such, the next section, looks at education from an artistic, performative perspective, leveraging the work of Ranciere.

**Educating**

Given the relationships between narrative sensemaking and aesthetic participation, emancipatory education can be viewed as an artistic journey (Biesta, 2008; Ranciere, 2004a, 2010; Ranciere & Gage, 2016). Following Biesta (2008), this section suggests a shift from educator as facilitator to educator as witness. This is to say, that we are not emancipated by the facilitators of our critical understanding. Pragmatically, critical reflection requires pre-existing emancipation. Since emancipation names the ability of the individual to exist in the face of
social contingency, all learning is contingent upon interpersonal relatedness. And interpersonal relatedness – to see into each other’s feelings and understandings – is to witness within the immediacy of the rudimentary sense making elements codified as the arts. In terms of our music –abilities, ‘the immediacy of the rudimentary sense making elements’ includes harmony, rhythm, melodic inflection, intonation, etc. Emancipation is fundamentally an aesthetic praxis.

**Biesta’s emancipatory education.**

_This kind of analysis is therefore not meant to solve problems, nor to give reformers and emancipators the knowledge to make the world better. It is meant for the subjects who act._ (Biesta, 2008, p. 174)

Foucauldian philosophy and the extensions presented in the previous section are frequently criticized (Ball, 2013; Hacking, 2004; Murphy, 2013). If the space of addressability we are born into names the very limits of our becoming, then what can be said, if anything, about self-efficacy? More specifically as educators, if as Foucault insisted, knowledge and power are woven tightly together, and as Butler suggests, this close-knit fabric iterates community, then what claims can we make toward any praxis of facilitating learning as change agents? In short: none. These approaches and questions all emerge from an underlying assumption that alienation is an ontological given. Foucault and Butler can be read alternatively.

Unpacking this predicament requires examining the underlying assumptions expressed in the questions themselves. Typically, we assume that educators will attempt to develop methodology and curriculum to scaffold understanding about the world and its power structures. This is to say, students are alienated in ignorance from the truth of their circumstances – and therefore lack the insight-as-power that sets them free (Freire, 1970, 1998; Giroux, 1994, 2005).

This is a pedagogy in which the teacher knows and students do not know yet; in which it is the task of the teacher to explain the world to the students and it is the task of the students to ultimately become as knowledgeable as the teacher. (Biesta, 2008, p. 172)
The Foucauldian tradition suggests that the entrapment in this way of thinking is in supposing that knowledge has some sort of demystifying or controlling position in relation to power. In effect, we believe that hegemonic power can be mastered with the correct mix of understanding and practice (Freire, 1970, 1998; Giroux, 1994, 2005). However, relying on knowledge as a source of emancipation fails to heed Audrey Lorde’s transfixing words (1984), “survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house” (Lorde, 1984, p. 112). Alternatively addressed by Lyotard (1979), “The State resorts to the narrative of freedom every time it assumes direct control over the training of the ‘people,’ under the name of the ‘nation,’ in order to point them down the path of progress” (Lyotard, 1979, p. 32).

A dialogical narrative practice rejects the certainty of conjoining power and ideology. Ultimately ideology is brittle, fragile, and cannot sustain bodily weight, “the workings of power should never eclipse power’s own ontological uncertainty: power itself should not be placed in a subject position, as if an agent of action. The workings of power are also contingent” (Borgerson, 2005, p. 68). The contingency of power is that it is always the force of knowledge in its becoming. That is, knowledge and power, no more or less than personal identity, unfold at the address of our saying and doing ourselves (Butler, 1988, 2005).

For Biesta (2008), the construct that development of knowledge predicates emancipation presents three predicaments: (1) Even in the context of critical praxis (Freire, 1970, 1998; Giroux, 1994, 2005) students’ emancipation becomes dependent on the liberating teacher. Someone from the outside must wake up within the masses an awareness of that which oppresses and empower opposition. Rather than emancipating, this subjugates the student to the liberator. (2) The teacher-student relationship requires teachers or their institutions to control and
administrate the workings of emancipatory know-how. Here again the construct of educator as arbitrator of liberation directly contradicts the meaning of emancipation. (3) Because by this definition, teachers know what liberates and students do not, the teachers definitions – education’s institutional ideologies – become trusted, where the student’s personal experiences are untrusted and associated with ignorance and the very oppression they seek to escape (Biesta, 2008).

To be more clear, critically attuned teachers do attempt to “relinquish the authority of truth providers” (Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, & Monzo, 2011, p. 165). As King (1993) eloquently states:

In contrast to the transmittal model illustrated by the classroom lecture-note-taking scenario, the constructivist model places students at the center of the process – actively participating in thinking and discussing ideas while making meaning for themselves. And the professor, instead of being the ‘sage on the stage,’ functions as a ‘guide on the side,’ facilitating learning in less directive ways. (King, 1993, p. 30)

However, redefining the role of educator in these constructivist terms is not enough. Claiming authority over the process of emancipation is problematic far beyond relinquishing authority over the provision of truth. Recall chapter one, in documenting the Problem of Practice, I quoted the Brookings Institute’s declaration that by 2030, 825 million children in low income countries stand to be unfit for the workforce (Brookings Institute, 2018). In the ways we currently conceptualize workplace engagement, these children currently lack, and will continue to lack requisite institutionalized knowledge. Whether as ‘sages’ or ‘guides,’ by definition our educational institutions idealize a validity of personhood that works directly against the already standing emancipation of these children, who now by our definitions are excluded and hereby oppressed. Whom does it support to name these children as oppressed rather than allow them to walk and work in the power of their innate human standing of emancipation?
This institutionalized ideal of the self, while excluding 825 million of the world’s children from participating in the workforce over the next dozen years has at present placed a $1.5 trillion debt burden on the ‘emancipated’ young adults in the United States (Friedman, 2018). With new delinquent balances ($32.6 billion) in student loans outstripping new debt ($29 billion) in the first quarter of 2018 when official unemployment was at record lows, we must consider on whose terms this mockery of ‘emancipatory’ education and ‘self-efficacy’ is being enacted. Only willful blindness could deny that the employee engagement problem is of global proportion and extends as its first point of contact to our children sitting in their virtual and physical classrooms. From this outlook, what it means to be emancipated and engaged at work is spelled out wrong, and education is complicit in the misspelling.

Emancipation is a mutual expression of vulnerability; it is not a matter of validating one’s personal image in the eyes of others (Butler, 2005; Roberts, 2009). Unless it is our desire to conflate emancipation with institutionalized hegemonic oppression, precepts of emancipation cannot be founded on educational attainment (Biesta, 2008). Agency as a social, contingent practice of iteration, announces identity, and not visa versa (Borgerson, 2005; Butler, 1988, 2005).

Thus... the self must ‘allow’ untranslated, unadulterated ‘islands’ of the other to exist within. Here the self opens its boundaries to an other that is beyond its own making. The self and other in such a view are seen as acting intentionally and uncoerced for mutual benefit, choosing first separation, then the extraterritorial solution to separation. (Borgerson, 2005, p. 75)

If there is an act of autonomy, the concept of self-efficacy needs a rewrite (L. Patel, 2015). Autonomy rests in exercising agency as a discipline of ongoing discovery of a contingency between other and self – and not a clinging to authenticity as a pedagogy of willfully blind personal agency. It is in the aesthetic range of being present with each other
(Biesta, 2008; Ranciere, 2004a) that our ability to witness, to be vulnerable to another’s experience, to learn, comes forth.

**Ranciere’s sensibilities.**

The relationships between aesthetics and emancipation becomes clearer in further investigating how artistic abilities provide a gateway into the time and place of address with another. Ranciere illustrates in his conceptualization of autonomy. His position is starkly in opposition to the problematizing of social, cultural and economic capital as predicate to community transformation presented by Bourdieu (1986, 1989), or as applied to employee engagement by the constructs of Job Demands-Resource planning (Saks & Gruman, 2014; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

The written word opens up a space of random appropriation, establishes a principle of untamed difference that is altogether unlike the universal exchangeability of commodities. To put it very crudely, you cannot lay your hands on capital like you can lay your hands on the written word. ... It is a matter of knowing if absolutely anyone can take over and redirect the power invested in language. This presupposes a modification in the relationship between the circulation of language and the social distribution of bodies, which is not at all at play in simple monetary exchange. (Ranciere, 2004a, p. 55)

Here the construct of ‘realloocation’ is not of resource, not of capital, but in the saying and doing – deconstruction and reconstruction – of the sensible. Here, ‘appropriation’ is an implementation of the sensible, as in, a sensible distribution of resource. Emancipation, in this regard, is a conscientious practicing of the form and content of the sensible: a work of art.

Ranciere’s dissensus speaks to a view of politics that transgress and modify the distribution of what is said to, and understood by, whom. If, “A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably” [emphasis added] (Wittgenstein, 1953, n.115), then for Ranciere, transformation transgresses the *picture*. Implicit in this undertaking is an ability to step away – to see what is
conceived of as making sense, and to reimagine and transgress what was previously knowable by whom. “Artistic practices are ‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility” (Ranciere, 2004a, p. 13).

Considering this framework, it is possible to view Butler’s position as complementing what Rancier (2004) signifies as an “aesthetic regime of the arts.” Specifically, for Butler at each heterogeneous address of accountability, “I live a vector of temporalities, one of which has my death as its terminus, but another of which consists in the social and historical temporality of the norms by which my recognizability is established and maintained” (Butler, 2005, p. 35). For Rancier, “The idea of modernity would like there to be only one meaning and direction in history, whereas the temporality specific to the aesthetic regime of the arts is a co-presence of heterogeneous temporalities” (Ranciere, 2004a, p. 26). It is neither a coincidence nor over simplification to bring these two views together: As we are in the iterative process of doing our bodies (Butler, 1988), we engage in the artistic act of doing, inventing, creating our heterogeneous temporalities (Ranciere, 2004a).

[I]t is not a matter of claiming that ‘History’ is only made up of stories that we tell ourselves, but simply that the ‘logic of stories’ and the ability to act as historical agents go together. Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct ‘fictions’, that is to say material rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done. (Ranciere, 2004a, p. 39)

The shift available to the educator is from facilitating the ‘stories that we tell ourselves’ as ‘sage’ or ‘guide,’ to standing as witness to the telling. To educate is to call attention to whom we are in transgressing the limits ‘what is done and what can be done.’ This aesthetic turning finds first that there is never a position of neutrality to facilitate from, and secondarily that one cannot – must not – undo the conflict and confrontation at the limits of personal and social
finitude. However, as *witnesses* we can interrupt, bring attention to, and practice the disinterested judgment – Butler’s *interruption*; Benjamin’s *dialectics at a standstill*; Gadamer’s *empty space of knowing*; Ranciere’s *artistry* – that names, organizes and transgresses conflict and confrontation. We can engage in the *dissensus at the site of our becoming*.

The role of witness is far from effortless. While there is the conflict and confrontation to which we can no longer turn a blind eye, at the same time there is everything to relinquish and nothing to hold on to, no capital to accumulate. To witness is to give up a certain kind of hold on personal identity. We can no longer narrate – facilitate change – from any initial sense of internal consistency or authenticity.

In the language that articulates opposition to a non-narrativizable beginning resides the fear that the absence of narrative will spell a certain threat, a threat to life, and will pose the risk, if not the certainty, of a certain kind of death, the death of a subject who cannot, who can never, fully recuperate the conditions of its own emergence.

But this death, if it is a death, is only the death of a certain kind of subject, one that was never possible to begin with, the death of a fantasy of impossible mastery, and so a loss of what one never had. In other words, it is a necessary grief. (Butler, 2005, p. 65)

Unable to reach into personal authenticity as an infinite source of creativity, we do not have the opportunity to generate or facilitate change from within: change is not ours to command. Change transgresses. It is a *becoming of*, not a *getting to*. “Don’t cling to the wave, which breaks at your foot. As long as it stands in water, new waves will break upon it” (*Benjamin (1973)*, p.13, as translated by S. Weber (2008), p.112). Change lies beyond what *I* have become. It lies at the entry of who *we, each in our own ways*, are becoming. Which is to say, we are not change agents: change is an agent of each of us. Our agentive participation is not self-authenticating, but as witness, educator, *artisan bringing forth attention to form and content* – iterating and transgressing the limits of the sensible (Ranciere, 2004a). As the immediacy of our experience hinges on the musical qualities of relationship, so too do our vulnerabilities and
the expressions of our emancipation. For “those who do not what to change, let them sleep”
(Rumi, Ode 314, rendition by Coleman Barks, 1990, p. 18).

**Music –abilities**

**Overview.**

*How might music listening as an opportunity for reflection, inform employee’s narratives of engagement?* To address the research question, this section includes two sub-sections. First, I provide a philosophical framework for considering music’s social utility. And second, I introduce a macro-level approach that links narrative psychology practices (Carey & Russell, 2009; Freedman & Combs, 2009; Pare & Lysack, 2004; White, 2007) with theories of meaning making in music (Adorno, 1993; Berliner, 1994; Dewey, 1934; Forte, 1979; Goodman, 1968; Green, 1965; Kane, 1962; Meyer, 2008; Schoenberg, 1967, 1969; Small, 1998; Szwed, 2002).

This narrative psychology approach to music includes, externalizing conversations, the absent but implicit and retelling the retelling. Externalizing conversations work to describe the presentation and naming of addressable workplace moments just as notes are explicated in time and rhythm to form melodies. The absent but implicit contextualize externalized subjectivities; in music, these name the harmonies and rhythmic feel of our melodies. Through retelling the retelling – iteration and reiteration – we create truth in our day-to-day communication; and through development, variation, harmonizing and re-harmonizing motivic iteration we create form and structure in music. If in life, these practices bring us face to face with the conflicts and confrontations at the limits of our emancipation, then in music these practices bring us face to face with the rhythms, harmonies, counterpoints, accompaniments and orchestrations that delineate musical persistence in time. This approach is in no way intended to be comprehensive
or conclusive. Within the scope of this study it provides a serviceable framework for exploring aesthetic participation in the workplace.

**Prelude: A note on ‘music –abilities.’**

The term “–ability” is a direct reference to Samuel Weber’s (2008) discussion of Walter Benjamin’s philosophy. Benjamin’s “distinction between ‘iterability’ and ‘iteration,’ ‘repeatability’ and ‘repetition,’ between empirically observable fact and structural possibility, can tell us much about Benjamin’s penchant for forming key concepts in terms of their –ability, rather than their actuality as mere facts” (S. Weber, 2008, p. 6). What Benjamin is concerned with is the very possibility of repetition, the notion that text is a mark that is iterable, repeatable, and translatable. Whether specifically actualized or not, these ‘–abilities’ provide means of relatedness. It is not at the endpoints of relationship, but within relatedness that the experience of the outline unfolds (S. Weber, 2008). To illustrate, in terms of the constructs of translate –ability Benjamin (1969) notes that:

The words *Brot* and *pain* ‘intend’ the same object, but the modes of this intention are not the same. It is owing to these modes that the word *Brot* means something different to a German than the word *pain* to a Frenchman, that these words are not interchangeable for them, that, in fact, they strive to exclude each other. As to the intended object, however, the two words mean the very same thing. (Benjamin, 1969, p. 74)

This is to say, within the end points of *Brot* and *pain*, there is an object, which we may call [bread], which never exists as a subjective experience of either *Brot* or *pain*. It is not in the specific utterance, but in its –ability that [bread] may unfold as some specific utterance – ‘Brot’, ‘pain’, ‘pane’, ‘brood’, ‘bread’, etc. – none of which is ever conducive of the same experience, and yet, still refer to the un-utterable: [bread]. [Bread] not as an ideal form (Plato), but as a never completed iterability, repeatability, translatability. In this sense of music as a repeatable, iterable and translatable quality of relationship, I promote the notion of *music –abilities*. If ‘-
ability’ is “a verb, that is inseparable from time insofar as it involves an ongoing, ever-unfinished, and unpredictable process” (S. Weber, 2008, p. 7), then music –abilities are ‘ongoing, ever-unfinished, and unpredictable processes’ of music.

**Music –abilities, theory.**

What type of language is music? It has been said, widely attributed to Martin Mull (O'Toole, 2010), that, “Writing about music is like dancing about architecture.” Indeed, one of the biggest threats to this research is that when asking others why a music recording is significant or meaningful, the general responses tend to be such statements as: ‘I don’t know; I just like the beat,’ or ‘It’s so deep… you know what I mean?’ As Adorno phrased the problem nearly fifty years ago, any discussion on the musical arts finds itself at a conundrum, “confronted with the fatal alternative between dumb and trivial universality on the one hand and, on the other, arbitrary judgments usually derived from conventional opinions (Adorno, 1997, p. 333)” (Quoted in Leppert, 2002b, p. 75).

Adorno tended to blame the problem on a capitalist culture so caught in consumerism that it was no longer able to listen to the music apart from conferring its commercial standing. From his point of view, we are more concerned with consuming the music than with the music itself. We lose the music by fetishizing it – by paying for amusement such that our purchase of the art defines and bestows our personal image and self-worth (Adorno, 1938/2002). “The reason for the obsolescence of aesthetics is that it scarcely ever confronted itself with its object (Adorno, 1997, p. 333)” (Quoted in Leppert, 2002a, p. 75). Simply put, in recounting all his work as a composer, philosopher and critic of music, Adorno never became a music aesthetics academician because except in the most perfunctory of judgmental terms or in specifically musical terminology, musical works resist interrogation (Leppert, 2002a).
Challenging this standard of practice, by contrasting music with spoken language this chapter seeks to examine music as the object of aesthetic theory. This comparison is not made for the sake of the comparison itself, but because, if, “Writing about music is like dancing about architecture,” then understanding in what ways this saying is accurate may help provide an entryway into what it may be like to dialogically “confront” musical artworks whose terminologies are assumed to be non-verbal.

This sub-section considers the following: Music has since antiquity been considered useless in practical terms. If music is not useless, then what is its utility and what might we learn by examining the structure of its utility? Does this utility, music’s hermeneutics, truly resist interrogation from our spoken language? How then might music acts, as compared to speech acts (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969), be envisioned as narrative practice?

A lack-luster start... with dreadful implications

In Western philosophy, music really does get off to a repressive start. From the outset, censorship, the rule of emotional significance, and classism frame our precepts of art, and especially, formalize our concepts of music. Central to the still living rhizome of aesthetics, instigated in Classical thought is the construct of art as purely representational. If art’s function is solely to imitate and represent then it becomes a question of taste and opinion as to what subjects and objects art should imitate, and ultimately a question of social class structuring as to what and whose art is legitimized as a proper imitation. And then, what should we make of music? It seems far too abstract in its representational ability to imitate articulately.

In Book X of The Republic, Plato distinguishes the deceptive imitations made by artists from the practical work of craftsmen. Overall, Plato creates a pecking order of authenticity. There are the perfect forms created by God, followed by the works of craftsmen whose works
execute God’s forms. And finally, there are the artists, who provide imitations of craftsmen’s works. Not only is art relegated to imitation – representation – but, the entire discussion on art in Book II of the Republic is dedicated to a seemingly endless litany of censorships.

The function for censorship is made clear in Book III: art should be used as propaganda for the state. “Then if any one at all is to have the privilege of lying, the rulers of the State should be the persons; and they, in their dealings either with enemies or with their own citizens, may be allowed to lie for the public good” (Plato, Republic, Book III). Adorno laments on these ramifications to music:

In the Platonic state, the major [scale] of later Western music, which corresponds to the Ionian, would have been tabooed. The flute and the ‘panharmonic’ stringed instruments also fall under the ban. The only modes to be left are ‘warlike, the sound the note or accent which a brave man utters in the hour of danger and stern resolve, or when he faces injury, defeat or death, or any other misfortune, with the same steadfast endurance.’ Plato's Republic is not the utopia it is called by the official history of philosophy. (Adorno, 1938/2002, pp. 289-290)

In these terms it is important to understand just what music is imitating. In a word, Plato’s music imitates socially acceptable taste. As apparent in Book III of the Republic, music imitates the harmony of the world, imparting upon the soul either ‘beauty’ or ‘deformity.’

And of all these [artistic] influences the greatest is the education given by music, which finds a way into the innermost soul and imparts to it the sense of beauty and of deformity. At first the effect is unconscious; but when reason arrives, then he who has been thus trained welcomes her as the friend whom he always knew. ... There is a music of the soul which answers to the harmony of the world; and the fairest object of a musical soul is the fair mind in the fair body. Some defect in the latter may be excused, but not in the former. (Plato, Republic, Book III)

Walter Ong’s (2002) book, Orality and Literacy, suggests that we can see in Plato’s writings the struggles of a society moving from oral tradition to a new tradition transfigured by textual representation. The stylistic emotive recitations of the aural poets became nostalgic, outmoded and inadequate for the clarity of textual inscription a modern republic would come to
require. As recounted by Ong, in the transition from *the word as revealed by the orator* to *the word as inscribed by the writer*, Plato’s litany of censorships and proscriptions depict an unconscious mind tormented by the responsibility of instigating the written word’s tireless technocratic alterations of humanity.

The importance of ancient Greek civilization to all the world was beginning to show in an entirely new light: it marked the point in human history when deeply interiorized alphabetic literacy first clashed head-on with orality. And, despite Plato’s uneasiness, at the time neither Plato nor anyone else was or could be explicitly aware that this was what was going on. (Ong, 2002, p. 27)

In spite of empirical refutation of Ong’s core arguments about the ways literacy modulates cognitive abilities (Scribner, 1981) and how oral societies lack reflexive personal and world views (Prouty, 2006), Ong’s (2002) work is important for depicting just how hegemonic literary thinking became. Even Aristotle seems unable to conceptualize music apart from a literacy-based cognizance of representation. In music’s absence of literary signification, to Plato’s constructs of *art as imitation, art as indoctrination, and music as prescriptive aesthetics*, Aristotle further prescribes music to the *entertainment of the leisure class*:

“Our fathers admitted music into education, not on the ground either of its necessity or utility, for it is not necessary, nor indeed useful in the same manner as reading and writing, which are useful in money-making, … [list of all the ‘useful’ studies of which music is not] … There remains, then, the use of music for intellectual enjoyment in leisure; which is in fact evidently the reason of its introduction, this being one of the ways in which it is thought that a freeman should pass his leisure.” (Aristotle, Politics, Book 8, Part 3)

From these beginnings, it is possible to see how deeply our classism has been inscribed. If music is reserved for the leisure and imparts beauty on the soul, then those with leisure have a beautiful soul. Those without the proper approved music have nothing but the music that imparts deformity – a deformed soul – deformed by nature. A similar construct played out even as John Lee Hooker’s biological father insisted, as was all too common through much of the 20th century
in the United States, that the blues – music performed outside of the church in general – was the work of the devil (Gussow, 2000; Peter Bielka, 2001).

If only to an alternative extreme, in Christopher Small (1998), we see the same classism played out in his analysis of contemporary classical music performance. Small thoroughly dissects the musical listening experience of attending a typical symphony in a present-day concert hall. Everything from the architecture of the hall to the way it is maintained, from the ticket sales to the priority seating, from the bureaucratic organization of the musicians into working groups (section leaders) with an executive director (conductor) to the separation of the performers from the audience… all point to an elitist beauty of ‘highbrow’ music. Music in the concert hall confirms through the purchase of the ticket that one has obtained a seat of importance at a performance that confers an elite position in the grand social order of life (Small, 1998). At least for those who attend, beauty will be bestowed upon the souls of the deserving leisure class. It is little wonder that the actual music is seldom addressed in aesthetic theory (Adorno, 1938/2002).

Obviously, these Classical philosophies of music still impress principles and values into our thinking today that are important to reconcile if we want to understand just what kind of a language music is. In terms of the utility of this language, Steven Pinker (1997), although he deeply appreciates music and provides an excellent analysis of its properties and utilities, broadly suggests that music from an evolutionary perspective, is “auditory cheesecake,” a side effect of the evolution of our language instincts (Pinker, 1997, p. 534). Music has the same “pleasure circuit” utility as “recreational drugs” and “pornography” (Pinker, 1997, p. 524). Neatly extending Aristotle, Pinker stipulates that, “Compared with language, vision, social reasoning, and physical know-how, music could vanish from our species and the rest of our lifestyle would
be virtually unchanged” (Pinker, 1997, p. 528). Pinker’s “speculative” taxonomy theorizes how music sensibilities might work from a cognitive-emotional perspective. His suggestions regarding language structuring, auditory sense-making, emotive communications, habitat selection and generation, and motor control (Pinker, 1997, p. 538), provide an objective analysis in similar areas of concerns as we find in Plato’s Republic, Book II, III and X proscriptions and censorships. Both consider music in terms of what is to be judged good or bad, Pinker in scientific evolutionary terms and Plato in philosophic terms.

Consistent with Aristotle’s assessment of music as a leisure class privilege, Bourdieu theorizes both the liberal and fine arts more broadly as social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1989). Liberal and fine arts education is reserved “only for the offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 54). It takes time to learn liberal and fine arts. To become fluent with any art that is not immediately connected with producing income “the length of time for which a given individual can prolong his acquisition process depends on the length of time for which his family can provide him with the free time” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 54). Today’s debate between STEM and STEAM replay Aristotelian rhetoric. From this point of view, by presupposition, there is no home for music in the workplace.

Like Plato’s observation that music inscribes its value upon the personal soul, Bourdieu (1989) noted that social groups tend to claim objective physical and psychic territory in a hermeneutic process that inscribes artistic values onto the self as well as the local community. “In effect, social distances are inscribed in bodies or, more precisely, into the relation to the body, to language and to time…” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 17). Even as we work to eliminate access barriers in the age of the internet, and regardless of any lingering arrogance about the blues
infringing on listeners’ moral character (or by extension, jazz, rock, hip-hop, rap, etc.), musical
taste still plays a role in knitting together social groupings (Bachmayer et al., 2014; Orozco,
2015; Susen, 2011).

*An ontology.*

Stepping back, looking for a systematic theory that moves toward the utility of music, Gunnar Hindrichs (2018) provides insight. Applying Wittgenstein’s constructs of language games, Hindrichs suggests, that to hear music we must listen in a way that is specifically musical. “[N]ot every kind of listening is apt to disclose the being of music. It [the listening] must be performed in specifically musical terms” (Hindrichs, 2018, p. 77). In this way, to listen to music is to engage in music: ‘Music’ is not a noun but is more clearly represented as a verb. As stated by Christopher Small (1998), “To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (p. 9).

Specifically, Hindrichs (2018) suggests that to hear *sound as music*: (1) We must listen to, or ‘towards,’ something: we must prioritize and select a particular field of sound. (2) To orient ourselves, we must listen within an interpretive frame. “Perceiving something as something is to perceive it according to an interpretation” (Hindrichs, 2018, p. 78). (3) By listening towards, and by listening within an interpretive field, our listening is actively guided. Guided listening leads us forward in expectation of what we might hear next. “[T]he ongoing flow of our perception is guided and determined by the different interpretations according to which we perceive something” (Hindrichs, 2018, p. 78). And finally (4), most relevant for this dissertation, to hear from an interpretive stance not only guides listening but also enrolls behavior. “When we perceive something according to a certain interpretation, we are disposed to behave in a certain
way, while we are disposed to behave in other ways when we perceive it according to other interpretations” (Hindrichs, 2018, p. 78).

These constructs are closely aligned with Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) constructs of phenomenology. We are drawn toward situating ourselves within a field, a gestalt of unified perception that organizes our sense of self within our experience, understanding and situation.

Thus, since every conceivable being is related either directly or indirectly to the perceived world, and since the perceived world is grasped only in terms of direction, we cannot dissociate being from orientated being…” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 295)

Wittgenstein’s and Merleau-Ponty’s constructs provide a useful framework for language games and phenomenology in general. Because musical experience is guided by interpretation that induces behavior, we can say that music is a language. However, Hindrichs’s introductory pragmatics leave open the question of what specifically is meant by ‘music’ versus any other language game or phenomenological experience. And, his answers to this question raise concerns about underlying assumptions instilled in his definition of music.

Specifically, Hindrichs relies on Kantian notions of theoretical, practical and aesthetic judgment to distinguish the ontological realm that defines music. For Hindrichs (2018) music is defined as sound organized in accordance with the Kantian notion of aesthetic judgment. Again, Hindrichs is aligned with Merleau-Ponty. For both, music, like fine art painting and poetry, escapes into itself. As fine art it is devoid of responsibility for reporting theoretically or practically on the natural state of affairs: “speech is applied to nature, whereas music, and painting, like poetry, create their own object, and as soon as they become sufficiently aware of themselves, deliberately confine themselves within the cultural world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 445). And according to Hindrichs:

…unlike practical judgements, aesthetic judgements do not entail any interest in the realization of their contents, for the aesthetic appraisal of something is impartial to the
question of its reality and concerns \textit{facta} and \textit{ficta} likewise. It follows that aesthetic judgements are judgements that are not made true by the facts of the world and are disinterested in their realization. Accordingly, they cannot be reduced to theoretical or practical judgements. (Hindrichs, 2018, pp. 67-68)

This stance is problematic. “Judgement,” including aesthetic judgement, is partial to both theoretical and practical cognition. By “theoretical” understanding, Kant is concerned with the practical and technical qualities of understanding. By “practical” reason he is concerned with moral acts of freedom and moderation of the will.

And since the division of a rational science [-wissenschaft] depends entirely on that difference between the respective objects which requires different principles for [their] cognition, the \textit{technically practical principles will belong to theoretical philosophy} (natural science [lehre]), while the \textit{morally practical ones alone will form the second part, practical philosophy} (moral theory [-lehre]). [emphasis added] (Kant & Pluhar, 1987, pp. 10-11)

Hindrichs’s relegation of music away from what he names as “theoretical judgement” negates music’s technically everyday semiotics. For example, this negation would exclude the musical sounds of microwave ovens, seatbelt and lights-on auditory signals in automobiles, advertising jingles, movies scores and their likes. Music has these obviously technical uses as well as its subliminally technical applications. Even in the concert hall it is doing something Kant would term as “theoretical” in the way its “natural” order distributes human bodies (Small, 1998). More tactically and generically significant, negating music’s connection to ‘natural’ experience negates our music –abilities to practice and participate in intra- and inter- personal \textit{entrainment} necessary for everyday speech and meaning making.

The entrainment of attentional rhythms can be understood as underpinning a number of human social behaviours, including speech and music: if I can entrain to your behaviour and you to mine then we are able to coordinate our actions. Numerous examples of human behaviours – notably musical ensemble – suggest that some mechanism of this kind must exist, while for others – such as turn-taking in conversation and other aspects of linguistic behaviour – it may also be a convincing explanation. (Clayton, 2012, pp. 50-51)
Not only does the art of entrainment (a music–ability) provide an exercise in “theoretical understanding,” but more to the point, doing entrainment well (musically) is essential. Through musical entrainment, rhythmical expectations of utterances are established that organize phonemes into speech. “Groups of syllables and words are made to stand out against one another. We can thus approach the perception of rhythmic regularity as one of the major contributing factors to the two functions of prominence and grouping” (Moore, 2012, p. 45).

Music–abilities call attention to entrainment and to working within and stretching the limits of expectations in both the rudiments of speech and macro level experience of communication. Musical practice in communications cannot be separated from the constructs of what music is by common experience (Clayton, 2012; House, 2012; Moore, 2012).

Further, relegating music–abilities to aesthetic judgment negates music’s “practical” reasonings. “Practically”, to do music, ‘musicking,’ is to participate in a social ordering not as an effect of music, but as musicking per se, as the object itself (Small, 1998). Music is inseparable from its socially signifying potency, its ability to inculcate its structural and performative theory as praxis. As Ranciere relates, as an art, music has the ability to reorganize the sensible: orchestrate the relationships of bodies and understandings (Ranciere, 2004a, 2010). To music is to engage in a ritual act – a demonstration of community belonging. “Since a social order is a matter of relationships between human beings, the performance of this or any other ritual act together is a powerful means of ensuring social cohesion and stability” (Small, 1998, p. 96).

In all cases, practices of music work either “theoretically” or “practically.” One could theorize music generally does both. As such, Hindrichs relegation of music to aesthetic judgment must be rejected. As a language, music acts just as speech acts, impartial to where it
falls within Kant’s frameworks of practical understanding or theoretical reason. This is entirely consistent with Kant: “And yet the family of our higher cognitive powers also includes a mediating link between understanding [theoretical] and reason [practical]. This is *judgment*…” [emphasis in original] (Kant & Pluhar, 1987, p. 16). Or as pragmatically indicated by John Dewey:

> Only the psychology that has separated things which in reality belong together holds that scientists and philosophers think while poets and painters follow their feelings. In both, and to the same extent in the degree in which they are of comparable rank, there is emotionalized thinking, and there are feelings whose substance consists of appreciated meanings or ideas. (Dewey, 1934, p. 76)

But even in Dewey’s pragmatic conceptualization of art, the construal of what it is to *music* – to be engaged in the act of musicking – is lost in his dissociative break with the material discursive world. Dewey is too quick to relegate the material-discursive world to the arts in its entirety:

> If all meanings could be adequately expressed by words, the arts of painting and music would not exist. There are values and meanings that can be expressed only by immediately visible and audible qualities, and to ask what they mean in the sense of something that can be put into words is to deny their distinctive existence. (Dewey, 1934, p. 77)

Because speech cannot exist without musical inflection, it is problematic to suggest that music would not exist if its meaning could be spoken. Music predicates speech. And, while there are expressions of music that elude speech, as we have seen, material-discursive enactment does not define artwork (e.g., Hultin & Mähring, 2017). Another framework for identifying the musical act is necessary. Reframing Hindrichs, it may be said that music acts are concerned with imparting aesthetic judgment. However, this does not discharge music, or any other art, from theoretical or practical reason. Nor does this discharge human and natural sciences and technologies from aesthetic judgment.
The distinction between aesthetic expression and propositional expression can be viewed similarly as the distinction between poetic rhetorical expression and grammatical empirical expression. As Paul Fry points out regarding De Man’s deconstructivist propositions, “without appealing to intention a question is both rhetorical and grammatical—and that inevitably the two questions lurking within the one will have conflicting answers” (Fry, 2012, p. 147). As all language is both poetic and grammatical, and because music is a language, it follows that an ontology of music suggests that the poetics of music – abilities cannot be separated from music’s significations (Small, 1998). Both readings are available in musical expression. Further, I suggest that where both poetic and grammatical expression exist, it is musical integration that sits between these incommensurable readings. This musical activity exists between the poetic and grammatical expressions of text as well as between the aesthetic and material discursive expressivity of human and object embodiment. Music weaves poetic and grammatical interpretation, including, recursively, within the act of musicking.

Accordingly, I suggest that music – abilities can be simply defined as the art of temporality. And more pointedly, musical expression can be defined as the art of auditory temporality. Husserl (1964) supports this proposition when formulating subjective time:

To be sure, we also assume an existing time; this however, is not the time of the world of experience but the eminent time of the flow of consciousness. The evidence that consciousness of the tonal process, a melody, exhibits a succession even as I hear it is such as to make all doubt or denial appear senseless. (Husserl, 1964, p. 23)

However, caution is required even here. Husserl’s ‘conscious time’ prescribes a practice of reductionism, a setting aside of presuppositions and assumptions in the process of listening, with the understanding that by observing the way we observe the world with a bracketing off of presuppositions we may come to better understand not just the world – the melody in this case – but more didactically, we may observe who and what it is that does the understanding (Husserl,
1964; Merleau-Ponty, 1964b). Again, Dewey has similar sentiments. Even as stated at a more macro level: the past is woven into the observing, and is instrumental in creating meaning.

It is even more true that the things which we have most completely made a part of ourselves, that we have assimilated to compose our personality and not merely retained as incidents, cease to have a separate conscious existence [become unconscious]. … Then comes the need for expression. What is expressed will be neither the past events that have exercised their shaping influence nor yet the literal existing occasion. It will be, in the degree of its spontaneity, an intimate union of the features of present existence with the values that past experience have incorporated in personality. (Dewey, 1934, p. 71)

Although Husserl neatly, if unwittingly, in the previous quote establishes music as an art of temporality, the predicating conditions of reductionism, even as pragmatically explicated by Dewey, fail to adequately problematize the underlying socialization of subjective time. A listening that accommodates Husserl’s “eminent time of the flow of consciousness” insists on a totalizing infinitude. As surmised by Merleau-Ponty:

When I carry out the phenomenological reduction, I do not bring back information concerning an external world to a self that is regarded as a part of being, nor do I substitute an internal for an external perception. I attempt rather to reveal and to make explicit in me that pure source of all the meanings which constitute the world around me and my empirical self [emphasis added]. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 56)

This process of reductionism – an attempt to engage in the “pure source of all the meanings” – precludes the notion of a directed listening requisite in Wittgenstein’s language games. Reduction specifically asks to put such directed intentionality aside. It eliminates intentional ‘musical listening’ suggested by Hindrichs (2018). It also precludes listening for the music in common speech (Clayton, 2012; House, 2012; Moore, 2012). Reductionism forecloses intention and its historicity. As a metaphor, in analogue recording tape it is the tape’s bias, its underlying frequency, its intention, which allows sound to be recorded. From waxed phonograph cylinders to digital recordings, audio bias has a history and intentionality. The camera’s shutter speed and capacity of the exposed medium, its intention, allows light to be captured. Again, we
can follow the intention to capture images from the Kodak Brownie to the Apple iPhone.

Without intention there is no music, no image... no language, no experience. Going back to Foucault (1970), human language emerges from the verb ‘to be’: Language asserts its being in the world, its intentionality, its action (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969). This is entirely consistent with Wittgenstein. Intention is not simply personal, but socially constructed – participative.

An intention is embedded in its situation, in human customs and institutions. If the technique of the game of chess did not exist, I could not intend to play a game of chess. In so far as I do intend the construction of a sentence in advance, that is made possible by the fact that I can speak the language in question. (Wittgenstein, 1953, n. 337)

As a result, noted by Stephen Smith (2012), in concurrence with Adorno and Benjamin, the reductionist proposition requires a phantasmagoric breach: a totalizing of infinite past and future history and possibility into the here and now of experience (Merleu-Ponty’s “all the meanings which constitute the world”). For Adorno and Benjamin, experience is finite and real, an indexical iteration. Temporality is not infinite; the here and now is transient and intentional (Smith, 2012). There is always a medium (‘tape’ or ‘film’) of intentionality. In other words, for Adorno and Benjamin, phenomenological reductionism is phantasmagoric and alienating because there is no “pure source of all the meanings which constitute the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 56). Meaning is always in use: finite and contingent (Wittgenstein, 1953) – dependent on the intent of the meaning making process.

So, while we may concur with Merleau-Ponty and Husserl up to a point, critique is required. As demarcated by Dewey, we might surmise across the board that art provides “a complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events” [emphasis added] (Dewey, 1934, p. 19). But this demarcation flies against art’s own contingency and precludes what by common experience we require most from music and all the arts. Kant’s aesthetic judgment derives its power not by alienating practical or theoretical reason, but by providing art the
ongoing opportunity to interrupt and reclaim that which alienates. Specifically, aesthetic judgment allows the disruption of contingencies (Ranciere) that illuminate the ‘eminent’ (Husserl), ‘pure’ (Merleau-Ponty) or ‘complete’ (Dewey) phantasmagoria.

As Ranciere notes, art provides each and every person opportunity to interrupt and reconfigure the sensible: *dissensus* (Ranciere, 2004a, 2010). In reference to Adorno and Benjamin, Stephen Smith summarizes, “With the interruption of the phantasmagoria comes the chance to unearth forgotten barbarism and unrealized possibility. Adorno’s philosophy is essentially concerned with these structures of un-forgetting or anamnesis” (Smith, 2012, p. 400). By disturbing the consequent, impure, the incomplete, we disrupt the ‘*in use*’ – the real. That is, by interrupting the iteration – the *intention* to iterate is observable (Butler, 2011, 2014). *If music is the art of auditory temporality, and art has the potential to interrupt and reassert the sensible, then music can be theorized as an assertion of sensible temporality.*

**Music –abilities, narrative practice.**

As the art of aural temporality, music: (1) is embodied by its participants *thereby establishing subjective temporality* (2) creates its own sense of time, and (3) is structured through interaction thereby *asserting the sensible* by (4) being decisive in its expression. Ian Cross (2001) provides the following definition:

> Musics are cultural particularizations of the human capacity to form multiply-intentional representations through integrating information across different functional domains of temporally extended or sequenced human experience and behavior, generally expressed in sound. (Cross, 2001, p. 38)

In Cross’s definition, “particularizations of…multiply-intentional representations” refers to the understanding that musical expressions tend to be specific (‘particular’) about generalized (‘multiply-intentional’) experience. For example, if Scott Joplin’s “*Solace*” (Joplin, 1909)
evokes ‘sadness’ in one person, it may evoke ‘peacefulness and contentment’ in another, or even both within a single person. While musical utterances are, moment-by-moment, exquisitely specific, there is no requirement that music must be translatable into any specific non-musical representation. “If music is about anything, it exhibits a deictic intentionality, a ‘transposable aboutness’” (Cross, 2001, p. 38). Just as in chess, the intention to checkmate the opponent’s king is inculcated in the intention to play chess (Wittgenstein, 1953), so Cross’s “multiply-intentional representations,” his “transposable aboutness,” is inculcated in the intentionality of musicking.

The task of this section is to show how the chess piece moves of music – melody, rhythm, harmony, inflection, counterpoint, orchestration, etc. – might come to engage in an ongoing process of interrupting and reclaiming that which alienates. How might music –abilities, music’s ‘deictic intentionality,’ interrupt that which professes to be eminent, pure or complete?

To answer these questions, tools of narrative psychology provide an entry point. Externalizing conversations, the absent but implicit, and retelling the retelling provide a macro-level semiotics that describe how music might be understood in terms of fulfilling its role as emancipatory illocution.

Externalizing.

*Well, good morning blues, blues how do you do*
*Well, good morning blues, blues how do you do –
I'm doing all right. Well, good morning, how are you?*
*(Lead Belly, 2012)*

When I externalize my reactions, behaviors and emotions, I describe the contact surface at the site of my becoming. I step back from myself to rub up against that system of unfolding that has ‘set itself up’ within. To externalize is to step back from oneself in a process “that creates some distance between the person and the problem, so that the person has the opportunity
to ‘see’ the ideas or beliefs that support the problem” (Carey & Russell, 2009, p. 324). Simply put, to externalize is to move from “I’m so depressed,” to “Well, good morning blues.”

As noted earlier, problems crop up at intersections set by conflict and confrontation. To continue the example provided by Lead Belly, “There was a white man had the blues. Thought it was nothing to worry about” (first lines of 'Good Morning Blues,' Lead Belly, 2012). As in narrative psychology, the problem’s complex relationship with the subject, iterates a “location in the social, political, and relational context of life” (Carey & Russell, 2009, p. 324). Whether in words or in music, as Judith Butler points out, we never externalize into a passive world. The world we externalize into, if equally contingent, is also complicit in accounting for what is utterable (Borgerson, 2005; Butler, 1988, 2005).

Regardless of the genre of music – folk, religious, jazz, popular, ‘classical,’ etc. – musicians spend time practicing the vocabularies that make musical utterances sensible: scales, arpeggiating chords, and working with riffs and genre-specific culturally significant melodic and rhythmic figures. These are part of the musical language. The externalization of musical meaning requires semantics, explored through practicing musical enunciation. Wittgenstein makes this clear about general language when stating, “In so far as I do intend the construction of a sentence in advance, that is made possible by the fact that I can speak the language in question” (Wittgenstein, 1953, n. 337). Jazz theorist Paul Berliner (1994) provides a similar analysis regarding the jazz musician’s practice of developing musical utterances.

This becomes apparent when, in the natural course of artists’ musings in the practice room, they focus on exploring the potential of particular figures. They might hold one of them in mind, perhaps, or perform it repeatedly, while trying out its combination with other vocabulary patterns within a discrete community of ideas. (Berliner, 1994, p. 185)

Music is externalized into its genre, and whether in tonal music, where its impetus (Wittgenstein’s ‘intention’) is contingent on its tonal center, or in non-tonal music where the
form’s motives work to transcend the limits of harmony, the limits of genre specific form
precedes the germination of the music, determining not only the soil and ecosystem of the
germination, but what types of seeds can be found in the environment. Douglas Green (1965)
describes the germination process in ‘classical’ western traditions.

A seed is, to all appearances, almost insignificant. Yet over a period of time, it develops
by the process of nature into the complex organism we call a flower or tree. A single
tone, too, may seem almost nothing compared to a symphony. But the great
compositions of the recent past have, in the last analysis, ‘grown’ from a single tone, the
keynote. (Green, 1965, p. 300)

From the tonal center, intentionality makes itself clear by individuating the musical
utterance. “The motive generally appears in a characteristic and impressive manner at the
beginning of a piece. The features of a motive are intervals and rhythms, combined to produce a
memorable shape or contour which usually implies an inherent harmony” (Schoenberg, 1967, p. 8).

Importantly, this process of externalizing musical ideas is social. In the ‘classical’
tradition, the community includes the heritage of music that encompasses the composition as
well as the community of musicians and listeners that make the realization of music possible
(Small, 1998). In jazz, the intentionality of community is ubiquitously transparent, as in the
following story from bass player Ruffus Reed, speaking about tenor sax player Dexter Gordon
breaking in a new bass player:

Gordon would say, ‘Now, look, you sound real good, man, but just relax, lay back.’
Then, the next night, he would play more laid back, or what felt to him like more laid
back, and Dexter would say, ‘Relax, man. Just let it flow.’ That kept happening until,
one day, the bass player got sick of Dexter coming to him with this and decided he was
really going to lay back to the point where there was going to be no doubt about his
laying back. So, that night they were playing ballads, and he laid back so far that he
knew [that] when he got off the bandstand and got into the dressing room they were
going to say that it was too far back. He laid back so far that it hurt to do it, like he was
becoming completely unglued with it. He knew they were going to have to say, ‘Not that
much.’ So, he goes into the dressing room after the set, and everyone came into the room
grinning from ear to ear. ‘That’s it!’ they said. ‘You got it now!’ [Reid laughs.] He couldn’t believe it. ([side notes in original] Ruffus Reed quoted in Berliner, 1994, pp. 434 - 435)

The point Reed makes is that the music is always an externalization of a communal construct. By “unglued with it,” Reed describes the musician’s pulling an expression from the self to enact the externalized expression not in the time of the individual musician but in the time of the music. Again, as noted by Small (1998), musicking is participatory. We come into musicking as we come into speaking or playing chess: with the intentionality of the language or game (Wittgenstein, 1953).

Broadway songwriter Dorothy Fields described this participatory construct of the temporality of externalization to Henry Kane (1962). Here, the context is of a song within a show. However, upon inspection, as in Reed’s example, all songs are within a story of one kind or another.

* A song must move the story ahead. A song must not hold back the story, or stall the show. A song must take the place of dialogue, moving the story along. If a song halts the show, pushes it back, stalls it – no matter how good the song – the audience won’t buy it; they’ll be rested, unhappy; and the song, at least as far as the show was concerned, will fail. (Dorothy Fields quoted in Kane, 1962, p. 169)

In both Ruffus Reed’s story and Dorothy Fields’s anecdote we see music as emerging in the same space of contingency that Butler characterizes performative acts of personal identity:

Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives. (Butler, 1988, p. 526)

Given the kaleidoscope of ‘already existing directives,’ in the course of narrative externalization, the process of storytelling in life experience is seldom syllogistic (recall for example, Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). Similarly, as the musical motive germinates, it does so by
taking shape across a disjointed and heterogeneous temporality. Plot lines are woven together, not adjacent. In Michael Whites narrative maps, meaning emerges between the points of contact, within value systems that remain consistent across multiply externalized accountings (White, 2007). As noted by atonal music theorist Allen Forte (1979), the same constructs hold true in music:

That is, given consecutive sections A, B, and C, it is conceivable that whereas A may not be associated strongly with B, it may be closely related to C. It is also possible that a particular section cannot be explained with reference to any other single section, but only in terms of the structure of the entire movement. This implies that it may be necessary to examine not only relations among consecutive sections, but also relations among all combinations of sections up to and including the total movement. (Forte, 1979, p. 124)

Just as personal narratives form and take hold within social contexts that validate social values, so too, music forms and takes hold within musical contexts that validate aesthetic values (Meyer, 2008). The expectations of the time and place of community precede the site not only of externalizing personal narratives, but because music too is a narrative expression, community expectations precede musical action. Art and human belonging are present to historicizing contexts (Meyer, 2008).

Musical utterances differ from speech utterances in that they can externalize experience beyond the boundary where words evaporate and shed their meanings – where historicizing contexts are no longer nameable in words. Whether with the blues, or excitement, or a sense of wonder at of the order of temporality, we come to a location where words give up. Brent Edwards calls our attention to this location in scat singing, particularly as pioneered in the vocalizations of Louis Armstrong:

In vocal expression in music, scat falls where language rustles with alterity, where the foreign runs in jive and the inside jargon goes in the garb of the outsider. …the performance of difference in scat is by no means innocent; it is the very point at which the music polices the edges of its territory. (Edwards, 2002, p. 628)
And so, when Lead Belly sings, “Well, good morning blues, blues how do you do,” we listen beyond the words. The music externalizes an intention to challenge the social norms and values the words can only clothe.

*The absent but implicit.*

If you could jump out of a chord, you could always jump back in. That was a trick I learned from listening to Louis Armstrong and many of the New Orleans musicians like Joe Oliver and Jimmie Noone. *(Trumpeter Doc Cheatham quoted in Berliner, 1994, p. 183)*

Like connecting points on a map, Michael White (2007) describes life’s narratives as a piecing together of memories as scenes in a causal plot line. “And, like other maps, they can be employed to assist us in finding our way to destinations that could not have been specified ahead of the journey, via routs that could not have been predetermined” *(White, 2007, p. 5)*. The points we pick to create plot lines in our narrative maps, and what we say and do in relation to these focal points, like in all good stories, read at two levels. “[T]he meanings that we derive from texts depend on the distinctions we make between what is presented to us (privileged meaning) and what is ‘left out’ (subjugated meaning)” *(Carey & Russell, 2009, p. 321)*.

Reflecting on the hermeneutic circle as posited by Gadamer (1989): as we read the text, personal assumptions are interrupted and reformed creating new meaning, only to be re-reformed again on the next iteration of reading the text. What White (2007) suggests is similar. Implicit in both text’s and life’s engagements, narratives include two parts in the hermeneutic reading: the generation of ‘privileged meaning’ explicit in the words and actions; and the implicit veridiction of assumptions. *Subjugated meaning* permits what was written and done to be understood as true.
Similarly, as every jazz musician knows, in music if there is an inside, there is an outside. The fun is in exploring, bringing out unheard facets of the implicit just beyond the edge of the assumptions that predicate what has been explicitly stated. The concept is not restricted to jazz but is also relevant even in the most indoctrinated forms of western music genres.

Great writers of poetry and prose do not always follow the rules of grammar if by ignoring the rules they can express an idea more clearly or with greater power. Normally great composers follow rules. If the student has learned to recognize and appreciate music which is systematic and precise, he will be in a better position to recognize and appreciate that which is not. (Green, 1965, p. 8)

In effect, in structuring temporality, music works in constant dialogue between the implicit – expected, and the explicit – stated (Meyer, 2008). For the most part, it is actually the unspoken implicit that is foregrounded, whether with Thelonious Monk, Willy Nelson, J.S. Bach, or DJ Jazzy Jeff. The implicit is formalized internally in musical composition and form, and more importantly, it is also formalized through the cultural expectations we come to the listening with (Dewey, 1934; Levitin, 2007; Meyer, 2008). We listen for the implicit and are delighted when expectation is thwarted – when the boarders of reasonableness are transgressed. Levitin (2007) describes with the simple example of Buddy Holly’s song, “This Will Be the Day”:

What Holly does here that is so clever is that he violates our expectations not just with anticipations, but by delaying words. Normally, there would be a word on every downbeat, as in children’s nursery rhymes. But in lines two and four of the song, the downbeat comes and he’s silent!

[pick up] Well, you
[line 1] GAVE me all your lovin’ and your
[line 2](REST) tur-tle dovin’ (rest),
[line 3] ALL your hugs and kisses and your
[line 4] (REST) money too.)

This is another way that composers build excitement, by not giving us what we would normally expect. (Levitin, 2007, p. 66)
Meyer’s seminal work in emotion and meaning in western classical music (originally published in 1956) details a myriad of ways that western music involves the dialogue between implicit expectation and explicitly thwarting expectation.

If tendencies are pattern reactions that are expectant in the broad sense, including unconscious as well as conscious anticipations, then it is not difficult to see how music is able to evoke tendencies. For it has been generally acknowledged that music arouses expectations, some conscious and others unconscious, which may or may not be directly and immediately satisfied. (Meyer, 2008, p. 25)

In order to thwart expectation, expectations need to be set. However judgmental it may strike us, some level of mastery over the ability to enunciate a cultural domain of musical expectations within the craft has been a long-standing requisite of communicating in music. As it would be difficult to play chess with someone who did not understand chess moves, typically it is difficult to create music with someone unable or unwilling to follow the rudiments of the musical genre they are undertaking. The implicit intentions of music are explicitly cultural and learned. For example, Schoenberg has harsh comments regarding inadequate mastery of choral voice-leading in the tradition of early western classical music:

Of course, part-leading must not be allowed to be a handicap to one who attempts these advanced studies. One who cannot control four parts with a certain ability either has not worked seriously or is entirely untalented and should give up music at once.
(Schoenberg, 1969, p. xvi)

Similarly, the power of socially implicit expectations is clearly articulated when looking at reactions to Miles Davis’s music between the end of the 1960’s and the beginning of the 1970’s. Consider first the reactions of Herbie Hancock regarding Miles’s adeptness at transforming and freeing implicit intentionality within the ensemble, working on Ron Carter’s composition ‘Eighty-One’ toward the end of the 1960’s:

Miles took the first two bars of melody notes and squished them together, and he took out other areas to leave a big space that only the rhythm section would play. To me, it sounded like getting to the essence of the composition. He’d take inherent structure and
leave us room to breathe and create something fresh every night. There were the basic elements of the song, but not used exactly as they were in the composition. (Herbie Hancock quoted in Szwed, 2002, p. 252)

In contrast, as Miles reinvented the trajectory of his music in the early 1970’s here is Charlie Mingus’s reaction: “I don't think he’s [Miles] around anymore, unless you mean this guy who had a trumpet that I saw with pictures of naked white girls. I gave a trumpet to my four-year-old nephew, and he made better sounds than this guy” (Charlie Mingus quoted in Szwed, 2002, p. 313). It was not simply a question of whether Miles had sold out to rock-fusion. As made clear by another anecdote related in Szwed (2002) by Rusty Allen, bass player of Sly & the Family Stone:

One night at Sly's apartment when Miles was there and ‘got on Sly's organ and started to voice these nine-note ethereal chords.’ Sly was way back in the bedroom and he came out yelling, ‘Who in the fuck is doing that on my organ?’ He came in and saw. ‘Miles, get your motherfucking ass out,’ he said. ‘Don't ever play that voodoo shit here. Get the fuck out.’ Miles left and I said, ‘Sly, that was Miles Davis you was talking to.’ ‘I don't give a fuck,’ he said, ‘playing that shit on my organ.’ (Szwed, 2002, p. 337)

In Michael White’s narrative practices ‘absent but implicit’ beliefs emerge as a source of underlying positive values central to empowering transformation (Carey & Russell, 2009; Pare & Lysack, 2004). But here, we see the other face of the implicit: a set of social expectations, themselves demarcating the boundaries of the acceptable. We cannot assume either the implicit or explicit is just and liberating while the other unjust and oppressive. What is required is dialogue negotiating the boundaries (in narrative psychology, see Pare & Lysack, 2004).

Musicking, as externalization, provides that dialogic space by constantly contesting, within each utterance, the boarders between explicit statement and implicit expectation. The contention is always exquisitely particular in its enunciation, no matter how generalized the musical refrain. Herein lies music’s ability to reorganize the sensible (Ranciere, 2004a, 2010).
The gravestone of Memphis Minnie states much more simply these “particularizations of...multiply-intentional representations” (Cross, 2001, p. 38):

The hundreds of sides Minnie recorded are the perfect material to teach us about the blues. For the blues are at once general, and particular, speaking for millions, but in a highly singular, individual voice. Listening to Minnie's songs we hear her fantasies, her dreams, her desires, but we hear them as if they were our own. (Memphis Minnie's gravestone text, Reed, 2006)

Least this section lead to a belief that transgressing the boundaries of the sensible in music are mere disputes between the artistic elite, what is ‘serious’ and what it means to utter a musical phrase can be summarized in two turns that take us to the cusp of the contention.

You come to a point in your work, if you are a certain kind of person, when it becomes serious to you. From there on out, you are writing serious music, no matter what the world calls it, and you are working at it, and learning at it, if you know what I mean. ... When a person discovers what he wants to learn – that’s when the real education begins. (Duke Ellington as quoted in Kane, 1962, p. 11)

Music, in the full sense of the art, is a ‘serious’ exploration of the absent but implicit, not for the elite, but for each and every person. But without a ‘serious’ intention to rearrange the sensible (Ranciere, 2010), Duke Ellington’s ‘real education’ may be illusive. To learn, we must continually ask – witness: just what is the conflict and contention that we work so hard to avoid at life’s current juncture? What is this disruptive space that music claims between the implicit and explicit?

*Through all the sorrow of the Sorrow Songs there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things. The minor cadences of despair change often to triumph and calm confidence. Sometimes it is faith in life, sometimes a faith in death, sometimes assurance of boundless justice in some fair world beyond. But whichever it is, the meaning is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins. Is such a hope justified? Do the Sorrow Songs sing true?* (Du Bois, 1903, p. 187)
Retelling the retelling.

[T]he narrator’s only claim to competence for telling the story is the fact that he has heard it himself. The current narratee gains potential access to the same authority simply by listening. It is claimed that the narrative is a faithful transmission (even if the narrative performance is highly inventive) and that it has been told ‘forever’… (Lyotard, 1979, p. 20)

An aphorism frequently attributed variously to the likes of Dizzy Gillespie, Kenny Barron and Curtis Fuller, is that if you make a mistake in an improvised solo, repeat the mistake a few more times, and it sounds great (Berliner, 1994, p. 212). Such is the authority to speak the truth, granted to the narrator. “If a structure, ideal, or subject identity must be iterated, Butler argues, then it is not absolute or ideal, as the existence is in the iteration” (Borgerson, 2005, p. 70). Biesta (2008) reminds us that we retell not to fixate on absolutes or ideals, but to iterate and redefine the fitness of the telling in new contexts.

…remember Karl Marx's dictum that ‘it is not the consciousness of man that determines their being but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness’ — but also, and more importantly, that ideology is thought ‘which denies this determination.’ (Biesta, 2008, p. 171)

The retelling of the retelling is an ungluing of the ideal in the name of the embodied and kinetic. Each iteration is a becoming in life’s unfolding, a frame in the film.

Music’s authority lays soli in its social enactment: the retelling of the retelling. Music, like spoken narrative, is a doing. It is an expression of temporality that legitimates ways of interacting.

Narratives, as we have seen, determine criteria of competence and/or illustrate how they are to be applied. They thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do. (Lyotard, 1979, p. 23)
And so, in music, the retelling is of *that which has “been told ‘forever’.*” Music enacts the social norms that iterate what *can be* legitimately uttered. *Music’s most basic utterances are in fact sensible only through their iterative constitution.* In tonal western ‘classical’ music:

The motive is a short melodic fragment used as a constructional element. However, not every short melodic figure is a motive. In order to act as a constructional element and thus constitute a motive, a melodic fragment must appear at least twice, though reappearances need not be in the original form. (Green, 1965, p. 31)

As Green indicates, motives do not need to be repeated exactly the same way to rise to the level of meaning making stature. As an art, music tests the borders of comprehensibility. As such, not only is it common to reiterate musical utterances in different contexts to test the fabric of their meaning, but also musical gestures are imitated by exploring the tactical and theoretical possibilities of variation. “The technique of imitation... occurs quite commonly in any of its various types: Real, or exact imitation... Imitation by inversion... Tonal imitation... Free imitation occurs when the imitating voice changes the motive rhythmically... Imitation of rhythm only…” (Green, 1965, pp. 36-37). By transfiguring the expected, reshaping the comprehensible, iteration shifts toward the *absent but implicit.* The original motives and contexts become implicit while the variations explicate the here and now, defining new constructs of sensibility.

While true in all music, especially intentionally developed in the jazz tradition, musical motives escape the confines of individual compositions, working themselves out through the vocabulary and musical lives of their performers. These musical motives, ‘riffs,’ appear as improvisations over any number of songs. Riffs are passed from generation to generation, taken up from performer to performer, not only verbatim, but also explored against their theoretical variations and possibilities. That is, the harmonic, rhythmic and melodic sensibilities of riffs are reconstituted as new retellings of the retellings. These tests of the sensible are embodied within physical limits of the musical instruments and musicians’ abilities, giving the performer and the
music its own direction, its own intentionality. In this way, musical utterances participate in the social wiring depicted by neurologist Matthew Lieberman (2013): the creation of identity where, “The self-system serves as a Trojan horse, sneaking in the values and beliefs of those around us under the cover of night without our ever being the wiser” (Lieberman, 2013, p. 301). In this light, jazz works as a practice of actively uncovering implicit systems of social and cultural understanding, while all the while these discoveries individuate the players and listeners.

Like their vocabulary stores, performers’ individual theoretical methods typically synthesize their personal discoveries with the most useful ideas gleaned from other players. The ease with which artists can negotiate patterns derived from theory when actually mapped out on an instrument, in part a function of their idiosyncratic physical characteristics, further delineates individual methods and contributes to the basis for personal styles or systems of improvisation. (Berliner, 1994, p. 169)

However, under no circumstances can this process be construed as utopian. In challenging the borders of sensibility, music is also a site that reiterates toxic norms of identity construction. In addition to the (sometimes questionable) normative truths inculcated in lyrics, music inculcates non-verbal truths. For example, Green, without comment or disclosure documents a common non-verbal ‘truth’ about masculinity and femininity in tonal music:

The masculine ending is a stronger form of cadence than the feminine ending; that is, if the final chord of the cadence falls on a stronger beat of the measure than does the penultimate chord, the cadence is stronger than when the reverse situation obtains. (Green, 1965, p. 9)

Music is no more or less prone to iterating oppressive tropes than any other human endeavor. Music can sing the gospel (Du Bois, 1903) or explicitly and implicitly promote allegiances to racism and fascism (Richardson, 2017). There are two aspects to consider.

First, music’s telling depends on who is retelling what. Here, a look at comments from Schoenberg, the band Outlandish, and Adorno provide helpful examples.

For Schoenberg, form and function within the composition drive music’s sensibilities:
Used in the aesthetic sense, form means that a piece is organized; i.e. that it consists of elements functioning like those of a living organism. Without organization music would be amorphous mass, as unintelligible as an essay without punctuation, or as disconnected as a conversation, which leaps purposelessly from one subject to another. The chief requirements for the creation of a comprehensible form are logic and coherence. (Schoenberg, 1967, p. 1)

Hence, Schoenberg’s sense of emancipation is realized through a framework of form and function. For instance, “The procedure is based upon my theory of ‘the emancipation of the dissonance.’ Dissonances, according to this theory, are merely more remote consonances in the series of overtones.” (Schoenberg, 1969, p. 193). For Schoenberg, the progressive drive of form and function are not just compositional, but historicizing as well, “Thus to the ear of today, their [dissonance] sense-interrupting effect has disappeared. Their emancipation is as justified as the emancipation of the minor third was in former times” (Schoenberg, 1969, p. 193).

Alternatively, for the band Outlandish, music is a connector, a speaking from one person to another in a context of common dignity. In the retelling of day-to-day experience – in this case of Muslim identity in predominantly Christian Danish culture – they convey that national boundaries are not in place to alienate, but to make sensible the belonging of people of all origins (Hilal, 2015). As stated by band member Lenny Martinez in RollingStone India, “For us, music is a way to express our everyday lives. It’s always been a very down-to-earth, human message, the way we are” (Vaidyanathan, 2016).

And, in consideration of music’s telling always entirely relying on whom is retelling what, turning now to Adorno’s thoughts, care must be exercised in light of the observation that music is mute regarding utopian expression.

What music says is a proposition at once distinct and concealed. Its idea is the form of the name of God. It is demythologized prayer, freed from the magic of making anything happen, the human attempt, futile, as always, to name the name itself, not to communicate meanings. (Adorno, 1993, p. 402)
Adorno’s words take us to the sub-structure of music’s expressivity. Regardless of what is being told by whom, in the retelling, music, even as it fails to explicate propositional meaning, it makes explicit the harmonies, counterpoints, rhythms and orchestrations of what can be held as experience – it reaches toward the name of God without judgement. Dewey shares this perspective in comparing music with sculpture:

As one [sculpture] expresses the enduring, the stable and universal, so the other [music] expresses stir, agitation, movement, the particulars and contingencies of existences—which, nevertheless, are as ingrained in nature and as typical in experience as are its structural permanences. With only a background there would be monotony and death; with only change and movement there would be chaos, not even recognized as disturbed or disturbing. (Dewey, 1934, pp. 145-146)

Whether enunciated to claim fascism and fear mongering or to celebrate justice and freedom, because music organizes the sensibilities of harmony, counterpoint, rhythm, articulation, etc., it necessarily conjoins the sensibilities of human relationship. Just as what is left unsaid in the absent but implicit is individuated (the implicit is finite and individual, not infinite and universal (in narrative psychology: Carey & Russell, 2009; in music: Smith, 2012)), similarly in the retelling of the retelling, music reaches for what cannot be articulated in words, and it does so personally, explicitly and at a particular time and place. Our music –abilities organize the sensible and intentionality of relationship, and so our musicking is finite, specific and individuated. That which cannot be said in words, achieves its utterance:

Do ba-na co-ba, ge-ne me, ge-ne me!
Do ba-na co-ba, ge-ne me, ge-ne me!
The child sang it to his children and they to their children’s children, and so two hundred years it has travelled down to us and we sing it to our children, knowing as little as our fathers what its words may mean, but knowing well the meaning of its music.
(Du Bois, 1903, p. 182)
Summary Remarks

At the outset of the literature review I asked, “How, in a world dominated by data generation and analysis can I draw focus towards another way of being? A musical way.” In the last analysis, music was identified as an art of temporality.

This calls attention to the opening quote of the dissertation from Rabbi Hillel. Within the assertion of self is the assertion of other. But the art of community lies in the question, ‘if not now, then when?’ That is to say, creating community, like musicking, is an art of temporality. It is not in the individual songs, symphonies, videos, dances, performances and track mixes, but in the music – abilities of everyday interactions from which our music emerge. Returning to the remarks of Arnold Berleant (2012), “It is a knowledge achieved through a sympathetic participation in aspects of the world that we grasp immediately, by acquaintance, and not through concepts, definitions, or proof” (Berleant, 2012, pp. 19-20). Indeed, music renders our voices as recognizable. Employee engagements are the workings of art, the enactments of time, rhythm, harmony and counterpoint.

This literature review presented a theoretical framework that integrated communicating, educating and music – abilities. The section on communicating reviewed Foucauldian sensibilities regarding the relation of words and power. Words were described as real, living forces, and yet no less precarious and contingent than the lives that speak them. The education section followed Biesta (2008). Resting on Foucault we turned toward Ranciere in establishing an emancipatory stance on education framed on aesthetic distance (Ranciere, 2004a, 2010; Ranciere & Gage, 2016). Through the work of Adorno, Merleau-Ponti, Husserl, Dewey, and their followers an ontology of music was established, similar in definition to Cross (2001). As an art of temporality, music semiology was explored in terms of narrative psychology practices.
Narrative psychology practices in the tradition of Michael White (2007) provided pragmatic practices helpful in exploring Ranciere’s ‘dissensus.’ White’s praxis included concepts of externalizing conversations, the absent but implicit, and retelling the retelling (Carey & Russell, 2009; Freedman & Combs, 2009; Pare & Lysack, 2004).

When turning next toward methodology (Chapter III), the intent is to construct an interview protocol that allows the music-abilities of day-to-day interaction to challenge conscious and unconscious forms of social alienation. The narrative-musical framework returns in the analysis section (Chapter IV) as a process for retelling the interviews.
III. Methodology

Reiteration of the Problem of Practice

Gallup estimates that just 33 percent of US employees are actively engaged at work; 51 percent are “not engaged” and the remaining 16 percent are “actively disengaged.” (Clifton, 2017). While 94 percent of global business leaders agree that employee engagement is critical to business outcomes, less than 20 percent believe that organizations are effective in improving it (CEB, 2016). The manifest problem facing employers and employees is that overall, the workplace seems inhospitable to employee participation.


2. Employee engagement extends beyond the workplace as a broader social phenomena (Robison, 2013; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

3. An ongoing crisis of disenfranchisement plagues employment practices in the United States (Braun et al., 2014; Council of Economic Advisers, 2016; Mazumder, 2011).

4. The alienation of middle-class employees from work has been identified as a likely contributor to a morbid crisis of despair (Case & Deaton, 2015, 2017). The employment practices of disenfranchisement includes both those who have left the workforce as well as those who are employed, where fully half of ‘fully engaged’ employees are exhausted, burned out and ready to quit (Moeller et al., 2018).

As such, this research views the employee engagement problem as a pervasive and ubiquitous form of alienation, leaving no one untouched. Using music as an opportunity for reflection, this
research begins by investigating with employees in the greater Boston area, “What has set itself up in us?” (Adorno, 2001, p. 169)

Restatement of the Research Question

*How might music listening, enrolled as an opportunity for reflection, inform employees’ narratives of engagement in the Boston area?* Here, music has been defined as “the aural art of temporality,” and employee engagement has been defined as “active participation in the core values, principles and practices of the workplace.” As such, two sub-questions emerged in the literature review:

- How is organizational temporality performed? Stated alternatively, how is time within the organization, organized? Is temporality organic and subjective, having freedom to contend with the conflicts and contentions between implicit and explicit narrative unfolding? Or, is temporality framed on a concept of transparency and clockwork that jettisons the rhythm and groove that allows harmony and counterpoint to take form. Or, yet again, is there another sense of time that allows for displacement of contexts, interruptions that hold ‘dialectics at a standstill’ (Benjamin, 1973, p. 13): a temporality that, “authorizes oneself to think—within the context of a different time and place—what that particular time considered illegitimate to thinking?” (Ranciere & Panagia, 2000, p. 122)

- What systems of values does the organization’s music of engagement authorize? What, if anything, is being turned upon itself in the resolutions of dissonance to harmony at melodic cadence points within the organization’s narratives? What might this have to do with the sense of alienation foregrounded in the problem of practice?
Research Paradigm

Inquiry that aspires to the name ‘critical’ must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within the society. Research becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label ‘political’ and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness. Whereas traditional researchers cling to the guardrail of neutrality, critical researchers frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world. (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 164)

Through the interview process six research participants compared personal narratives of workplace participation with personal narratives of music listening in order to reflect upon and possibly modify personal employee engagement practices. Usually in critical studies the researcher is considered as a change agent. However, in this study change is considered as constant, pervasive and unyielding. While as a result of participating in this research some participants may elect to disrupt change in their organizations, the emphasis in this study remains on witnessing rather than facilitating.

The intent was to provide an opportunity for participants to step back and listen to the ongoing nature of organizational change from an aesthetic perspective. By holding two frames of reference simultaneously in focus – a preferred recording and a workplace meeting – it was hoped that participants would be able to witness what may have been hidden in unconscious agreement.

[I]n order to constitute a moment in thinking, a moment that gives itself to thought, it is perhaps always necessary for there to be two temporalities at work; in order to constitute an object of thought it is perhaps equally necessary to have two different registers of discourse in play. (Ranciere & Panagia, 2000, p. 123)

Population and Recruitment

Six research participants from the Boston Area were solicited through social media, professional networking opportunities in Boston, and personal contacts. Originally, all
participants were to be selected from large corporations. The restriction on large corporations was removed after two months of recruitment effort. Because this research is focused on workplace experience more broadly, a broader range of participation allowed a broader range of understanding and significantly facilitated recruitment efforts.

- Social network postings on Facebook, LinkedIn and through on-line alumni association resources were used. This included: (1) an “Article” on LinkedIn soliciting participants, compliant with IRB requirements for recruiting research participants (Appendix 1, LinkedIn Article); (2) a “Post” on Facebook, announcing the study and directing anyone interested to the LinkedIn Article (Appendix 2 – Facebook Post); and (3) Posts to social media sites of alumni associations of University of Massachusetts, Boston, Graduate School of Business and Boston Conservatory of Music at Berklee, Boston (Appendix 3, Alumni Posts).

- Word of mouth through work association with prior professional colleagues, family and friends. All word of mouth solicitations included: (1) The research question, “How might music as an opportunity for reflection inform employee narratives of engagement?” and (2) the problem of concern stated as employee alienation. For those interested in the research, I informed them of the expectations for research participants, that participation would be confidential, that participants could leave the study at any time, that I would be the sole investigator, and that the research would be in conjunction with my dissertation at Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies.
Sampling strategies and criteria.

Participants were required to be able to conduct the interview process in English language and be currently working in the Boston area. This research was not dependent on job role, music literacy, age, race, gender or other biological, social or cultural identity markers. Knowing that different perspectives would enrich the study, every effort was made to solicit a diverse group of participants. Ultimately, three men and three women participated. Participants ranged from early to late career professionals in finance, nutrition, education and law. One participant was Chinese, living in China and working remotely for the Boston branch of an international finance company. One participant was Russian, having immigrated to the United States many years ago. The remaining participants were white Non-Hispanic and born in the United States.

Finding a group of participants within the reach of my social networking skills, who were willing and able to engage in a ninety-minute interview linking music to employee engagement, presented three significant bias problems.

- Only those with the social, cultural and economic capital required to participate in the study were able to volunteer (Bourdieu, 1986). To help offset this bias, announcements were clear that research was to be conducted at a time and place convenient to the research participant. Childcare cost reimbursement was offered. And, a neutral location, a meeting room at Northeastern University, was also offered. The neutral location was utilized for three of the interviews.

- Only those with an active affinity for music volunteered. Although the focus of the research was not music, but music—abilities, this bias was not mitigated. The ability to notice the harmony, counterpoint, inflections, rhythms, etc. of daily life do not
require or necessarily benefit from an affinity or special training in music. There is much evidence that musicality is intrinsic to human cognition: no special training or affinity is required to be musically adept (Honing & Ploeger, 2012). In any case, all participants reported enjoying music listening and four of the six reported enjoying playing an instrument, dancing or singing recreationally. No attempt has been made to speculate on how deeply the participants’ music affinities affected the interviews, analysis or findings.

- Based on the interviews, all volunteers could best be described as being highly engaged, very actively participating in the core values, principles and practices of the workplace. This was not the intended result of the recruitment process as this study views those who struggle with employee engagement as perhaps the most engaged at the outset; otherwise, engagement would not be a problem for them (Carey & Russell, 2009). Moreover, this research is most concerned with those who are apathetic about the engagement problem. Non-the-less, all who volunteered were highly engaged employees. As a result, this research is heavily biased by narratives of those who actively care deeply about their work and workplace. All participants cared deeply about those with whom they work.

**Research Method**

*In its hard labors in the domain of complexity, the bricoleur views research methods actively rather than passively, meaning that we actively construct our research methods from the tools at hand rather than passively receiving the ‘correct,’ universally applicable methodologies. Avoiding modes of reasoning that come from certified processes of logical analysis, bricoleurs also steer clear of preexisting guidelines and checklists developed outside the specific demands of the inquiry at hand.*

(Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 168)
As developed in the literature review, the methodology for this research has been assembled in bricoleur fashion from many disciplines including: linguistic philosophy; dialectic narrative theory and narrative psychology; phenomenology; aesthetic theory; music – listening, composition, harmony, improvisation and performance theory; and critical and post-critical pedagogic theory. *This assemblage is as an attempt to provide a methodological approach to listening appropriate to the music–abilities inherent in the employee engagement problem.*

**Interview protocol.**

*When philosophers use a word — ‘knowledge’, ‘being’, ‘object’, ‘I’, ‘proposition’, ‘name’ — and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? — What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.* (Wittgenstein, 1953, n.116)

Riach et al. (2016) suggest that research data is not gathered but generated. In research, we pull words, concepts and narratives away from their everyday use. Accordingly, “We use the term ‘data generation’ rather than ‘data collection’ to emphasize that research data is generated through the research process rather than pre-exists it, awaiting ‘capture’” (Riach et al., 2016, p. 2072). What is said in a research process is not what is necessarily said otherwise, regardless of how reflexive and transparent an environment the research constructs. The most important features of ‘generating’ versus ‘collecting’ data is the recognition that not only does generated data have a self-serving quality, but it may also generate outcomes that hegemonically obscure the intersections of the research and ‘real’ worlds (Riach et al., 2016).

This research protocol was developed conscious that the discourse between researcher and participant has its own hegemonic and biased temporality, leaving a trail, evidenced in the physical world – recording, transcript, e-mail, etc. – and later observed as ‘generated data.’ Data and the impact of its generation is necessarily instigated by the specific research question and
methodology (Riessman, 2012). Conscious that generated data needs to be grounded in day to day reality, the data generation process for this research included the following steps.

1. Reflexive personal written memos (on-going)
2. Informed Consent Form
3. Participant Information Request Form
4. Interview Part I. Significant engagement narrative
5. Interview Part II. Preferred listening narrative
6. Interview Part III. Contrasting engagement and music listening narratives
7. Observational notes, audio recordings and transcripts of interviews
8. Analysis of individual interviews
9. Follow-up sessions with participants

1. Reflexive personal notes (on-going).

Meaning is created through a constant interplay of presence/absence and what is not said is as important as what is said because each supplements the other. Reflexive researchers recognize oppositional logic as implicit, and actively explore the paradoxical relationship between presence and absence. (Cunliffe, 2003, p. 987)

The foundation of this research has remained reflexive throughout. Exploring the boundaries between the externalized explicit and the unstated implicit, it has elicited utterances that emerged both intentionally and ‘accidentally’ – gestures that only upon reflection have contested the complacency of retelling of the retelling. To actively engage in personal reflexivity, I kept a diary of thoughts and ideas throughout the research process and shared these with participants during the interviews and follow-ups. Participants were encouraged to test my assumptions during the interview, when reviewing the interview informed consent form, and in our follow-up communications after the interview.
2. **Informed Consent Form.**

I e-mailed a cover letter (Appendix 4 – E-Mail response to participant solicitations) and a PDF version of the Informed Consent Form (Appendix 5 – Informed Consent Form) to those who responded to participant solicitations. I corresponded with participants to arrange a time to conduct a detailed overview of the Informed Consent Form by phone. Participants and I reviewed the form over the phone and again at the commencement of the in-person interview, where the form was signed. The Informed Consent Form provided all the details of the interview and research process, written in plain language.

3. **Participant Information Request Form.**

A Participant Information Request Form (Appendix 6 – Participant Information Request Form) was sent with a cover notification (Appendix 7 – Participant Information Request Form Cover Letter) via e-mail as a MS word document to participants who had indicated that they wanted to participate in the research. Participants were instructed to complete the document using MS Word and return it via e-mail. The Participant Information Request Form:

- Provided my contact e-mail and phone number for the participant to use if any questions about the research or interview arose at any time during the research.
- Briefly disclosed in non-academic terms the interview process and questions.
- Informed the participant that although no additional preparation was required, the participant was welcomed to consider the research questions prior to the interview and if desired, to bring notes to the interview.
- Asked the research participant to disclose: name, organizational role, number of years with organization, and number of years in current role.
• Provided the participant the option of giving a preferred alias, personal pronoun, and company alias for the purposes of the published work. The form notified the participant that if no aliases were provided, aliases would be provided for them.

• Asked the research participant to provide a brief written summary of a consequential meeting or discussion to be discussed in the interview. By ‘consequential,’ the meeting or discussion selected by the participant was to be one that confirmed or changed thoughts, feelings or behaviors in relation to personal engagement in the workplace. The summary included: (1) the roles of participants in the meeting and organizational relationship of those in the meeting to the participant; (2) the purpose of discussion; (3) the topics or subjects covered in the event; (4) the tone of the meeting; and (5) the meeting outcomes.

• Asked the participant to provide a URL link or written reference to a preferred recording/music video to be listened to during the interview. By “preferred recording” the form noted, “This does not have to be your ‘favorite’ piece of music, nor does it have to be related to your workplace experience. Please pick a recording that you feel a personal connection with.”

4. **Interview Part I. Significant engagement narrative.**

The purpose of this section of the interview was to ground the research in the participant’s employee engagement narrative. By having the participant disclose a ‘consequential’ engagement narrative before the interview, the temporal ‘address’ of the narrative was extended beyond the designated interview time. The following questions were used to prompt the participants in performing their narratives of employee engagement:
1. Please provide me with a brief history. How is it that you came to work for [name of company] as a [name of role]? How is it you found yourself in the meeting you described in the Participant Information Request Form?

2. If you feel comfortable doing so, please close your eyes for a moment. Think back to that meeting. Please describe what you heard. The way words were said, who did the talking, how slowly or quickly did different participants contribute to the conversation, their rates of speech, the physical qualities of the conversation. What did you hear?

3. Given what you heard, how did that feel? How do you feel now about what you heard?

4. Given what you heard and how it felt, given what was said, what does that tell you? What held the meeting together as a meaningful experience? What was significant to you when you attended that meeting and now as you think back? Did the meeting convey a message you personally would like to convey to others? At work, in what ways are you able to convey or disavow this type of message?

5. *Interview Part II. Preferred music listening narrative.*

The purpose of this section of the interview was to ground the research in the participant’s music listening narrative. By having the participant disclose a ‘preferred’ music recording before the interview, the temporal ‘address’ of music –abilities related to employee engagement was extended beyond the designated interview time. After the first question, soliciting a narrative frame of reference for the preferred recording, we stopped speaking and listened to a recording of the participant’s preferred music. I provided identical mid-quality
noise cancelling headphones for the participant and me. I played the recording from my laptop using a headphone output splitter. The following questions were used to assist participants:

1. Please provide me with a brief history. How is it that you came to prefer [music genre], [name of band (or composer)], this song, [name of song]? How is this music important to you?

[Music Listening]

2. If you feel comfortable doing so, please close your eyes for a moment. Think back to hearing the music just now. Please describe what you heard. The way melodies, rhythms, harmonies worked together. Which instruments or vocalists did the talking? How slowly or quickly did different participants contribute to the music, the rate of ‘speech,’ the physical qualities of the musical conversation. What did you hear?

3. Given what you heard, how did you feel when listening to the music? How do you feel now about what you heard?

4. Given what you heard and how it felt, given what was said, what does that tell you? What held the music together as a meaningful experience? What is significant to you when you hear the music? Does the music convey a message you personally would like to convey? In your day-to-day experience, what ways are you able to convey or disavow this type of message?

6. Interview Part III. Contrasting engagement and listening narratives.

Having just answered the same set of questions about both a significant employee engagement experience and preferred music listening experience (What did you hear? How did that feel? What does that tell you?), the purpose of this portion of the interview was to ground the research in the participant’s reflections on their responses. The key sub-liminal questions for
this portion of the research were: How does the participant experience temporality within the organization? Does the performance of temporality within the organization indoctrinate or pacify a set of values or beliefs? Or, does the organization’s ‘music’ emancipate employees at the site of conflict and contention of these beliefs?

1. When we discussed your important meeting, you mentioned that you heard: [read from notes taken]. When we discussed your preferred music, you mentioned that you heard: [read from notes taken]. In what ways do the meeting and preferred music get along together or clash? How would you describe the ‘music’ of the office?

2. When we discussed your important meeting, you mentioned that you felt: [read from notes taken]. When we discussed your preferred music, you mentioned that you felt: [read from notes taken]. Would the music we listened to be a good soundtrack to the meeting if this were a movie? What would be a good soundtrack? In what ways is it either appropriate or inappropriate to have similar feelings when listening to music or engaging at work?

3. When we discussed your important meeting, you mentioned that you came to understand: [read from notes taken]. When we discussed your preferred music, you mentioned that you came to understand: [read from notes taken]. What does the “music” at the office allow, hide or encourage in terms of employee engagement? Is there any “music” that should be “turned down” or “turned up” in your workplace?

7. **Observational notes, audio recordings and transcripts of interviews.**

During the interview, notes were taken to keep the interview focused on the interviewee. Notes included: my own thoughts in order to isolate ideas that may have otherwise interrupted the flow of thoughts as participants formed their narratives; important conversational points that
prompted further clarification within the interview process; and, salient points from the engagement and music listening sections of the interview that would be useful for comparison in the reflexive section of the interview. Notes during the interview also included observations about: interview interruptions and pauses for reflection; gestures and facial expressions; any environmental changes or interruptions; and any non-verbal utterances that contributed or detracted from the interview.

After the interview, notes were taken as to the surroundings: the interview room; personal feelings going into and leaving the interview room; the way the interview unfolded (arrival, departure, amount of time for the interview, how the interview began and ended); time of day; and comfort level of the environment.

8. Analysis of the individual interview.

After word for word transcription of each interview, to retain fidelity to the intentions and interests of research participants, each participant’s interview was summarized in written form. Each participant was e-mailed a copy of their interview summary prior to the follow-up phone session. Participants had the opportunity to correct, edit or redact any section of the interview summary either using MS Word with track changes or by verbally requesting that I make changes. Only minor changes were requested to the interview summaries. The summaries exclusively were utilized in the analysis. (Chapter IV fully describes the Summary process.)

9. Follow-up phone session with participants.

Follow-up sessions were managed by phone with all but one participant, whom I met with in-person. Notes were taken, but follow-up sessions were not recorded. The purpose of the follow-up sessions were: (1) to obtain feedback from the participants about their experience of
the interview process; (2) to verbally validate that the data collected from the research was accurate and preserved confidentiality; and (3) to find out if the interview was helpful.

**Limitations**

**Theoretical biases.**

This research is strongly biased towards believing that no matter how oppressive the structural social hegemony, each person is always emancipated. This does not mean oppression is not real, but that the perpetration of oppression is all that much more real because it is always perpetrated against the emancipated individual or group. This study cannot provide an education that leads to emancipation because emancipation pre-exist the research.

Additionally, no amount of research or data will convince those who will not see that the problem of workplace alienation exists. This research is unlikely to reach those who insist employee engagement is a matter of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Rather, it is intended for those who experience engagement and alienation apart from motivation, and it is intended as a way to inspire disruption of what may appear sensible but holds oppression in place (Ranciere, 2010).

It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. It doesn't have to lay down the law for the law. It isn’t a stage of programming. It is a challenge directed to what is. (Foucault, 1991, p. 85)

**Research limitations.**

A full music semiotics is not used, nor is a full narrative analytic approach used. In any case, the bricolage approach applied here focusses only on the four interview questions: How did you arrive at the site of address? What did you hear? How did that feel? And, what did that tell
you? Other questions would speak to other experiences about workplace engagement. Moreover, only one music listening example and one workplace occasion are selected per each of only six participants. It is reasonable to assume that most people have good and bad experiences at work regardless of the experience of engagement any one participant might bring to the interview. The selection of only six participants each with a single event, much less the selection of a single reckoning, can speak to only a tiny sliver of the entire engagement experience. None-the-less, like examining six drops of water from a pond, much has been learned.

**Researcher Limitations**

Although I have spent many years working with people at all levels of corporate hierarchy to help document and analyze business and technology systems opportunities, and although I have worked with employees on personal engagement approaches as a manager, peer, and trusted colleague, I do not have professional experience working with individuals as an independent researcher. I missed queues and remarks that would have stirred conversations that someone with a stronger research, human resource, or therapeutic background might have pursued or captured differently.

Additionally, I did my best to both create an interview primarily interested in the participant’s experience, while at the same time, capture answers to all the research prompts and queues in a reasonably consistent manner across participants. I never met both goals fully satisfactorily. In other words, some questions were not fully pursued with some participants because the conversation did not lend itself to those questions within the time we shared.
Finally, at the time of the research, I am an older, white, male with 30 years’ experience at multiple levels of organizational management, working on a doctoral dissertation. Technically, I am ‘retired’ from the workforce. What participants said to me was shaped by their expectations derived from my personal appearance and assumed social stature – and lack there-of.

**Non-Binding Research Limitations**

This research was non-binding to any participant. Participants could retract, deny, change, or drop out of the study entirely. Additionally, responses were confidential and did not affect participant’s standing within their organizations. Hence, responses were far different than if project outcomes, raises, promotions, organizational image or standing, or job opportunities were directly associated with the interviews. Similarly, it was irrelevant whether what participants said they experienced in the interview would have been said in another context. In many cases the questions asked were quite difficult. Given more time, better scaffolding and clearer wording and articulation, or a different setting, it is likely participants would have responded differently. This research speaks only to the stories that individuals told in the context of their interviews.

**Sampling method limitations.**

The small number of self-selected volunteers participating in this study was necessarily biased toward individuals who care about engagement from an aesthetic point of view. While the research took on an international quality by including a participant from China, and a participant whose early life experience was shaped in the USSR, all participants were white collar professionals, highly engaged in their work. Although included in solicitations, participants did not include members of black or Hispanic communities. From this empirical perspective, the efficacy of the methodology cannot be assumed across a broad population.
Limitations of a Western construal of music.

Fitch (2015) reminds us that not all traditions of music account for monolithic structuring of harmony, rhythm and melody as core components. In this study, this class of western terms used for music have been maintained because participants were from traditions that use these terms. However, this research also adopts a more universalist definition, suggesting that music is the aural art of temporality, and is focused on concepts of music within this broader definition.

Reciprocity

_The interview entails an asymmetrical power relation._ The research interview is not an open, everyday conversation between equal partners. The interviewer has scientific competence, and he or she initiates an defines the interview situation, determines the interview topic, poses questions and decides which answers to follow up on, and also terminates the conversation. [emphasis in original] (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014, p. 37)

Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) explore the power relations of research in terms of a metaphor regarding the miner and the traveler. Neither metaphor captures the power dynamic I strove to create in this research. Rather than entering a metaphor where the researcher is imagined either as a miner, searching for hidden gold in the research process, or a traveler, voyeuristically clinging to thick descriptions of othered truth (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014, pp. 57-59), this research was intentionally constructed as a mutual engagement of artists. Participants and researcher engaged in this effort more like artists engaging in a shared work which we hoped would bring us a new clarity of perspective in the way we see our personal workplace engagement practices. The hope has been that the research would provide each of us a sense of that “Aha! moment, the sudden recognition that we have seen into another person’s mind, and that allows us to see the truth underlying both the beauty and ugliness depicted by the artist” (Kandel, 2012, p. 393). My personal experience in this process has been to witness, refraining
from evaluative judgment, the artistry not only within the music and engagement practices discussed, but also reflexively, within the research process itself.

**Trustworthiness**

As parts of complex systems and intricate processes, objects of inquiry are far too mercurial to be viewed by a single way of seeing or as a snapshot of a particular phenomenon at a specific moment in time. (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 170)

In this research, building trust in relationships served as a higher source of authority than proving fact over fiction. As such, the reader will come away with neither the truth about managing employee engagement, nor even an analysis of engagement practices within one location. Agreement on the truth – consensus – is suspended for a moment. The standard of trustworthiness reverts to asking: has the retelling of participant stories been told with fidelity to the telling (Lyotard, 1979)? To help promote fidelity to the telling the following steps were taken:

1. Participants were provided with an Information Request Form and Informed Consent Form which not only provided an enumeration of the interview question prior to the interview, but also provided a summary of the problem of practice, approach, and interview questions. In effect, participants engaged in the project as co-researchers and ensured that their words were appropriately stated in the summaries.

2. The third phase of the interview provided the core of the analysis. Analysis, at least in part, was a dialogic, shared effort – a part of the interview itself.

3. I transcribed the interviews manually, writing out each utterance. This provided a detailed level of listening beyond the level of fidelity obtained by note taking.
4. After the interview, transcription and analysis, participants reviewed the written summary of their interview prior to its use as a source in the final publication. Only quotes from the summaries have been included in this dissertation.

From a macro level research agenda perspective, seeking dissensus rather than consensus (Ranciere, 2004a, 2010) regarding employee engagement, Freedman and Combs (2009) offer four observations regarding how their community of practice has stepped away from retelling the retelling as a framework of privileging dominant discourse:

1. “Mentioning the Unmentionable: We are committed to mentioning the unmentionable, and acknowledge the courage and strength this requires of us” (Freedman & Combs, 2009, p. 352). A commitment to saying what transgresses the limits of the acceptable implies a deep and profound trust in the intentions at the site of address. This commitment allows for growth and transformation of speaker [research participant] and listener [researcher] beyond the acceptable limits of the dominant discourse.

2. “Doing Things at Our Own Pace: We are determined to proceed in life at a pace that suits us, and not at a pace that suits the voices” (Freedman & Combs, 2009, p. 353). This commitment acknowledges that relationships have tempo and rhythm. To respect the time and meter of relationship [research process] is to respect the relationship and to give it time and place apart from the time and place of the dominant discourse.

3. “Acknowledging Our Teamwork: We are determined to keep sight of the fact that we are members of a team that is the size and as strong as the ocean, and as intelligent as the dolphins” (Freedman & Combs, 2009, p. 353). This
commitment acknowledges that the water our identities swim in is the organizations we are part of. It further acknowledges the limits of intelligence. There is nothing sacred in knowledge as ideology; intelligence and the sacred are in being with, ‘swimming with,’ others. This includes the research participants, their organizations and the academic institutions that make this research possible.

4. “Honoring the Little Steps: We are committed to the honoring of the so-called ‘little steps’ we take in life” (Freedman & Combs, 2009, p. 353). This commitment acknowledges that the heart of all leadership lies in the fact that each morning each of us gets out of bed and must put our ‘feet on the ground’ and lead our lives. Our narratives are filled with details as trivial as the way we put on our sox, hold a pen, or fix our coffee or tea. Each detail tells of privileged as well as subjugated meaning.

This research agenda endeavored to remain true to the participants by honoring the details that each person valued. Even the ‘summaries’ did not attempt to summarize, but rather, they remained attentive to the particulars in the unfolding of our dialogues. To the best of my ability I have remained faithful to this framework in the later stages of analysis, as I applied scaffolding to help engage dissertation readers in the musical qualities of the narrations.

Protection of Human Subjects

Systemic risks to research participants emerged based on the therapeutic nature of the theoretical framework as well as to the anti-narrative approach used in the workplace discourse. Risks to confidentiality arose due to the nature of academic research. These risk factors are reviewed below. The Informed Consent Form disclosed known possible risks in clear and simple
terms (Appendix 5 – Informed Consent Form). I reviewed terms of the research and risks verbally prior to scheduling each interview. I confirmed participant understanding again at the onset of each interview.

**Systemic risks.**

**Music-ability related therapeutic risks.**

Dorit Amir (2012), in working with aspiring music therapists, describes the personal discovery process that unfolds as a matter of course in sharing significant music with others. She approaches the disclosure process in terms of the *Johari Window* (*Luft, 1963; Luft & Ingham, 1961*). As research participants explicate their attachments to preferred music, the tendency is for unconscious understandings to drift up from being *unknown* to the self and others to being *open* to all; disclosures travel through *hidden* from others and *blind to self* window openings (*Luft, 1963; Luft & Ingham, 1961*). The risk in this research is in disrupting the balance of personal defense mechanisms (*Cramer, 2009*) that keep participants safe from inner conflicts and contestations that have been kept off-limits – both to themselves and to others – in order to cope with real or perceived realities and relationships.

Rather than developing the ‘self,’ as in therapeutic relationships, this research remained focused on working with participants to name external situations of mutual becoming. This approach did not pursue authenticity or even a ‘correct’ or ‘truthful’ understanding of self. The research’s intent was to solicit narrative understandings of social legitimacy. To focus the research away from therapeutic personal conflicts the following steps were taken:

- The research protocol, questions and theoretical framework were provided to participants prior to their agreeing to participate in the research. Participants were allowed to frame their responses up front and could bring notes to the interview. This
provided participants the opportunity to direct the discussion within ‘safe’ limits of personal discovery.

- There were no surprise questions or prompts. Participants were asked difficult, thought provoking questions, but they were not prompted or coaxed into ‘baring their souls.’

- Even though participants are aliased in the study, if it appeared something personally sensitive or identifying had been exposed, I asked directly if that content was appropriate for inclusion in the research or if the preference was to be sure that content should not be discussed further or included in the study. Because I could not be certain to catch all sensitive issues, the participants were asked to review the exact content that could possibly be included in the study. This content was explicitly referred to in our follow-up interviews. All participants reported reading and approving of the content selected for possible inclusion.

- This research was not intended to be therapeutic, and as such, psychological risks were effectively minimized. Although never called for, informed professional consultation was available to me to help determine appropriate follow-up if an urgent or unexpected need of this nature had surfaced.

Anti-narrative related risks.

This research has taken its lead from Riach et al. (2016) in asking personally and organizationally risky questions:

- How do music-abilities help us hear “organizational subjectivities and normative conditions” in such a way as to reconfigure their sensibility (Riach et al., 2016, p. 2072)?
• Can this form of investigation avoid “reproducing patterns of narrative coherence” (Riach et al., 2016, p. 2072) that disenfranchise rather than allow for transformative conflict and contestation at the edges of organizational sensibility (Biesta, 2008; Ranciere, 2010)?

These question were risky for participants in that the research necessarily exposed the individuals’ experiences of organization to that, “Aha! moment, the sudden recognition that we have seen into another person’s mind, and that allows us to see the truth underlying both the beauty and ugliness…” (Kandel, 2012, p. 393). To the extent that research participants came face to face with the alienation problem structurally inherent in a pervasive practice of “harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles” (W. A. Kahn, 1990, p. 694), participants were subjected to the possibility of feeling increased social discomfort and alienation in the workplace, including racism, classism, sexism and structural barriers intent on keeping them both harnessed and subjugated in the workplace.

I view this risk as systemic to critical research. For this reason, this project was necessarily volunteer based, and non-localized. It was not intended to change anyone’s thinking, nor was it intended to initiate structural change within any organization. It remained a witness-based approach to emancipatory learning. This project intentionally solicited volunteers interested in workplace engagement from the outset. Participants came to the research in search of an opportunity to explore risky problems of organizational participation. The research offered the chance to witness engagement through a music-abilities approach to listening. Because participants elected to explore these risky problems, and because they could have dropped from the study at any time, this risk was considered both expected and reasonable. In effect, it was
intended. The risk provided the opportunity to explore the conflict and contestation associated with organizational engagement that participants have intentionally signed up to examine.

**Confidentiality risks and data storage.**

While every attempt has been made to preserve confidentiality, it is always possible due to human or technical error that confidentiality could be breached. While the possibility of a breach in confidentiality always exists, with reasonable safekeeping of information, the odds have been lowered. That said, because participants are disclosing thoughts and feelings about workplace engagement that may not have been disclosed to workplace cohorts, the consequences of a breach in confidentiality have been considered diligently. Confidentiality has been preserved in this research by taking the following steps:

- Participant information, interview artifacts and files are maintained on a primary and backup removeable USB flash drive. These drives are kept in a locked location in my home when not being actively worked on. These drives are not otherwise left unattended. These drives will be erased three years following publication of, or final rejections of, the dissertation.

- All interviews have been transcribed by me personally.

- Hard copies of the signed consent forms and interview notes are maintained in a locked cabinet until three years after the dissertation is approved and published or finally rejected. Then, these will be shredded.

- All names and composite characteristics of participants and their companies and co-workers have been aliased.
IV. Presentation of the Research and Analysis

My interest in music includes its non-propositional qualities. Music’s ability to not refer to something else, but to just be in the world, standing for what it is without apology or explanation. This is, what I have in the course of these interviews come to think of as ‘a loss of innocence so profound that the loss returns us to innocence,’ each of us, a work of art, shaped in the hands of life.

Thank you to ‘Alex’, ‘Ken’, ‘Mila’, ‘Rich’, ‘Jen’ and ‘Linda’, the six participants who made this work possible. Thank you for spending time with me talking about music and workplace interactions. Each of our discussions demonstrated how every utterance was buoyed by a unique willingness toward vulnerability – vulnerable to the conversation, to each other, to the situations our lives have brought us to. I am grateful for the courage, determination and profound trust each participant shared in exploring what it means to embody our conversations from a music –abilities perspective.

Each participant asked me, in one form or another, ‘where are you going with this research?’ So upfront, here is a conclusion for the problem of practice: Workplace vulnerability renders workplace alienation superfluous. The non-propositional qualities of musical being – the raw expressions of harmony, counterpoint, rhythm, melody, orchestration, etc., regardless of the content – these elements of relatedness, without our asking or trying, perform ‘where we’re at’ with each other. In so much as musical –abilities are non-propositional performances and at the same time, they connect us, these performances act to embody, touch, and energize our vulnerabilities.

Yes, harmony-counterpoint-rhythm when we music is different than when we organize at work. And so too, they are different in a painting, a soufflé recipe, an architectural plan and the
execution of a soccer play. However, as Samuel Weber notes about Walter Benjamin’s ‘—abilities’, our —abilities to music, in consideration of the “distinction between ‘iterability’ and ‘iteration,’ ‘repeatability’ and ‘repetition,’ between empirically observable fact and structural possibility, can tell us much about … forming key concepts in terms of their —ability, rather than their actuality as mere facts” (S. Weber, 2008, p. 6). Music, as a means of reflection, attempts to address our —ability to music. *Musicians perform these music —abilities as aural works of art. Employees perform these music —abilities as engagement at work.*

**Analysis Process**

After meeting with each participant, I transcribed, utterance-by-utterance, each interview. Each interview ran from about 75 to 105 minutes, resulting in about 40 to 60 pages of text per interview. While summarizing, I supplemented each with an introduction and closing constructed from the notes taken before, during and after the interview, and I included insights drawn from notes taken during the transcription process. I picked one quote that was particularly eloquent in stating the positionality of the participant in their expressed relationship to music —abilities. The quote provided a guidepost in centering the narrative tone and timbre taken in framing the participant’s words. The biggest surprise to me about the interviews was how much fun we had. All interviews were characterized by a generous amount of humor and laughter, which, unfortunately, I have not done justice to in the analysis.

In constructing the summaries I also: (1) condensed my questions and prompts; (2) cut repeated content; (3) removed repeated words (for example, “I, I, I think that”, and “but, but, but he didn’t”); (4) removed non-semantic connector words (for example, ‘like’, ‘and’, ‘um’, and ‘ah’); (5) conformed to standard written grammatical form, but only where it was obvious standard grammatical form was ‘intended’; and (6) replaced all personal and location identifiers.
with aliases or generics. While these edits removed some of the melodic and rhythmic entrainments we performed in the interviews, these non-semantic performative acts translated so poorly into written form that including them in the summaries seemed inaccurate. While authentic, they obviated the tone, timber, form, harmony and overall illocutionary and perlocutionary flow of words intended by the performance.

In short, given the substance of this research is at the personal narrative rather than articulative level of employee engagement, I elected to do my best to convey the illocutionary, propositional and musical force of the participants voice over attempting to reproduce our exact utterances in written form. Summaries were about 12-13 pages each, sent to each respective participant for review for anonymity, accuracy, intent, and approval for publication of content.

After review by the participant, I scheduled follow-up calls. A few participants requested small editorial changes. As promised at the outset, participants had final say in the content brought into the analysis. All participants thought that the interviews were interesting, and each expressed a sincere desire to find out more about the research analysis and its conclusion.

While all participants acknowledged that the interview provided a chance to reflect on their listening skills from a position they had not previously considered, only two of the six participants in the closing discussions considered the interview directly “useful” or “helpful” in their workplace. The two participants who found the research helpful believed that the interviews allowed them to express and reflect on personally important systems of understanding not previously put into words.

Following approval from participants, I coded the written summaries using MAXQDA2018. Codes were assigned to every participant quote from four categories: (1) musical quality exemplars (harmony, rhythm, beat, orchestration, etc.); (2) narrative psychology
exemplars (externalizing, absent but implicit, and retelling the retelling); (3) performative construct exemplars (consensus, dissensus, performative intention, and interruption); and (4) summary construct exemplars (Emancipation, Vulnerability, Radical Acceptance).

The coding exercise provided a litmus test for the analytic lens. Broadly speaking, the summaries resisted and were impenetrable by this analytic approach. That is, because participants were so gracious in providing honest, open and vulnerable expressions, these summaries were more like works of art than like ‘data’: (1) Meaning was created in dialogue, not as something drawn forth out of the participants. Like the function of chords or rhythms in a song or composition, quotes and their analytic codes were only meaningful in context. (2) The interviews did not stand for or neatly summarize into something other than what they expressed.

In a musical composition, the analysis of harmony, counterpoint or structural form tend to forefront a technical aspect of the music and not speak for the music itself. Similarly, externalizing conversations, absent but implicit, and retelling cannot speak the meaning of the participants’ narratives. These tools are lenses for looking at and scaffolding the music and narrative structures. These analytic tools speak neither the music nor the narrative.

The process up to this point brought me to an either-or decision. I could center the analysis on the participants, giving readers access to their stories in raw form. Or, I could center the analysis on the readers, allowing the participants’ stories to contribute to an overall understanding intended by the research process. The later approach has been taken. While much of the artistry of each participant’s story has been lost by not presenting the summaries in raw form, these stories were never mine to tell – not even in anonymous form. Participants volunteered to participate in the research, not to have their stories stand in place of the analysis.
Therefore, using the interview protocol as guidelines, what follows is an attempt to scaffold for the dissertation reader:

- In this chapter (IV), using the shorthand narrative-musical semiotic approach developed in the literature review and interview methodology, an awareness of the kinds of music—abilities participants performed in these interviews;

- In the closing chapter (V), an awareness of how these music—ability discussions provide a fertile alternative discourse to employee engagement constructs of alienation, motivation and human resource management.

In taking this approach what is given up is not only the music and narrative of the participants, but also more broadly, the general recognizability of the participants’ stories. This approach privileges demonstration of a way of listening that must not be confused with the “truth,” “personality” or “authenticity” of the participants.

**Introductions**

**Alex Stanovich: Pink Floyd, *Us and Them.***

*Alex: The music feeling itself is like you are in a weightless kind of environment. It’s not like you’re uplifted. It doesn’t change your mood, but it definitely takes you somewhere else. It helps you to, I mean it’s like reading a good story. Even if you don’t understand the words, you still can listen for a long time, and not get distracted. You can relax under that music too. ... The lyrics are very brutal, but the music—the music is actually really very soothing. Kind of a flow, and it’s like, ‘Don’t listen to what I’m saying, listen to what I’m singing.’ ... It’s all done purposely, exactly. It was not done just because it happened. It’s very well thought out.*

*So quiet were the surroundings that I half expected the house to be empty, but Alex greeted me shortly after I rang the doorbell. His home was sparsely but elegantly furnished. We sat opposite each other at a round white kitchen table. I drank water, he, coffee. By the time we*
had said our hellos, I had set up the headphones and recorder, shared the lyrics sheets, and had ensured the Informed Consent Form was signed, we were fifteen minutes into our allotted time.

Alex is an enterprise systems architect at Venerable Insurance. He was recruited into his current position by Venerable’s HR team. As a seasoned systems developer and architect, the complexity of the prospective job was attractive – a veritable playground of interesting problems and meaningful opportunities for systems improvements. During our interview Alex discussed a meeting where he proposed a new client onboarding data system that was agreed to by the CIO and business department heads. While his meeting went exceedingly well, and was exemplary of systems architecture best practices, in the end, the new system was abandoned after the needs of the sales department took an unexpected turn. Alex volunteered Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* as his preferred music. Considering the album as a unified whole, we agreed to listened to and discuss *Us and Them* (Wright & Waters, 1973) as a preferred track during our interview.

**Ken Thomson: Psychedelic Furs, All That Money Wants.**

*Ken: There’s a little bit more depth in some voices than others. And a little bit more volume in some than others. You can focus on each one at least for a few seconds at a time. I like being able to hear. Unfortunately, it’s not, or I don’t know if it’s unfortunate, but the music isn’t that complicated, so there isn’t that much to hear when you find it. But it’s just interesting to listen to each, like a bird singing while we’re here. You want to hear what each one of them is saying.*

I had acquired the last available quiet space in the library. But the air in the room was too warm and dry. The heat had not yet adjusted to the mid-spring weather. I walked to the corner store and picked up two bottles of cold water and returned with plenty of time to prepare for the interview. Ken arrived on time, but out of breath, struggling with a chronic illness. We thought about postponing, but Ken agreed to proceed with the interview.

Ken is mid-career. He has been a lead systems analyst at Broadview Finance for many years and has worked with systems technology his entire life. We discussed a disquieting
meeting where his arguments were given the silent treatment. As an alternate to the soundtrack of this meeting, he brought in Psychedelic Furs’ single, *All That Money Wants* (Ashton, Butler, & Butler, 1988).

**Mila Li: Emma Stone, Audition Song from La La Land.**

*Mila: For example, if I told you, hey Randy, I’m feeling—I’m feeling sad. Then it’s just a message that Mila is sad. But if I share a song with you, then you will feel it. You will listen to it and know that’s what Mila’s feeling right now and stay connected with me. This kind of interaction is what simple words cannot bring to people. Music is much, much more vivid. It can make people really feel. Not just pretend to say hay, I understand.*

I opened our video conference. On my side, the passing traffic could be periodically heard through the open window in my home office. Here in Massachusetts, it was a warm, sunny morning. On her side, in China, I could hear an occasional ping on her cellphone. Otherwise, the evening appeared quiet and still. I had not seen Mila in many years. We were both delighted to reconnect. Mila works for a branch of Estrella Financial Services (EFS) based in Boston. Her office, and the team of developers she works with as Project Manager, is in China. Still early in her career, she has been with EFS for about eight years.

Within moments we were completely absorbed in her description of a contentious project review meeting of her newly formed team. The tone she described by most measures, would be considered toxic, with aggressive members shouting and defensive members pointing fingers and deflecting responsibility. Mila describes the team’s transformation from that difficult state to a team whose organizational interactions are now hallmarked by its capacity for empathy and compassion. The music she brought to the interview was from La La Land, Emma Stone, singing *Mia’s Audition Song* (Hurwitz, Pasek, & Paul, 2016).
Richard Carstone: Gold Panda, *You (2nd Version).*

*Rich:* The same words, different context, mean different things. We use so many euphemisms and so many redundancies, I don’t think the words—

*Randy:* They fall short?

*Rich:* Yeah. We’re not even really speaking sometimes.

Firm handshake, smiling, this promised to be a fun interview. On entering the library, the air conditioning was a welcome relief from the heat and humidity. Rich needed a bottle of water, but the cafe was closed. I had just picked up two cool water bottles on my way. We were all set and headed up the steps to the reserved conference room. I hurried to organize the table, ensuring all the pieces would come together as we spoke – the headphones, recording, digital recorder and informed consent. Rich appeared to be at ease, relaxed. Socializing seems natural to him. He’s relaxed in the way he makes eye contact, his movements, language, the way he holds his head: forthright, efficient, curious, attentive.

Richard Carstone is a young probate attorney with Tulkinghorn & Snagsby, LLP. The small, close-knit team, as a rule, works well together. The meeting he described to me was a successful effort to resolve an unusual situation. His paralegal had written and sent a harsh e-mail to a new client that was potentially damaging to the developing client relationship. Rich’s preferred music: *You (2nd version) by Gold Panda* (Schlecker, 2010).


*Jen:* Sometimes when those things happen, they are the end of the story. But the conflict doesn’t always resolve. From that perspective – of song or story or anything – well not all stories resolve in good ways. People need to learn that it is okay to apologize. It is okay to retract, it is okay to calm down after you’ve blown up, and hopefully you can move on.

Jen was coming from her workplace to the library where I had reserved a conference room. Overcast sky, comfortably warm evening, waiting at the entrance I reflected on our long relationship. We have seen our children grow up together and have shared many meals,
holidays, birthdays, bereavements, new years and new beginnings. My reticence to bringing close friends into this research was overcome by my gratitude for having her support and comradery as I approach a new chapter in my life. She had similarly started a new chapter in her life many years earlier. Through education and certification, she traded a financial services role in for a clinical role at Best Practice Hospital (BPH). Her work is highly specialized, helping chronically ill patients build and manage lifesaving diets.

On her arrival I was delighted that she had not had too much trouble finding the library. She elected to share a contentious meeting where her clinical cohort was unable to move forward in their efforts to discuss a more strategic research agenda. For music, Jen has selected George Winston’s, *Variations on the Kanon by Johann Pachelbel*, from the December album (Winston, 1982).

**Linda Freedman: The Hollies, *He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother*.**

*Linda: People are afraid to feel the pain, to feel suffering of others, and to feel the good harmony. To me it’s like embracing but also of feeling strengthened by it. Not diminished. It’s the whole argument about letting yourself be vulnerable. That doesn’t make you weak. It will make you stronger.*

While delighted to have the opportunity to interview Linda, I was concerned about the venue we had chosen. The café setting suggested that we would come together as friends over coffee. But, would the research process pull at our friendship? Perhaps strengthen it? Or, would it uncomfortably objectify one or both of us under an academic microscope? Linda Freedman manages and staffs the Individual Education Plan (IEP) resource room at a high school in the metro-Boston area. With the school year just ending, I was grateful for the chance to talk to her while events were still fresh in her mind.

When Linda arrived a few minutes early I waved to her from the table. Her presence, as always, warm, welcoming, honest and open. Smiling, a lift to her step, she took a moment to get
coffee and a pastry. Then, seated, in just a few short moments of conversation we had crossed the threshold, from friends having coffee, to exploring the substance of a counseling session with a student struggling to establish a personal compass within the maze of the high school’s sociological priorities. Linda brought the lyrics to The Hollies, *He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother* (Russell & Scott, 1969).

**Externalizing Conversations: “How did you arrive?”**

*Externalizing* “situates persons as being in relation to experience—a position from which a person can adopt a reflexive stance and exercise enhanced choices for action” (Pare & Lysack, 2004, p. 7). Externalizing moves participants from ‘I am depressed,’ towards, “Well, good mornin’ blues.” (Lead Belly, 2012). The address we externalize into, precedes our participation (Butler, 1988, 2005).

More precisely speaking, the narrative psychology approach as documented by Michael White, does not describe “Externalizing,” but rather, his discourse is on “Externalizing Conversations” (White, 2007). From White’s point of view, Externalizing Conversations are therapeutic. Specifically, these are conversations that help move narratives about personal problems from a *description and enactment of the self*, to *discussions describing the enactment of the problem itself* (White, 2007). Technically speaking, the *subject* of the conversation moves from the person to the problem. This allows distance between person, problem and situation, giving the person visibility required to assess, confront and manage presenting contestations (White, 2007).

While this research is not therapeutic in nature, it does explore the lines between subject and object. Noting Berleant’s conviction that drawing the subject-object distinction disembodies
us from aesthetic experience (Berleant, 2012), I call attention to Michael White’s demonstration that the subject-object distinction is dialectic – a conversation – and not an empirical or ontological fact. Rather than therapeutic discussions, the attempt here was to look at the music – abilities expressed in the externalizing, subject-object, conversation.

To engage with music is always dialogic. For the purposes of this study, musicking engages at the subject–object boundary, whether bringing in external sounds (subjectification), or performing internal sounds for oneself or an audience (objectification). While in narrative therapy, internalizing contested behaviors can be interpreted as self-destructive, this research makes no claims as to whether externalizing conversations are more or less useful or virtuous than internalizing conversations. A sense of belonging, an embodied “I” in Hilllel’s “If I am not for others, what am I,” requires us to internalize – whether to name our relatedness and share experiences, or to attend to the consequences of our actions. It is the function of music at this subject-object boundary that is of interest.

Music is never a purely internal or external experience. To externalize or internalize requires a social context where performing or listening is possible: at the immediate level of making and attending to recognizable sounds, as well as at the temporal-spatial level of using those sounds to address what is socially comprehensible (Butler, 1988, 2005). Even within these social contracts, because music can present non-propositionally, it can internalize and externalize intentions where words fall short.

In practical terms, to narrate about one’s self, a self must be externalized as a participant in the story. The first questions in the interview were designed to begin the externalizing process in our dialogue. “How did you arrive at, what brought you to that meeting?” These questions asked participants not to “tell me about your meeting” nor to “tell me about your colleagues.”
The questions worked as a prompt to begin a process of *externalizing* a story, as an object of discourse. “How” and “what” do not address the self or other. These questions instigated externalized stories where the stories themselves became shared objects of discourse. It allowed for a conversation that shaped a narrative object capable of performing the subjective voice of the participant at the site of the interview. Participants used our objectifications to shape our relatedness and explore their own personal understandings about their experiences.

**The workplace.**

*Alex* begins his narrative by creating a dialogue focused on the systems tools he and I are both familiar with. Through these tools we can create a shared concept of workplace. This is how he arrived at Venerable, and at the meeting he will discuss. Rather than “Once upon a time…” Alex starts with “It started with…”

Alex: It started with assembler, DOS, REX, COBAL, Fortran, and all the way up to Java. OK what company uses a toolset that BIG. And that’s interesting. So, I went to the interview.

These tools exist in relation to a business problem. The problem as “that work” is externalized away from the employees and away from the clients:

Alex: All of that work from the accounting point was being done manually. The current business need was: OK, we’re spending too much time during enrollment trying to aggregate the data so that we can report where we are.

And so, there is a place for Alex to participate in this externalized problem. Neither the employees nor the clients are the problem. The problem, objectified, is an opportunity for creative work, for participation in creating a new consensus.

Alex: Technical gaps of the legacy solution created risks for the business processes too. As a result, a certifiable perfect storm. My role was to take this on from multiple business domains: sales, marketing, underwriting, enrollment, contracting.
Ken’s narrative starts reflectively. Over many years, systems work has become a subjective, internalized positive part of Ken’s identity. He has developed a practice of seeing the world through a systems development lens.

Ken: I started programming computers when I was about thirteen and was always interested in high school in computers. I wrote my own programs and studied engineering in college. I actually designed integrated circuits when I was in school here in the Boston area.

From this professional systems development subjectivity, Ken notices a database development problem that from other positionalities, would be impossible to have notice, let alone objectify (externalize). He tells me how best practice data development standards insist that every data record be uniquely and persistently identifiable to the business level data managers. However, none of the data owners – the business teams – wanted to maintain extra data to meet this architectural standard. They wanted to drop the UPC (Universal Product Code) from the new system design and user interface. Ken held his ground for data integrity, insisting on the utility and structure the data architects had drafted into the data model.

Ken: It’s an essential – for use of the data – to have this in the model. But, for political reasons, people weren’t willing to push on that. I wasn’t quite so bashful in speaking up and saying we have to have this.

For Ken, the argument was not about externalizing personal beliefs or opinions, but about his commitment to the practices the organization had painstakingly developed over the years by working on many other similar problems. Internalizing the architectural data standards, Ken externalizes the problem of practice for the group.

Ken: It wasn’t worth revisiting. We, through our experience and wisdom, we knew this was something we need to have in our data model. I felt like someone who had to stand up and represent that accumulated wisdom over the years.
Mila externalizes her story by bringing us right into the heat of battle. She performs a present tense replay of the story. When she first mentions her role, Mia externalizes, stating, “The project manager is in the center.” She does not say, “I was in the center.” She is looking at her problem actively and reflexively, in an objectified, active relationship. By externalizing, Mila does not accuse the individuals in the group of being the problem. The problem is externalized: the “project team,” as an object of discourse, is in a discordant state. “The Project Manager,” objectified, apart from a subjective self, is conversationalized, fully hermeneutic.

Mila: So, it’s quite obvious when you get into the meeting room. The developers just sit together in a corner, and the quality team is sitting opposite, and then the business systems analysts are in another group. The project manager is in the center. [emphasis added]

By continuously pulling the action of the story into the present tense, Mila invites us to internalize her perspective, to see and hear from the viewpoint externalized in her performance.

Mia: When we talk about whether anything went well in the last project, then people just keep silent. When it came to problems experienced or issues found, they started to point fingers and blame each other. … They’re just talking from their own perspective, everyone in fight or flight mode.

And when the story comes back to Mila, we are now fully in the story, hearing from her ears, seeing what she sees at the time of the action. Having externalized herself and having dramatized the action, she now allows us to participate by internalizing for ourselves, developing an empathy, as she shifts from third person back to first-person taking our attention with her:

Mila: Frankly speaking, I’m also getting nervous. It’s a first time for me to see a new team where people are fighting. I feel like I need to work like, perform like, a fireman or fire-woman so I can cool down everybody.

Rich starts his narrative by externalizing professional perspective. In stating, “before I knew it, I had become friendly with…” he establishes two selves, the narrative ‘I’ that came to ‘know it’ and the externalized ‘I’ – the member of the small office that does real estate closings
who had become friendly with the new client’s team. He also externalizes the story by narrating in the present tense, giving us at the same time and place the I who is speaking and the I who is spoken about.

Rich: One of the things we do are real estate closings. And a lot of that work comes directly from loan officers who refer their loans to us. There is a particular loan officer in Massachusetts…. Just through mutual connections – because its a small world – before I knew it, I had become friendly with all the people on that team, including the main loan officer. Which is a really good thing for me because we’re a small office and all of the sudden I’m starting to get all this work from this very high volume and well respected office. [emphasis added]

As a leading professional in a small office, Rich holds a deep personal (internalized) commitment to the actions of the whole firm – including an internalized sense of the firm’s relationship with the client Rich has worked so hard to onboard. The actions of Rich’s paralegal are in this regard a reflection of himself. In the following, by asking himself, “How do I respond to this e-mail?” Rich externalizes, creating working space between the I who sits, internalizing what has just happened, and an externalized ‘I,’ whom Rich can ask how he should respond.

Rich: My paralegal goes back and forth maybe thirty to fifty times with some of these people, adjusting numbers, getting documents and figures and whatever and I see this one e-mail from my paralegal to the entire office in this tone – I don’t remember exactly what it said – but the tone was terrible. …... – I’m really speechless. …I knew in the back of my mind and immediately that this wasn’t fatal. These guys are reasonable guys and I’ve gotten to know them, and we been doing a good job. But at the same time, from their perspective they can work with any lawyers they want and there’s a lot of us. And here’s an email from a paralegal. They have enough on their plate, just like everybody else in the world. ... I close my door and I just stopped for about fifteen minutes. How do I respond to this e-mail? And I did. I think my response was good. It’s smoothed everything over. But it was in this crucial building stage of getting to know each other…. [emphasis added]

Rich continues to narrate between the internalized and externalized self with “I think my response was good…” Here, an internalized I, thinks the externalized ‘me’ who responded, did well. An internalized sense of how his client might feel and what it means to exercise sound
judgement on behalf of his firm seem to run in close counterpoint to his feelings toward his paralegal on the issue.

Rich: It surprised me because I rely on my paralegal. She’s incredibly smart and I’ve never relied on anybody like I rely on her. I need to be able to count on her and then she kind of betrayed me. First of all, she knows that I do a lot of work to try to generate business and keep the doors open and the lights on. And it surprised me that she didn’t see that that was sabotaging the very essence of what we’re trying to do. [emphasis added]

It would be misleading to suggest that the internalization rather than the actions led to Rich’s sense of betrayal. Importantly, without internalizing the wellbeing of the firm, Rich might not have been as attentive to the discord created with the rogue e-mail. In calling attention to Rich’s process of internalizing and externalizing, I only mean to call attention to the internalizing-externalizing dance all of us preform in diverse ways and in different contexts. This constant counterpoint at the subject-object boundary of experience is one way we rhythmically entrain and harmonize with others. It is a way we paint or compose our experience of the world in relation to others. The space between subject and object – the ‘externalizing conversation’ – pulls us into the experience of the narrator.

Jen begins her narrative by externalizing between “I” and “we.” Here, when Jen says “I” she is referring to herself as an individual. When she says “we” or “you” she speaks from her positionality within the working group. This distinction creates counterpoint that harmonizes subject-object positionality.

Jen: As I started to work at BPH, I came to realize what everybody who works there realizes. We see a lot of very unique things, things that we could be publishing – at least be putting out case reports. Before I got there, there wasn’t a lot of organization about research because we’re clinicians first we’re not paid to do research. I mean, we are, but we aren’t. BPH, their mission statement includes clinical research. There’s a lot of things you could be writing about. But you probably need to do it on your own time. You’re hired to do patient care.
Jen continues this process of externalizing through the singular, plural and second person references to self. When Jen says below, “You’re asking the person who…” the objectification is brought into the immediacy of our conversation. At that point, I invite Jen to extend the externalizing conversation to a musical metaphor.

Jen: If somebody is talking and they’re not going to stop, I’m not going to talk over them. I do stop. There are just some people who are softer than others. Some of us are just louder than the others. … You’re asking the person who can’t shut up. I think if you asked my coworker the other day, she would absolutely say that. [emphasis added] Randy: Louder instruments? Some people play flute, others play trumpet? Jen: I was thinking more like trombone. [laughing]

Up to now in the narrative, Jen has included herself in the “we” of the organization. In the following, the externalized “we” and internalized “I” are at a logger jam. The counterpoint at the subject-object boarder, between the “I,” and the “we,” becomes discordant. “We” momentarily turns to a contest between “they” and “I.” Jen tries to restore the subject-object harmony, when she states, “I was trying to get everybody to focus on one thing.”

Jen: There is nobody that wants to say, to look at it realistically and just say, ‘No! We’re not going to have time for that.’ They never want to give up on the intention. But after all these years, I’m sort of understanding what the outcome is. It’s been a frustration for me. Either commit to it, or say that you can’t. But don’t say, ‘yeah, we’re going to do it,’ but don’t do it. So that’s what’s frustrating. That’s why I was trying to get everybody to focus on one thing. Instead it just didn’t work out that way. [emphasis added]

Again, it would be inappropriate to conjecture that the contestation lies in the internalization or externalization of personal experience. My only point is to call attention to the harmony and counterpoint Jen created at the subject-object boarder of an internalized “I” and externalized “we” as a way in which she composed her personal experience in our dialogue. In this way the words – “I”, “we”, “they”, “everybody” – acted musically, forming an ensemble rather than simply behaving elocutionarily. The subject-object counterpoint led to compositional form. The
‘music,’ as Berlent (2012) points out regarding what is commonly referred to as music, resonates subsuming the subject-object boundary, bringing the listener into the performer’s experience.

Linda starts her externalization by drawing our attention to the physical space of the narrative – “my room,” “my office.”

Linda: I had a student who came back to my room and was very distraught. She appeared angry and upset. Clearly there was this internal distress going on. I asked if she wanted to talk – just check in. She came into my office. She’s not normally someone who’s very expressive verbally. [emphasis added]

By the time Linda says (below), “There was a flow, that was what was exciting to me,” that ‘flow’ and the associated feelings had been firmly established as externalizations within “my office” – the focal point of the externalizing narrative.

Linda: We were sitting in a contained space, so nobody was floating around. It’s a smallish office. I was sitting on a chair at the table. She was sitting in another chair but, sideways so that she wasn’t facing me. There was that dynamic of not being face to face that gave her space to talk. I think she felt more comfortable. … There was a flow, that was what was exciting to me. It felt like she was having real insights and making certain declarations about how she wanted to do things differently for the future. [emphasis added]

Now, within that office – working as a subjective space in that time – Linda performs yet another level of externalization. She steps back again, externalizing herself as an instrument of reflection for her troubled student. Linda asks herself, what did that student need from that person, the ‘me’ that sat in that subjectified space? Linda’s words in our interview follow through by distinguishing these contextualized objects, the “me” and “I,” and now, a linguistically differentiated self, named as “you.”

Linda: I probably was a little more restrained than in other times, in other counseling sessions. But what was really working was for me to be more restrained and listen and let her do a lot of the talking. Listening and validating. That really seemed to be most of what she needed. Emphasizing her process and not telling her what to do or what not to do. Let her come up with the ideas. Let her come up with the answers. I do know with
this particular student that if you say something too declarative about her then she responds in an angry way. Like somehow you were getting it wrong. [emphasis added]

The point is not simply that the “I” and the “you” carry different linguistic force – “I” referring to Linda, and “you” referring to anybody talking to that student (or empathically, as the “you” experienced by the student). What Linda demonstrates is that these constructs of “I” are dancing in counterpoint (“restrained’ ‘I,’ versus unrestrained ‘you’), rhythm (I say, she responds) and harmony (wanting the best for the student) at the boarder of “I” as subject (“I” as “me”) and “I” as object (“I” as any “you”).

Alex externalized by creating his narrative within the objectifying constructs of tools and business domain problems. Ken, externalized by internalizing architectural best practices and objectifying the business problems he, having internalized those perspectives, was able to see. Similarly, Rich internalized the professionalism required by the small legal firm and strongly reacted to a rogue e-mail based on his professional positionality. He distanced himself – externalized the problem by asking himself, “How do I respond?” to move forward. Mila performed her narrative in the first person present tense, building compassion for her subjective self as interviewee while her objective self performed in the third person, “the project manager,” in the story. Jen named herself as “I” subjectively and “we” objectively in her role until the workplace contention was made obvious and the “we” turned to “they.” And Linda created a time and space she could externalize into, and further developed a sense of counsellor as an objectification of fulfilling the therapeutic needs called forth by the time and place of the discussion.

In all cases, the narration of the subjective and objective self created harmony, rhythm and counterpoint in the narration. Performing these externalized and internalized personal voices
established harmonic resolution and tension. Musical abilities worked to create a contrapuntal personal voice, timbre and rhythm that in all cases established aesthetic form. Participants chose these words to reproduce the aesthetic sense they held of their meetings. Certainly, these acts are not intended to create musical artform. To the contrary, to perform musical artform is to engage in an artform that utilizes the harmony, rhythm and counterpoint of these conversational acts.

**The music.**

When the same question, “How did you arrive at…” is asked regarding a preferred music recording, the question no longer requires that participants externalize a self to explain how that self, engages with others. Participants come into the dialogue with the music serving as a ready-made externalizing reference point. The music externalizes because it is knowable by others and speaks of something internal to the person sharing the music. As Mila stated, “if I share a song with you, then you will feel it. You will listen to it and know that's what Mila's feeling right now and stay connected with me.”

Alex demonstrates how music, as an embodied experience, tends to externalize from a remembered time and place of significance (Amir, 2012; Bensimon & Amir, 2010; Greasley, Lamont, & Sloboda, 2013).

Alex: In 1975, I was in what 8th, 7th grade? 8th grade. I used to study in a very interesting place as well as a very interesting school. I mean, this is the Soviet Union, of course. Iron curtain and everything. No music. I mean no good music. But, I was fortunate that my parents moved from Siberia in ‘71 or ‘72. ’72, I think. They moved to a town that was organized to conduct scientific research. The socialist countries of the Warsaw Pac organized a joint venture. Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, East Germany, and others… there were people from all these countries living in the city as well as in my classes, the kids…. One was actually very interesting. His father was Czech, a scientist. He brought a lot of albums with him – a lot of music. And one of the albums with this [Dark Side of the Moon]. … He also did a disco-tech for us. I mean, that was ‘75-’76, and he did it regularly. All this was again, an unknown kind of thing. We had much more freedom inside of the city, rather than anybody else.
This experience of time and place are inscribed into Alex’s experience of the music.

Randy: Have your feelings about, or your approach to the music changed over time?
Alex: No. Not at all. Still the same.

Ken incorporates his preferred music narrative into his personal narrative. Note the use of pronouns. The musicians, “they,” are compared to the “everyone” in the meeting, creating a “we” that comes to includes “you” as Ken extends the conversation to us. The “I” is gradually integrated where the music and meeting become unified as “it” – “it all sounds good together.” The music comes to represent an externalized personal competency, a “music -ability,” to successfully communicate.

Ken: I don’t know, it just struck me that, wow, they’re really doing some production here. It’s not just laying down the basic tracks. They’re actually accentuating and adding voices. The reason I thought it would be good to compare with the meeting is it’s kind of like that moment when everyone comes to agreement in a meeting. And everybody says, OK this is what we’re going to do. You have all these guitars playing together. Not necessarily the same notes but it all sounds good together. [emphasis added]

Having articulated an ‘us’ in the music, Ken then goes back to name the historical context. As he speaks about where he first heard the music the story is about friends and relationships. By describing the transformation of tone and timbre in the music, Ken is also telling a story that clues us into the respect and importance he places on the lineage of guitar sounds over the years. This parallels the respect he places on friends over the years (demonstrated in this segment of the interview) and more structurally as a broad based parallel respect for lessons learned in software development technology, including the importance of UPCs. These guitar sounds externalize internal social bonds and codes of conduct.

Ken: So, when I was a kid living in the Midwest, there was a record store across the street from where I lived. I hung out there every afternoon and was friends with the kid that worked there. I was very much into Punk Rock and played guitar. I could get exposed to all the latest music by hanging out in this record store. My friends would play new stuff
for me. … I had a friend that went to New York to visit another friend of ours. She brought back their first album with her. It was really a different sound. She played that for me and it was really cool. And then much later, many years later I bought the CD that has this song on it. You know it’s funny with rock music, maybe with other music too, is when they develop new effects – like modulation effects – those are always the latest thing to be used. You can hear the periods of music, like 70’s, 80’s, 90’s. You can hear what effects were popular at that decade because they used them a lot. So, this was a time when they had first figured out how to do chorus effects on guitars.

For Mila, the music is an anchor – a standing point of reference from which subjective time materializes. She starts with, “Everyone has his or her own experiences, life experiences, especially growing up.” Her externalized musical experience holds a reference point for these subjective timescapes of remembrance. While the music may speak for itself, here it functions to anchor externalize personal subjectivity, liberating remembrances.

Mila: Everyone has his or her own experiences, life experiences, especially growing up. When I heard the song for the first time it reminded me of my own experience. That’s it you know, that’s why I connected. It’s back to the word empathy. It’s like you can feel what she is about to do and what she’s thinking about because you have the same emotion, the same ideas at some point, at some time. A special period – just refreshed back to that time. And then you feel like, wow! And I even feel a little bit of regret because I wish I could be more brave like Mia’s auntie. Because I gave up something, it’s a very special feeling when I hear the music. [emphasis added]

In its ability to provide that link between subjective and objective, Mila describes this song’s ability to evoke a sense of empathy. Below, we see a continuous dance utilizing the words “I” and “you.” This subject-object dance – named as the music – allows Mila to take something from the outside world, another’s externalizations, and connect – to it, to some “I” in another “you.” The music provides a non-verbal point of contact shared by “I” and “you” – pictures, remembrances and moments – externalized as her own experience. Recall once again Borgerson’s (2005) comments on Judith Butler’s work, “the self must ‘allow’ untranslated, unadulterated ‘islands’ of the other to exist within. Here the self opens its boundaries to an other that is beyond its own making” (Borgerson, 2005, p. 75).
Mila: I think it’s soft because it’s kind of remembering at the very beginning. And then you can feel the emotion. Forget about the content or the lyrics. You can feel. You know the emotions, and the changing. I don’t know if you will get a similar feeling – when I listen to the music, to a song or music, I have pictures in my mind. And for this song, because the first time I heard it was when I was in the cinema, it’s also related to the story itself, so I have a background and so I close my eyes and then all the images, they just came back again. Just brought it back again to that moment. And again, you recall all those interactions and reactions at that time, brought to this moment. So that’s why I felt like, you know, I really wanted to cry.

*Rich* begins by telling me about internal values that are congruent with the music. Rich is drawn toward Gold Panda’s abilities: to be influence by others, to integrate different influences, to be original in expression, and to maintain integrity to the voice and positionality that he has created. The music externalizes these personal values.

Rich: I’ve listened to that DJ, Gold Panda – music producer, ‘DJ’ sells him short – I’ve been listening to him for a long time. There was one album he has where he takes a lot of seemingly East Asian influences. And I just thought it was a nice blend of disparate elements that I hadn’t heard anywhere else. Now a lot of people do that. But he was one of the first and I think is still some of the most tastefully done hybrids. … I’ve seen him live – for whatever that means with electronic music. There’s a lot that attracts me to it.

Rich’s externalizing provides a connection beyond the betweenness of himself and the redeeming qualities of the artist. He speaks convincingly about how the song itself provides a means of connecting to another, beyond the limits of words.

Rich: The first I think is almost the gimmick of the song which is that it’s entitled, *You,* and hovering above the entire song is that drawn out woman’s voice singing ‘you,’ over the whole song. I love how that’s there. Just that sustained thought of ‘you.’ I think about my wife when I think about that song. As long as I’ve known her we’ve tried to out-compete each other finding cool new music. She always wins. We’re both really into music and we both try to find something new and eclectic that the other hasn’t heard. Build play lists. I think she found this song.

Jen selected George Winston’s performance of Pachelbel’s Canon. This performance is one of many instances of countless performances of the 17th century composition. To talk about
the performance, Jen contextualizes the composition in terms of her own experience. She creates a map of remembrances in which the experience of the music has taken form.

Jen: How did I get to this piece? I’m trying to remember. I took piano lessons as a child so I’m trying to remember if I plucked out some version of it on the piano when I was taking lessons. It was just around everywhere and I’m sure at some point in church I heard it played on the organ. But the George Winston version—well George Winston in general was introduced to me by somebody who I used to work with a long, long time ago at my old job. I’ve always loved piano. I think George Winston is amazing and the Pachelbel Canon is one of my favorite pieces. It’s beautiful.

Incorporating the performance with the remembrances, the music takes on its ability to externalize Jen’s emotions: “It’s very joyful.” “It puts me in a good mood…”

This would have been more than thirty years ago. And then I introduced Carl to it. We had it played on hammer dulcimer at our wedding. It might have been the one I walked down the aisle to. It’s just one of those songs that every time I listen to, it just, is emotional. *It’s very joyful. It puts me in a good mood* if I’m in a bad mood. Plus, I think I also tried to play this song after I heard George Winston. I got an easy version of it to play on the piano myself. [emphasis added]

Linda describes not so much her experience coming into the song, how she arrived at the song, but how the song arrived at her. The song hear has an active, presence, coming to her at a particularly open and vulnerable moment, raising her spirits. It is externalized in the sense that it (something external) acts internally (subjectively). “It really took me… it very much raised the way I was feeling… This song would just make me feel revitalized.”

Linda: It was the morning, I was driving to work, and I must have been feeling particularly compassionate in that moment. Thinking about my students, thinking about my family, whatever else I was thinking about. Feeling compassion. And this song came on the radio that I hadn’t heard in decades. It really took me. It just felt so deep and moving and it very much raised the way I was feeling. I listened to the whole thing in the parking space. When I came into school I right away said to the people in my room, ‘You know I just heard this song on the radio that I had known in the 70’s, and it’s a really beautiful song. I want you to hear it.’ A couple of students who listened to it said, ‘Yeah, it’s really a nice song.’ I downloaded the lyrics because I felt that to sing this song to myself was very reaffirming because I can feel that being supportive to other people at times can be kind of draining. This song would just make me feel revitalized. Like, no.
This is like a beautiful thing and you know you can. It can give you strength and not take away. Linda states clearly that it is not the song, *per se*, that works to revitalize. Rather, the song works as an externalization of her personal experience. Specifically, the song’s ability to ‘revitalize’ and ‘reaffirm’ is directly attributed to: “Thinking about my students, thinking about my family, whatever else I was thinking about. Feeling compassion.” Notably, the song, when she first heard it did not hold these positive qualities.

Linda: I don’t even know the year they did this song. It was really, really popular. And I never would have given this song another thought. You know at the time, I liked it. But it was just another song on the radio. But it just so happened that when I heard it again. At that particular moment, it resonated with me. But I would have never said, I remember that song and I really loved it.

For Alex, the time and place, the inception of his experience of the music held a sense of freedom, “We had much more freedom inside of the city, rather than anybody else.” For Ken, the music worked to externalize his sense of what it is like to be heard. As he spoke, the “I,” “they,” and “we” coalesced within the production qualities of the music. Mila’s subjective experience of time – her memories – flowed through the externalized opening provided by the listening. Rich’s preferred song externalized his personal value in a context of communicating those values beyond the limits of the words, externalized a sense of being with another – “you.” For both Jen and Linda the music is an external source of emotional support. For Jen, “It’s very joyful.” “It puts me in a good mood…” For Linda, “This song would just make me feel revitalized.”

In dialogues about the workplace, participants invariably externalized a self that they could shape within their storytelling. Just as invariably, when asked, “How did you arrive at the music,” the music itself served as an externalizing reference point; participants spoke about what
of themselves they found in the music. In both contexts – music and work – harmony, counterpoint, rhythm all unfolded at the subject-object boarder creating a feeling the participants named by performing an aesthetic space between the ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘we’, and ‘they’ of the narrative.

In these examples, by holding externalized workplace selves and externalized musical selves next to each other, we observed how music–abilities emerged in performances of a subject-object dance. Participants’ descriptions detailed performed harmonies, rhythms, articulations and cadencies of human relatedness. Participants, without stating so explicitly, named the music–abilities that in absolute human vulnerability, engage others.

The Absent but Implicit: “What did you hear?” “What did that feel like?”

*Absent but Implicit* refers to the ongoing polarity of narrative declaration. “[T]he meanings that we derive from texts depend on the distinctions we make between what is presented to us (privileged meaning) and what is ‘left out’ (subjugated meaning)” (Carey & Russell, 2009, p. 321). Western music is intelligible largely through its preoccupation with performing in the spaces between implicit expectations and explicit challenges to those expectations (Hindrichs, 2018; Levitin, 2007; Meyer, 2008). Harmony, rhythm, melody, etc. all work within the spaces that challenge the boundaries between what is explicitly stated and implicitly insisted upon. In music, as in narrative declarations, once the implicit has been stated, it is explicit. A residue of what had been explicit becomes subjugated – implicit – creating a rhythm, counterpoint and dance.

When asking participants “What did you hear?” I asked not about the meaning of their meetings or of their preferred recording. I wanted to know what the sounds were like physically, apart from the words. I asked participants if they remembered the Charlie Brown cartoons
where the classroom teacher’s voice was performed by a muted trombone using word’s that sounded like, “Wah-wah wa wah waaa” (for example, Schulz, 1969, clip at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxC_AjFxS68). I prompted participants with questions like: How many voices were there? Did they all speak? Were some louder than others? Were the voices fast or slow? Did people interrupt each other? Just the sounds – did they create a structure? By call and response? Was there accompaniment? How were the sounds orchestrated?

In contrast, when asking, “How did that feel?” I wanted to know about the positive and negative spaces of those audible markers and shapes. What feelings did these evoke? What were the subjugated and privileged feelings associated with those sounds?

Given the tight weave between man-made sounds and their intentions, participants tended to provide answers to questions about what sounds were heard and what was felt in concert with their comments about what was intended by the words and music. Perceptions, feelings and thoughts were generally inseparable. This very much confirmed Vygotsky’s claim that “the immediacy of ‘natural’ perception is supplanted by a complex mediated process; as such, speech becomes an essential part of the child’s cognitive development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 43).

If this dissertation asks in response to the pandemic of employee alienation, ‘What has set itself up in us?’ (Adorno, 2001; Butler, 2012). In some sense we can answer, “speech.” We tend away from our physically embodied selves toward our cognitive interpretations of meaning. To the extent that to talk about human sounds requires us to talk about human intention (Wittgenstein, 1953), more often than not when participants did describe non-word sounds, they did so in musical terms. Music too works intentionally.
The workplace.

Alex directs our conversation toward the structure of the workplace conversation. Except for implicatons we might draw regarding the orchestration of voices, Vygotsky’s ‘natural’ perception’ of sound perception is supplanted almost entirely by Alex’s focus on the process that allowed the sounds to appear in their structured form.

Alex: Sales was part of it. Enrollment was part of it. Underwriters were part of it. They were already aligned. There was a long series of preparation, as well as a very substantial assessment done.

Describing the meeting, Alex focuses again on the structure and function of the conversation.

Alex: The CIO was sitting right by me looking at my presentation and we were discussing together how to meet the business demands.

The feelings that these sounds evoked, are also associated with the content and functional aspects of speech:

Alex: It was a very well prepared, orchestrated and uplifting event. For most of the meeting basically everybody said, well done. And then that was the end of it. Everybody was saying, ‘a very good meeting,’ ‘we are all for it,’ and ‘we are going to do it.’ The proposal was accepted by the business teams in agreement with the Chief Information Officer.

But even within this highly content driven functional framework, there is still an implicit frame of reference, a political tone, a harmony and rhythm of sorts, that Alex describes as “polite,” “slow moving,” “orchestrated,” “soothing.” This implicit tone can be observed as it works to create alignment within the organization. Through these “soothing” harmonies and “slow moving” rhythms there is a sense of “relationship” that implicitly states when there is “something wrong” or “something right” in team members’ words and actions.

Alex: First, the organization is, I wouldn’t say relaxed, but definitely polite and slow moving. And secondarily, there are a lot of politics within the organization of course. And those politics are, could be relied upon, really relied upon basis of relationship… you can not necessarily exploit, but you can ride those politics, to the target success. Of course, if you propose something wrong, you cannot do this. But if
you are proposing something right, you still need to steer everybody and you need to steer it carefully, and you need to orchestrate the events carefully so that nobody gets shocked. … The whole of the organization – the whole tone of the organization – is very, I don’t know how to say, maybe, soothing.

Ken begins his response to “what did it sound like” by describing his feelings and thoughts about the general level of tension within the meeting. He quickly turns from what tension felt like to describe why it was tense. By describing why the sounds are tense, a resulting, implicitly painful, silence is contextualized – ‘heard’ through the cognitive screen.

Ken: There’s always a sense of tension in the meeting. There were a lot of opposing interests at play. I don’t want to say opposing interest, but different, different interests at play. I knew when I brought up the subject that it would create tension. And the interesting thing was, that after I had said my piece, nobody said anything.

When asked what in the sounds themselves, apart from the words, might have indicated that it was tense, Ken provided more description. However, even here, the sounds were primarily arrived at through their cognitive functions, implied meaning prioritized in naming the explicit sounds. Logically, this makes sense: following Wittgenstein, the intent in the meeting was to speak, not to make sounds; following Vygotsky, speech is the gateway to hearing.

Ken: People are in different locations for these meetings. A lot of them are speaking on the phone and so it comes across as kind of loud and there’s a lot of interruption because people can’t see each other who aren’t in the room. … It’s more of interjections. Jumping in. There’s a sense of impatience in the voices of people who aren’t technical in nature. They, they seem to feel like people whose role is technical are creating problems rather than solving problems. You can hear sighing. Or you can hear just a little bit of abruptness in the language that is used. And when someone like myself raises an important issue and gives a good example of why it’s important, and the response is dead silence, it’s, it’s as though they’re not disagreeing with you. They just don’t want to say anything. It’s sort of a passive aggressiveness almost.

Even though the intent is to speak, rather than create music, within the meeting’s sounds, a musical context did seem to persist. When pressed on the sounds apart from their vocabulary,
Ken describes a significant distinction between musical and speaking sounds – an implicit harmony.

Ken: Unlike music, you can only have one person speaking at a time. But, you can have multiple people thinking the same thing at the same time. So, although one person is speaking at a time, as we come closer to agreeing on a topic and the solution for that topic, a resolution, or whatever you want to call it, it’s as though people are playing together. It goes to harmony instead of disharmony.

This music inherent in the meeting creates musical form.

Ken: It’s interesting. You’ll have an intense discussion for a few minutes on a topic and it, you come to agreement then there’s sort of a quiet off period until you get into the next topic.

Ken’s narrative arrived at a musical quality in the conversation: an implicit harmonic form in the conversation. As Ken described the physical sounds, both the speech content and musical harmony carried implications. A specific sense of group agreement and cohesion became the implicit harmonic bias against which personal emotions and meaning became viable.

_Mila_ showed no hesitation in describing the sounds of her meeting apart from the vocabulary driven content. To do so, she switched immediately to a musical metaphor. This again demonstrated the idea that we listen to the intentions of the sounds prior to recognizing the sounds. That said, by explicitly naming the musical intentions of the sounds, Mila showed how music is sometimes explicit rather than implicit in our conversations.

Mila: First and fore we take the project team like a rock band. Everyone has their own instrument. You play guitar and I have a keyboard and he, a bass. And during a performance they’re supposed to play individually, but they should be doing it in the harmony of the music. But at that meeting it’s not like that. They’re each playing their own music. It’s noisy. They just only focus on their own chord. They’re not listening to the drum or to the bass – even if you had Jimmy Hendrix, then you still couldn’t play very good music. Right?
These explicit ‘musical’ sounds – “performing...in the harmony of the music” point towards the implicit. The performance directs Mila toward an understanding about the group’s lack of direction. We can follow Mila’s naming the implicit below. She externalizes the “I” and “we,” as “you,” “they,” “them” and “people” as the implicit condition of the ‘rock band’ becomes explicitly named.

Mila: From a broader team perspective, the whole EFS, sometimes we feel like we’ve lost connection with the bigger team. No clear view of the group’s strategy. What’s the team targeting? Where’s the direction? ... Even though we have town halls and team meetings, you still do not know your value in the group. If people do not know the reason, it’s hard to get them to concentrate. If they do not have the big picture, then they just focus on their own piece: cut the work into small pieces. Everyone just focuses on what’s on their hands with only disregard to the whole team, or even the whole organization.

Rich also confirms the construct that to hear, we listen through intentions. The soft or loud sounds of his meeting are heard in relation to implicit as well as explicit intentions. In the meeting, he, his managing director and his paralegal spoke about the rogue e-mail. Explicitly: “There’s no yelling or tension in our office.” Making the implicit, explicit: “We didn’t want her to feel attacked.”

Rich: There were three of us. And, it sounded very much like the two of us talking right now. It was a thoughtful and calm conversation. That’s how we operate. There’s no yelling or tension in our office. And I didn’t want to— and my boss didn’t want to make it worse. We wanted it to be a constructive thing. We didn’t want her to feel attacked. ... In terms of the sounds, his voice is almost unusually calm and soft in his manner of speaking, particularly for an attorney. I think most people expect something a little bit more abrasive.

When asked how these sounds felt, Rich was honest and direct with me. Far from the calm and soothing sounds of the meeting, Rich had another underlying feeling.

Rich: The right thing to do was to talk about it. But it was not comfortable! ... Well, on the way here on the commuter line, the car that I was in. The air conditioner hasn’t been working. It was 150 degrees in there. And people were angry and yelling at each other. They just wanted to be angry at something. I thought, God, I just can’t wait to get out of
this train. The whole time I was coming here – I just can’t wait to get off of the train. That’s what it felt like. I kept thinking I just can’t wait for this conversation to be over. I want to get back to work and not talk about it.

While Rich was angry with his paralegal about the e-mail, the musical qualities of the meeting that handled the problem were calm and soft. Indeed, Juslin (2013) extensively discusses distinctions between the perception of emotions intended by the music, and the personally felt emotions experienced by the listener. For example, I may feel elated while listing to a ‘sad’ song. For Rich, in this discussion, these distinctions are palpable to the extreme. What is explicit and implicit in the music, may not be explicit or implicit in the listening. And yet, to the extent that this schism persists, we are ever more profoundly captive in the implicit and explicit, internalizations and externalizations of the musical experience.

Rich: It was pretty quiet actually. I think we were all making an effort not to seem upset. Maybe we overcompensated in calmness – or perceived calmness. We all were further apart when we were talking then we usually are – actually, physically. It emphasized that nobody was being ganged up on.

As instigated by Carey & Russell (2009), “What might these tears testify to about what it is that is held precious” (p. 321)? Implicit in both Rich’s discomfort with the meeting, and explicit with the distance provided in the conversation, is a profound caring for the quality of life at the firm.

Jen is upfront with me throughout our interview. From her perspective, the sounds of words are driven by linguistic, not musical intent. The intention of the meeting is to resolve agenda issues using words, not to create musical sounds. Here (below), the adversarial feeling in her meeting is functional, explained by “different agendas,” not by musical discord.

Jen: Sometimes it feels adversarial to me. Even though the agenda’s right in front of us, we kind of all have different agendas.
When pressed on how the sounds are organized apart from the vocabulary meanings, Jen describes the dynamics and orchestration in terms of the meeting participants.

Jen: It is really interesting about the different personalities in the room. There’s definitely some of us who talk over others. And there’s others who don’t say anything because they feel like they can’t, or just that they feel like they can’t get a word in.

If there is music to the conversation, it is unintentional. It is only because the personalities with these speaking patterns are in the same place at the same time.

Jen: If somebody is talking and they’re not going to stop, I’m not going to talk over them. I do stop. There are just some people who are softer than others. Some of us are just louder than the others. …

But even from this predominantly verbal language perspective, Jen still has an entirely implicit sense of harmony, rhythm and intonation. Perhaps, in the sense that music has been defined as the aural art of time, our definition needs to be extended in Jen’s case to include the dance – the embodied musicking of the participants.

Jen: Sometimes there’s like a bad note. But sometimes the bad note is not in words but in actions, or facial expressions or body language. I have a tough time getting along with one of the team members. We just don’t mesh. There was a point in this meeting where he was making a suggestion that had to do with a subject that I would probably work on. The doctor was sitting here [pointing left], I was sitting here and he’s here [pointing right]. [Exasperated] He completely was talking over me, to the doctor. He would not make eye contact with me about something that would involve me directly doing something. … To me, that was a bad note. And I don’t, can’t figure out what’s going on there. … He won’t make eye contact with me. Even though he’s talking about something that I’m involved in or might affect me. [emphasis in Jen’s voice]

Through this refrain that includes an impasse in the group’s ability to move the research agenda forward and a participant’s explicit unwillingness to interact directly, Jen reaches an implicit musical analogy about how the group sounds.

Jen: If we want to put it in musical terms, it’s like playing the same song, just that record got stuck with the needle and it won’t move forward. And nothing that I do is making it move forward. Even if I try to like scratch it across, it’s not moving….
Linda starts the description of sound with the silence of her office. Then she implicitly associates the “quiet” with the solitude provided by not making eye contact. In Linda’s interview the lack of eye contact provides an implicit statement about coming from a “genuine,” “authentic” and “thoughtful” place. Note too, the implicit tie between the student’s ‘authenticity’ and her ‘vulnerability.’ That is, the student’s authentic stance is named by her willingness to engage in conversation.

Linda: It was just the two of us in my office, so it was really quiet. She didn’t make eye contact, which is typical. But her responses were genuine and authentic. Thoughtful. Her responses sounded like they were coming from a place of raw feeling and being vulnerable. At times she was really exasperated, expressing frustration. And other times, her voice was quiet when she was feeling sad. It changed and it modulated.

The musicality of the conversation continues to develop from that theme. Linda’s voice steady, holding the space of the ‘quiet’ open for her student, who is allowed to solo and improvise.

Linda: There was a lot of back and forth with moments of silence, with pauses. My voice was steady – I have more of a lower voice because I’m older. Her voice [had]… inflections, variation, frustration, and then a little quieter. Her voice was reflecting her emotions. My voice was grounding and clarifying.

The implicit value associated with coming from a “vulnerable,” “genuine,” “authentic,” and “thoughtful” place allowed her student to engage in an exploration: allowed her personal story to take a new form.

Randy: Besides the vocabulary, the word meanings, was there a structure to the sounds? Linda: The sound of it was like there was more frustration and upset initially and then it moved into more affirmative kinds of sounds. She moved from anger and frustration to, to more of strength and self-efficacy, affirming change.

The performance of these implicit values – “strength and self-efficacy” – are made explicit in musical form and feeling as well as in the illocutionary content.

Linda: I’m very movement oriented — so it felt like a dance to me. And that was nice. It felt like improvisation. There was a lot of flow. To me if felt like we were dancing… a dance of improvisation where there was contact. Somebody moves back and someone moves forward. You’re responding to one another, giving each other space.
For Alex, the “soothing” and “slow” rhythmic feelings of organizational discourse unfold into the implicit “polite” qualities of the organization. This does not say that the organization is either soothing or slow, but only that there is a musical quality to the organization that is realized in the careful planning and execution of programs and projects. The terse silence that met Ken’s comments was part of an implicit drive towards organizational harmony, hard won in the harsh throws of tense discourse. The discord Mila’s team produced by not playing together pointed toward an implicit management issue: an inadequate sense of direction provided by the home office. For Rich, while the music of the meeting felt quiet and soothing, his personal response was “hot” and aggravated. The externalized and internalized feelings both coalesce around a unified profound caring for the quality of life at the firm. For Jen, even though little utility was derived from listening to the musical sounds of her meeting, the metaphor of the stuck record explicitly named her frustration. The metaphor made palpable her frustrations about the team’s inability to move the research agenda forward. Implicit in the frustration: Jen’s deep caring for her team’s capacity to produce quality research. For Linda, the music in her dialogue with her student proceeded as an improvised dance. The dance, always building toward the implicit respect and trust held in the dialogue.

My sense from these conversations is that a music exists in the boundaries “between what is presented to us (privileged meaning) and what is ‘left out’ (subjugated meaning)” (Carey & Russell, 2009, p. 321). As stated at the outset, these narrative approaches are dialectic scaffolding, not some ontological “truth.” The words used to express what has been “externalizing conversations” might well also have expressed the boundaries between privileged
and subjugated meaning. In our places of work, music—abilities touch and transgress across these narrative constructs, resonating as we embody community.

**The music.**

In theory, music speaks for itself. Berleant claims music speaks “directly from musical experience, without any intermediary” (Berleant, 2012, pp. 19-20). Adorno says music speaks for itself as “a proposition at once distinct and concealed... demythologized prayer, freed from the magic of making anything happen” (Adorno, 1993, p. 402). And John Dewey claims music is a direct expression of “stir, agitation, movement, the particulars and contingencies of existences—which, nevertheless, are as ingrained in nature and as typical in experience as are its structural permanences” (Dewey, 1934, pp. 145-146).

Consistent with these theories, none of the participants thought it was appropriate to suggest that music in general could serve metaphorically either for workplace engagement or more broadly as a philosophical approach to life. However, contrary to these theories, when participants talked about music, music did not speak for itself. All participants externalized implicit dearly held values into their reports when asked what they heard in the music. Similarly, participants externalized important implicit personal feelings associated with those sounds when asked what they felt. At least in the context of this research, musical listening served these utilitarian functions. As for music speaking for itself, if music is a language, we must approach it from its everyday utility (Wittgenstein, 1953, n.116). In this respect, the utility of music for each participant followed some variation of hermeneutic fore-projection (Fry, 2012, pp. 30-50), creating a canvas on which personal systems of understanding could be vetted. From Gadamer’s, *Truth and Method:*
A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 269)

Essentially, to describe what was heard, participants first set forth (‘fore-projected’) the implicit bias against which any musical description could be verbalized. Music is physical. When listening we embody harmony, counterpoint, rhythm, cadences, orchestration, etc. (Small, 1998). By engaging in the hermeneutic cycle with music, we engage in our embodied vulnerability to change. What we held as implicit is verified or refuted, and in so doing, named explicitly.

I ask Alex about which voices or instruments lead in the song. When he tells me that it is the saxophone and vocalist. In the telling, he transports me back to where he first heard the music, his education in USSR. He provides enough information to create a frame of reference from which I can, moving forward, imagine his experience. From his externalization (fore-projection), I can then attempt to hear the music in a new light: the nostalgic quality of importance he assigns to the vocalist and saxophone player; a human voice in terms of Alex’s nuanced values and beliefs about how important it is to be politely heard and to attend to the politics – to “not shock anyone”.

Alex: Definitely a saxophone. And the voice is the other one. And then there was a lot of surrounding instruments. But the primary ones are the saxophone and the voice. By the way, the combination of saxophone and voice from what I know from the history of music – I studied music when I was back in USSR. They told us that the saxophone was invented as a human voice instrument. Meaning as an instrument that imitated the human voice. So that’s why perhaps the combination is very strong. There is a sax and there is a human voice.

The harshness of the lyrics, what this human voice says, almost seems to catch Alex off-guard.
Alex: Aurally, in the beginning when you asked me when I listened first, I didn’t understand English, so the music [as opposed to lyrics] was actually the best part of it.

Regardless of what is said in the lyrics, this music speaks of a quality of relationship intrinsically significant to Alex, a “bringing everything together.”

Alex: Yeah. It’s a very interesting contradiction. In this particular song – maybe it is true in the other songs – the text is actually very aggressive. The way the music is done is kind of a philosophy. It, combines. They try to bring everything together. They try to create a very deep musical experience.

When Alex discussed his successful meeting, it too was about combining. The different software languages, platforms and business groups. “It started with assembler, DOS, REX, COBAL, Fortran, and all the way up to Java.” And later, “Sales was part of it. Enrollment was part of it. Underwriters were part of it….” He talked about the importance of the “slow” and “polite” tone of the organization. These values are externalized into his experience of the music.

Alex: There is a rhythm code. Even though it is a slow rhythm, but there is a rhythm. And rhythm is done by bass, guitar and drums. And then there are accents. Like, when, when there is sort of a, I don’t know… an explosion of emotion, then everybody is participating in that particular sound. And I would say that this is very typical for any type of music. Classic. I would even say that this is a very classical form of music.

The point I make here is not that the music only sounds this way for Alex. Certainly, Alex’s observations – whether about Dark Side of the Moon or what is “very typical for any type of music” – are, in practical terms, broadly universal. Regardless of universality, for each listener the utility of the music lies in its ability to speak toward these personally implicit values beyond the explicit “aggressive” content of the words that remind us of our human condition. In Alex’s listening, we hear the music externalizing implicit non-verbal values.

Ken begins his description of what is heard by placing himself fully within the music as an amateur performer and producer. As he speaks about the music, he speaks about (fore-
projects) his personal interests: “what really interests me is the production of it.” Ken’s

hermeneutic process is in imagining, recreating in his mind, one instrument at a time, how this

music might be captured in the recording studio.

Ken: You know, I played guitar and I would listen to music. But I never took
appreciation about how a song was produced until I started doing my own recording. It’s
nothing special musically or lyrically. But what really interests me is the production of it.
The, ‘Wow! I never noticed that before. Oh, cool!’ Like at the very end there you can
hear this really high gain guitar, but the volume on it is very low. I think that’s part of
how the production was designed. You can hear different voices at different rhythms.
So, like the acoustic guitar - the guitar notes themselves are not so prominent, but you can
hear the strumming, at a very high frequency, and in both channels. It establishes a
smoother rhythm than the beat, beat, beat of drums. It’s more like a walking. You
wouldn’t be able to hear them if it weren’t for the fact that it was an acoustic guitar with a
strumming pick next to the microphone. Otherwise the notes would just get blurred in
with the electric guitar. The base is very prominent and sort of bouncing. Which seems
to – traditionally the bass is in the rhythm section and sort of carries the song – but this is
almost melodic. It’s playing off the vocal.

Throughout Ken’s description, we hear a constant theme of what it means for so many voices, so
many colors, to be heard. This is in sharp contrast to the meeting he was in where the silent
treatment was used as a device to mute participation. A non-verbal picture is painted of an
implicit feeling of being heard. And in the hearing, even one voice is not necessarily a unity. In
each voice there is room for a dissonance of its own.

Ken: He has a very interesting voice. Like the Rod Steward scratchy voice. Which is,
it’s not soft, it’s not really melodic at all and yet, it’s interesting sounding. If you were to
analyze the frequencies in his voice, you’d probably see a lot of dissonance in the
different frequencies there. But the octave that he’s singing in seems to fit very well with
all the instruments. They all seem to have their own little place within the soundscape in
terms of frequency, rhythm and position. While the acoustic guitar sounds very soft and
subtle, that sort of harsh screeching that accents the top, it’s also singing.

There is room for personal growth, acceptance and resolution of dissonance made possible by the
“frequency, rhythm and position” given to each voice in the production of the track.

Ken: The voice of each instrument is its own independent thing wanting to be heard. But
only in a way that adds to the collection of the whole. It creates a little bit of
interference, but it’s really just making it more colorful. Like that hot guitar. The notes that they’re playing have a built-in dissonance. It makes it ring differently.

In response to, “how does it feel,” Ken is clear. The music feels like the music itself. And in that feeling, there is an implicit value externalized: the value of participating and having one’s voice heard.

Ken: Sometimes I sing along with it. But usually when I’m listening to it, I’m listening for each little voice that I can hear it and see if there is something I didn’t hear previously. I’m sure there’s probably dozens of guitar tracks on there.

*Mila* hears the music through implicit values that externalize the same human values she brings to her team: “working together.”

*Randy*: How do the instruments support the vocalist?
*Mila*: I don’t think ‘supportive’ is the proper word. Because she started by talking the story, like what we’re doing right now. And when those instruments came in, they were just worked out in a harmonious way. They’re supporting each other actually.
*Randy*: Supporting each other?
*Mila*: Yeah. It’s not the vocal is leading and then the instruments are supporting in the background. *They’re just working together.* [emphasis added]

Within the “working together” fore-projection, Mila describes a purely hermeneutic process – a constant revisioning. First, she describes a gestalt that touches the heart as a full experience of the implicit (Gadamer’s “fore-projected expectations”), and only in iteration of the cycle do we come to hear more precisely that there are pieces of the whole working together.

*Mila*: The harmony is of the whole. I don’t think wow, the vocal or the lyrics are so touching I will ignore the piano or the other instruments. It’s not like that. When you first hear a song, its special. You take it as a whole. And then after, you will start to dig into more details. And focus on the lyrics and the music itself because you find that you like it and you want to know why. You just want to get to know more. So, when it first comes to you, music listening, it’s not rational. It’s something that makes you feel. Not just from your head. Something else. Because when you first listen to it, it’s from your heart, not from your brain. And maybe the second time, the third time, you start to use your brain and then start to see what’s good, what’s bad. And then, you will also get into the details.
When music is substituted for Gadamer’s (1989) ‘text’, fore-projections take on an alternative significance: meaning making is embodied and musical. *Becoming* occupies a hermeneutics that deals with an embodied – as Mila put it, “from your heart” – cycle of transformation.

R*ich*’s account of his preferred music also follows a hermeneutic process. Here, his fore-projections of the music are interrupted by a new historicizing horizon. In re-ascribing meaning to his preferred recording, he exemplifies what Michael White calls “re-membering conversations” – reconstructing one’s horizon by privileging alternative memories and voices in one’s life story. “Re-membering conversations provide an opportunity for people … to grant authority to some voices in regard to matters of one’s personal identity and to disqualify other voices with regard to this.” (White, 2007, p. 129).

Rich: At first, I was probably listening to it while I was studying in college or law school. And I just thought it was cool. I liked the interplay with the percussion and the string sounds. And over the last couple of years it has taken on more meaning. Again, as I said, about my wife. The first time I realized that it was somebody singing ‘you,’ I just started to associate it with her. It’s a lot more meaningful now because of that.

Importantly, Rich’s process demonstrates how Gadamer’s fore-projections – our implicitly held beliefs, externalized into the music – are not destined to become deterministic (Fry, 2012). As White (2007) states, we can invite new projections in, while foreclosing or demoting others. Integrating multiple horizons is critical to Rich, and a recursive frame for hearing this music.

Rich: To me it’s entirely about the interplay of all these things. That’s what makes it interesting to me. The drums that stutter on their way in, and the strings that also sound like a sample. The producer had these different pieces and this whole song was him messing around with those pieces. You know, start here, add this, add this. It builds, then drops off, and then he adds new pieces. Then all of the sudden he throws all the pieces back on together. It’s all repetition – same sounds over and over again, just rearranged.

When addressing the feelings associated with these sounds, Rich states his appreciation that the song portrays multiple feelings. In saying so, I am reminded of his feelings of heat and anger
during the calm and peaceful conversation held about the rogue e-mail. Rich values the song’s ability to hold and artistically juxtapose conflicting emotional realities. The music is “something more respectable” in these terms.

Rich: I like that it’s almost bitter sweet. When the strings first come in, I think of a sunrise. Optimistic. The beginning of the song and the strings are bringing brightness into the song. Then the bass comes in, which adding a little bit of body, like the day’s starting to get going. Then the interlude is a little dark with the creeping piano keys in the background. The tone of the song when everything comes back in you’ve got the strings and you’ve got the drums and you have the vocals over it: it’s mostly optimistic. But, there’s a little bit of — I don’t want to say pessimism — but there’s a hint of darkness that this song has. It’s melancholy, which takes it out of the realm of happy summer dance songs. Something more respectable.

Jen’s sense of frustration, just expressed to me about her research meeting, infiltrates her experience of the music. Where listening to this recording had previously been a purely positive and uplifting event, now there is conflict. The music was no longer simply an externalized reference for highly valued dearly held beliefs. It now also provided a focal point for externalizing contestation.

Jen: I hope this exercise doesn’t ruin this for me. The part in the piece where it really swells— he’s banging on the keys! I started to think of that as like the angry part of the music. In the past when I listened to the song, the swelling always sounded like the really joyful part. But, thinking of it in the context of this meeting, it feels like the angry part. It felt like he was really [Jen bangs on table] banging on the keys like he was mad! And then this, the little, the little trills at the end are just amazing – it feels like, okay he’s calming down now – and they’re so delicate.

When Jen described the sounds of her meeting, she spoke predominantly in terms of the people who made the sounds (as opposed to the qualities of sounds themselves or the content). Similarly, as she spoke about the music, her entry point to describing the sounds was through the performer’s – George Winston’s – intentions: “he’s banging on the keys!” Through this conduit – the implicit expectations Jen holds about the performer – she names her implicit positions as taken up by an externalized “you.”
Jen: What’s so amazing about the way he plays it is the feeling in each section, the control of the volume, even the lightness or the pounding of keys – like, manic a little bit. It starts off very basic. Almost like when you’re calm; it feels like you’re calmly thinking of something. And then you think about it more and more. It swells into this—thought process almost. When you’re having a feeling about, or going over an idea of a particular conversation or something that didn’t go very well.

As Jen’s description of the music proceeds, she fully externalizes her own fore-projection of George Winston’s implicit intentions in story form. Jen returns to the use of the “I” pronoun, inserting herself into the music’s implicit story. Specifically, when Jen says (below), “I didn’t really mean…” “I” refers to another, a participant in Winston’s story. When she says in the next sentence “I feel like he’s calming down,” “I” refers to Jen herself. And finally, “I” in “why am I getting so angry” refers rhetorically to George Winston.

Jen: It’s like an interaction with another person that starts off amiable and then one person says something wrong and then it takes a really bad turn. You immediately regret it. And then it just goes, okay, no, no, no, let’s try to smooth this over because I didn’t really mean that to go that way. I feel like he’s calming down. Like he gets worked up and then he’s calming down. He’s like, wait a minute. Hold on. No need to get all worked up there George. Almost like he’s saying, ‘why am I getting so angry?’ [emphasis added]

In short, to say what the music sounds and feels like, Jen externalizes her own perceptions and feelings by describing (1) what is implicit to her about George Winston’s feelings as he externalizes in his performance, and (2) what is implicit to her about the feelings of the characters in the implicit story that George Winston explicates. I suggest that none of this is unusual or different than what any of us might do when we hear music. Jen’s honesty of expression exemplifies how music serves as a conduit for the absent but implicit. What is implicit here can only be labeled by the propositional content of the words Jen used to describe her experience. Here, the implicit is embodied, intrinsic to the immediacy of her experience of the story the music tells.
Linda’s points of contact with the music – her fore-projections – are embodied and emotional. Her narrative is embodied in the sense that to tell me about what she hears, she sings. Through the emotional sweep of the music, she can sing the sounds that emerge as she experiences them. Important among these sounds are the lyrics.

\textit{Linda:} It has within it a passive flow, underneath. [She sings four or five bars.] It has a melody that’s smooth throughout. There’s also a melancholy, like a bitter sweet. There’s a lot of emotion. 

\textit{Randy:} How do you know, what do you hear that tells you there is emotion? 

\textit{Linda:} The crescendos. There are bursts. There’s these intense crescendos you know that arise into a whole level of more intensity. And certainly the words. The words just add to that. I have the lyrics. I have them right here.

Given the nature of Linda’s work, counseling students who struggle balancing personal and social life at school, the song’s lyrics are fitting. The sounds that materialize the implicit feelings of these lyrics are “reaffirming.” The song explicates what is implicit in Linda’s work.

\textit{Linda:} There’s a refrain, ‘He ain’t heavy,’ you know, it’s just reaffirming. Balancing between the caring about somebody, but also not letting their pain and struggles bring your own personal defenses down. There’s a real balance with that.

As Linda sings the song, embodying the music, she provides a first person, present tense account of what she feels, as explicated in the music. She crosses the boundaries between what is externalized and explicit in the world, and what is implicitly insisted on by the music. In her voice I hear: \textit{this is what it feels like to help my students individuate.} While Linda fore-projects her positionality as a counselor onto the music, the music works in our interview as a conduit of the compassion implicit to her work.

\textit{Linda:} During the, well, when there’s a crescendo, that’s when you hear the violins come in. Like emphasis. [singing] ‘many a winding turn… to who knows where…’ Like there are certain emphases when you get more instruments. You get that offset with a single voice, that’s more intimate. The single voice, [Singing] ‘The road is long,’ one human voice would emphasize, just emphasize with what feels like a sea of voices.
Alex spoke about the conjoining of the human voice with saxophone as a source of strength, fore-projecting from his experience in the USSR. Ken spoke about being heard within the whole, as a contextualizing fore-projection from which the sounds of the music emerged in conversation. Mila spoke about mutual support, hearing the song as a whole, working together first, and then as particular sounds second. Rich’s implicit sense of the music was updated and made explicit as he incorporated his feelings of ‘you,’ in reference to his wife, into the music. Jen allowed the music to embody new and conflicting emotions. Her existing fore-projections of the music were challenged when within Winston’s performance she heard her workplace contestations she had never heard before. Linda also externalized her workplace situation into the music where the music helped her recharge and re-affirm her personal emotional resources as she works compassionately with her students.

In all these cases, the music worked in the space of fore-projection (Gadamer, 1989, p. 269). Looking at music listening portion these interviews: structurally, music set a cultural frame of reference at the macro level, and a thematic frame of reference at the micro level, and proceeded to cycle over those reference frames in physical terms of music –abilities (rhythm, melody, harmony, etc.) to create emotion and meaning (Hindrichs, 2018; Levitin, 2007; Meyer, 2008) within the listening participants. From this standpoint, the interviews confirmed Cross’s concept of deictic intentionality. “If music is about anything, it exhibits a deictic intentionality, a ‘transposable aboutness’” (Cross, 2001, p. 38).

Participants fore-projections were in terms of remembered implicit feelings. Fore-projecting did not objectify meaning, but signaled arrival at a familiar process of objectifying. Participants discussed not so much what the music meant, but each described a distinctive process of hermeneutic cycling held in bounds by the terms of the music, in relation to their own
internal implicit beliefs, stirred up by the sounds. Hence, music was felt by the heart, emoted, embodied because it holds a fore-projecting reference for the process (‘What does coming to understand this kind of thing feel like?’) - rather than for truth (‘What does this mean?’).

Retelling the Retelling: “What did that tell you?”

Re-telling commits culturally, socially and personally significant stories and lessons learned to the status of valid and true (Lyotard, 1979). Retelling iterates the process of ‘re-membering,’ allowing individuals “to grant authority to some voices in regard to matters of one’s personal identity and to disqualify other voices with regard to this” (White, 2007, p. 129). In Gadamer’s hermeneutic process, retelling the retelling speaks to the idea that as we “work out” through iteration “this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges” we “[penetrate] into the meaning” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 269). We “understand what is there,” in the iteration of the telling. “This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 269). And as noted by Judith Butler, we must make a distinction between what is promoted to the status of valid and true from what might be considered absolute or ideal. “If a structure, ideal, or subject identity must be iterated, Butler argues, then it is not absolute or ideal, as the existence is in the iteration” (Borgerson, 2005, p. 70).

In music, listeners make sense of music as the music retells explicitly and in variations its motifs, rhythms, harmonies, and cadences (Green, 1965; Meyer, 2008; Schoenberg, 1967). In jazz, retelling a ‘mistake’, can make the iteration sound cool and exciting (Berliner, 1994). Because musical experience tends to be non-propositional (Adorno, 1993; Berleant, 2012; Hindrichs, 2018), the truth that it tells reaches for what in human relationships cannot be
articulated in words (Adorno, 1993). For what it lacks in propositional content, music’s validity and truth are visceral; music is personal, explicit and specific in time and place through its retellings.

**The workplace.**

*Alex speaks about* his rearchitecting of the business problem as a retelling – and probably not the first retelling. As such, our conversation exemplifies a retelling of the retelling. In retelling the retelling, we were playing a familiar theme, but supported by a new rhythm, harmonic structure and groove. By doing so, what made sense in one setting is shaken up, reflected upon in a new time and place.

*Alex:* There was a lot of work done before that last meeting.
*Randy:* Like the last movement of a symphony?
*Alex:* Exactly, it was uplifting, not controversial. It was not any sort of a problem.

As Alex and I review the meeting, our iterations confirms the meeting’s validity. Yes. The planning, the orchestration and the solution provided to the business, they all followed best practices. Regardless, new realities did not fall in line with even these best laid plans.

*Alex:* What happened after that? Sales couldn’t hold themselves. They tried to push as much as possible into the initial implementation. Instead of step by step [as previously agreed], they jumped, so to speak, and that created a staggering crisis. The end of the day, nine months later, after we went through all of the user stories and figured out the total price would be five times higher than the original IT estimate. And so, basically this year we said, let’s do a re-platform. That’s it!

Borgerson’s retelling of Butler seems worth reiteration. “If a structure, ideal, or subject identity must be iterated, Butler argues, then it is not absolute or ideal, as the existence is in the iteration” (Borgerson, 2005, p. 70). Applied here we might say, Venerable’s identity – its viability – is not dependent upon getting the systems ‘absolute or ideal’ at each turn. There is an iterative process. Not only does “[t]his constant process of new projection [constitute] the movement of
understanding and interpretation” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 269). More pragmatically, the ‘existence’ of Venerble ‘is in the iteration.’ Alex is direct and articulate in these constructs:

Alex: I fit in very well. I mean, I like what I do. I like the people with whom I am doing it with. Partially because increasingly, I’m gaining respect and credibility. … The relationships are more important rather than the outcomes. [emphasis added]

Alex is not saying that ineffective systems technologies work as well as effective ones. But if efficiency is sought, it is to be found only in the harmony, counterpoint and rhythm of the iteration, and not in the absolute or ideal of any one iteration. The art is in finding your way, not in the endpoint.

Alex: If you don’t know your way you can be lost very quickly. And you’ll not be correct.
Randy: And that’s through the politics as well as through the information?
Alex: Yes. And nobody really hides any information at all. It’s just organizationally Venerable hasn’t grown up yet, to have that kind of information repository and access.

When I ask Ken what his workplace meeting experience tells him – the tension in the meeting and the silence that resulted when he spoke about something so important to the organization – the emptiness he conveys feels painful to me. The silence Ken experienced was not a pause for reflection nor an opening for expression. Ken speaks of it as a foreclosure on his role and instrumentality.

Ken: I was feeling a sense of, I have a role to do or a job to do here. I know how to do it. But I don’t think I’m respected enough for people to listen to me. Respected to the degree that you know I’m an employee and everybody respected an employee. But not my degree of wisdom and experience. Mostly among those who really don’t, couldn’t grasp the importance of what I was describing. … I feel like I have enough experience and wisdom that people should want to solicit my opinion. And listen to it carefully. … What I bring to the table is going to waste.

If organizational existence is in the iteration, then non-existence is in the non-iteration. Not simply an interruption, this kind of silence brings to mind a complete negation of Ranciere’s
mute pebble which insisted that, “one can no longer contrast those who speak and those who only make noise, those who act and those who only live” (Ranciere, 2004b, pp. 14-15).

Ken: When they seem like they’re not listening or not trusting my input, it’s kind of maybe it’s an arrogance almost. I don’t know. I don’t mean arrogant in the typical sense but an impatient arrogance. It wasn’t that I was being completely ignored. It was just that it was as if people were tired of listening to me [laughs] and wanted to move on. Even though we hadn’t resolved the issue, we didn’t get an answer. It was as if, who am I to make this demand on the entire organization? For a requirement. You know, you’re lucky to have a job. Keep your mouth shut.

However, it seems that even this type of silent oppression iterates. It speaks in its own rhythmic cadences. For Ken, this silence is a retelling of a trope:

Ken: Driven by budgeting and by wanting things done quickly, people who don’t understand information systems very well tend to see information technology teams as always delivering things slowly and late and over budget. It’s more of, we just, we want a machine and software and data and it shouldn’t be that complicated.

Like all iterations, a story’s validity, its ability to act, is in its telling, the iteration itself. I sense a starkly different tone in this retelling about why Ken was silenced (“it shouldn’t be that complicated”) than when he provided the direct telling about the meeting itself. Absent but implicit in the initial telling was the expectation of being heard and valued. That implicit expectation named the pain of being silenced. In retelling the trope about why he was excluded, the implicit expectation of inclusion as a dearly held value has been eliminated; inclusion is no longer expected; no longer painful when missing. The alienation has been accounted for: “driven by budgeting” by people “wanting things done quickly” and “who don’t understand.” Hearing Ken’s words I find even deeper respect for Lyotard’s construct of terrorism: “By terror I mean the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him” (Lyotard, 1979, p. 63). The expectation of being heard is in the iteration, and that iteration, at least in this meeting, was foreclosed.
Mila iterates through more stories about her project team. The first meeting had no cohesion. In the second meeting Mila truncated any fore-projection the team members might have brought into the room. Rather than team members retelling their positions, she interrupted, turning to an anonymous communication pattern, forcing a reset on what was before held as implicit truth.

Mila: So, in our second meeting we did more preparation and used some tricks. We started with collecting information in an anonymous way on sticky notes. We used the white board to list the notes one by one so that people could have a clear view. And we summarized… We had everyone vote and rank one by one the top five priorities. The outcome of the second meeting was that finally we had some working agreements. Like what kind of success we’re going to achieve in the year, in the first quarter, the second quarter... So with that things started to get better.

In some senses, this story itself is a retelling of an archetypic story.

Randy: But, what part of all this is just that it’s a new team and they hadn’t stormed yet? Mila: Yeah. It’s a new team.
Randy: I mean there’s a saying that goes, “form, storm, norm, and perform.”
Mila: Tuckman, Tuckman’s thought [(Tuckman, 1965)]. All right. And now the team, they’re starting to perform. … One of the best!

Mila trumps me by citing the source of her archetypical retelling. Hers is an iteration of a story retold in 1965. Even then it was a retelling of fifty stories from the 1950s (Tuckman, 1965).

However, each iteration is in a time and place of its own. But here Mila explicitly, head-on, introduces a process of interruption to the team’s iterative process. She enforces personal vulnerability.

Mila: We have so many meetings with the project team. To insure everyone gets to the meeting on time we set a rule that if you’re late, then in the next round of review you will have to sing in front of everyone. You know we actually already have an album [laughing]. We have had twenty songs already and we have them all recorded. … It’s kind of like a warmup. No matter if you are a good singer or terrible one, then you just start to relax. … This Tuesday we just had a mini concert because there was a meeting conflict with some of the team members and they forgot to notify. We had five performers. I asked if they want to change to another penalty and they said no. I think it’s because in China, especially between friends, we all go to karaoke to sing together. So, it’s more like the team is getting connected, not like we’re just colleagues. We’re
really a team. Especially when someone’s getting nervous and then the rest try to encourage him or her. There’s an interaction between the team members during this kind of performance that helps a lot. It really took some time to get everything happening. It’s more than a song trick. Because everyone feels the pain – and nobody likes that – when you change your mindset and start thinking as a team, things just get better and better.

Not only does the singing address the personal vulnerabilities of the team, but it also explicitly sings the implicit harmonies, counterpoints and cadences of its own iterative processes, “as the existence is in the iteration” (Borgerson, 2005, p. 70). Archetypal iterations become individuated. This is not to suggest that all teams should sing, but more to the point to suggest that in the iterations, all teams do sing. Mila found ways to interrupt the team to demonstrate the singing.

_When speaking with Rich about the meanings_ implicit and explicit in the sounds and feelings of his meeting with his paralegal – the calm words and his ‘hot,’ aggravated feelings – he is clear that the ways he described his reactions far exceeded the bounds of the objective substance of the issues.

Rich: And, by the way, going this deep into this makes it sound like a massive crisis. It was not. She was frustrated that they had done all this stuff. I think that she just wanted me to know that her job is hard when she has to deal with people who aren’t [easy to deal with]. And it’s true.

In our discussion Rich had already spoken about personal space. “We all were further apart when we were talking then we usually are – actually, physically.” In this context, the space and need for space beckoned further discussion.

Rich: Well, I’ll give you a little bit more background. … I work for my father-in-law. So, it’s an intimate relationship. My mother-in-law will come in every now and then and do the books and things like that. My wife works down the block, so she pops by after work. It’s more than a work space. It’s everybody’s second home. That’s another reason why it’s got to feel— it can’t be tense in there. You can’t come into our office and unload on your coworkers because you are your family. And it works so well. I mean it’s really
wonderful because we all are so committed. It’s just, you don’t argue. When I said earlier that there is no separation between my work and my life, I mean there’s none. Which is not a bad thing for me. I love it.

In Rich’s counterpoint – balancing work and family life in a single melodic flow – I am reminded of Husserl (1964): “To be sure, we also assume an existing time; this however, is not the time of the world of experience but the eminent time of the flow of consciousness” (p. 23). This ‘flow of consciousness’ is not simply a personal vector of time and place, but more to the point here, “the temporality specific to the aesthetic regime of the arts is a co-presence of heterogeneous temporalities” (Ranciere, 2004a, p. 26). Rich describes a work space in concert with a family space and a personal space. Multiple time continuums define how those spaces feel and work together – a flow of consciousness that is individuated in its iterations – the day to day flow of family ‘popping in after work’ and ‘doing the books.’ Rich’s implicit sense of a multi-dimensional time-space and a deep personal commitment to the intersectionality of those spaces, created by personal interaction, is forefront, reaffirmed and made explicit in the retelling.

As Jen’s meeting was iterative with its formal structure (agenda) and cadences (periodicity), so too is Pachelbel’s Canon: a theme and variation built on an ever-present ‘ground base’ (short, repeated base line). But, Jen was looking for a structural change.

Jen: And this particular meeting was different. We always have a million projects on the list of things that we might potentially do. And we assign people to look into things and all that. And a lot of times we have this meeting when there’s a conference coming up. People are rushing around saying, ‘what can we present as a poster?’ It’s more about the quantity rather than focusing on one or two quality projects that may be really needed in the sphere of our subject out in the world. But, even if we don’t have a poster for this conference, maybe we should try to work on something of quality. That was my agenda. It was the last meeting we had. I felt like it fell back into the old pattern. I lost.

As we iterate over the meeting again, it is not so much that Jen “lost” against the others. The loss is against “that record” that “got stuck with the needle and it won’t move forward.”
Jen: But it [the desire to contribute to a broader research agenda] is something that we have. Most of us are even willing to spend some of our own time to do something good with it. Except sometimes I question. Even if we had the time and money, would we be any further? I’m not sure.

What keeps the record stuck?

Jen: Well, the problem is, is that any projects of real quality are a lot more work. They might be prospective studies where you have to recruit people. Or, our center is too small. It would have to be multi-center and then that would involve us getting other centers involved. It was disappointing to me because I felt like I was trying to put us in a different direction, and we went back. More about having something at the next conference as opposed to what it [the research] was. This is our pattern. I think that we all have really good intentions. But people have a lot on their plate. At the end of the day it’s not really what were paid for day-to-day.

In naming the problem, Jen points with clarity to the reality of iteration. As much “as the existence is in the iteration” (Borgerson, 2005, p. 70), the iteration is still embodied in the form and structure of the organization. The ostinato structure performed by the hospital names its own temporality. These norms perform and persist apart from Jen’s best intentions. It is the counterpoint between the organization and Jen, visible in the interruption – “I lost” – that names the implicit values that sustain Jen’s professional life. “Paradoxically, it is this interruption, this disorientation of the perspective of my life, this instance of an indifference in sociality, that nevertheless sustains my living.” (Butler, 2005, p. 35) This is not to belittle Jen’s disappointment. On the contrary, to the extent that we recognize the disappointment, we acknowledge the negative space. It is the disappointment that names the validity of the distance between Jen’s progressive research agenda and the status quo research agenda. In the reiteration, Jen’s deep personal commitment to sharing the clinical work of her team, while frustrating, is still named. As difficult as it is to deal with the frustration, it is still an incredibly important experience. At the risk sounding glib, when Jen is no longer frustrated, she will have succeeded
in moving her team forward, or she will have given up. In either case, it is precisely these types of frustrating contentions that help to name who we are and what we stand for in our work.

Linda, when asked what the sounds and feelings of her meeting told her, she retells the sounds and feelings in the first person, present tense, bringing us right into the conversation. We can witness, here and now, what she speaks of. Once we arrive at the address of the meeting, she returns to past tense narration to validate her fore-projection. When talking about her student, Linda moves from the past, to the present to the future, naming the ongoing truth and validity of the experience.

Linda: I’m listening very intently. Hearing her frustration and then reflecting back my observations. I felt her receptivity in the conversation we were having. Some of the things that she talked about I have talked to her about before. I’ve noticed where she gets in her own way, where she has difficulty. None of it was exactly new to me. But what was exciting was that she finally seemed to come around to understand how her thinking was just setting her up for unhappiness. I felt like this time she was really looking at it herself, coming to the realization finally, after many, many times of being like, ‘Why do I do this?’ ‘I’m done with this.’ She was ready to actually make behavior changes. Commitment to changing her outlook, her perspective, her thinking, and changing her behavior. Which would lead her to feeling a little more happy, more balanced.

Linda had described her ebb and flow of conversation as a dance, “To me it felt like we were dancing… a dance of improvisation where there was contact.” In the retelling she explored the subjective space of time through past, present and future. In this retelling I experienced a sense of composition, not a single meaning or thought, but something held together only by the space that it names in the time of the telling. I wanted to know more about how this time-space continuum worked and felt to Linda. What does this art of time tell her? Given that her metaphor of choice is dance, I asked about gravity.

Linda: I feel like the gravity is really, is the inner truth. It’s like trying to recognize what is your inner truth. What it is, is going to be different than somebody else’s. We’re trying to find that place within yourself that’s pure when you’re being true to yourself.
In naming gravity in these terms, Linda’s story moved into a retelling of her student’s experience. In retelling the student’s story, the parable is validated and named as true, as felt through the music – the shared dance – of the iteration.

Linda: This person did not have a lot of places in their life that they felt good about themselves. They felt very socially awkward and anxious. They didn’t really have friends outside of the classroom. She put all her energy into getting good grades. That was going to be her place where she would find something to feel good about. She was actually trying to get straight A’s. While you had a moment of satisfaction, there as a huge cost to it—really hating school, being very overwhelmed, incredibly stressed out, angry, bitter. And yet, [she] couldn’t let go of this pursuit, almost like there was nothing to replace it. She was actually doing more things that were giving her satisfaction, like playing guitar, dancing, other things that were expressive. Finding other activities that were enjoyable. But she was still holding onto this thing with school. And it was the end of the year. She had done super well, and she was so angry. Everything that she wanted to get from that, she didn’t get. Like, ‘I was miserable. What’s the point?’ So, the conversation really came down to her being more clear about what she will say no to. Not comparing herself to the culture at the high school but just, what is important to her, to her values, how is she going to stay true to her own measures of success.

In the retelling, Alex’s claim that at Venerable, “relationships are more important” named an implicit stance of mutual respect and trust in the ongoing iterations of building more efficient and effective systems technologies. Ken described a meeting where the implicit expectation of being heard was held in contention; participation in the conversation was foreclosed. Mila addressed the vulnerabilities of her team with acts of compassion and support, including singing to each other. Rich, in the retelling, named a complex, poignant space of trust and caring in his family business. Jen’s contention with the status-quo research agenda of her team individuated her as her values and beliefs in the team’s ability to provide higher quality research pushed against the “stuck record” of the organization’s structure. And Linda’s iteration of her student’s journey named a subjective time and space of “being true to yourself” – a truth exposed, named, performed in vulnerable conversation.
The music.

When asked about their meetings, “What do those sounds and feelings tell you?” participants externalized a self in order to narrate their stories. Participants told stories about a ‘self’ that exemplified personal values. This externalization named personal values as the context in which the sounds of the meeting made sense – were hearable: Alex – relationships; Ken – being heard, Mila – compassion and support; Rich – trust and human dignity; Jen – courage and trust in the value of research and information sharing; and Linda – human compassion and vulnerability. Each participant named an actor in the story who came up against organizational and personal contestations. However, as seen below, when asked about the music, participants inserted themselves and their values, into the listening. They created a canvas, an externalized ‘bias,’ upon which the colors of the musical sounds could be identified as a system of values, validated as true in the retelling.

For Alex, his preferred recording is not about life generally, but more like a photograph. It allows a specific time and place to be held now, at once, in a field of experience.

Alex: I think it just tells me about some moments in life. Not necessarily the whole life, but moments. You need to experience those kinds of moments in life too. When you’re just alone, theoretically. But you know there is everybody else there around you. But they’re not bothering you [quietly laughs]. So, from the life experience per se, life is something else. This is just a moment of life. … It’s like looking at the photograph and saying OK I remember that moment. That does exactly the same for me. And even if I don’t know what the moment is, I kind of still remember it.

Even though the lyrics refer to the insanity and violence of alienation, the music itself, connects listeners through that very alienation. It does so by naming it.

Alex: I mean it’s certainly, judging by the text, itself, it is certainly an anti-war kind of statement. But the music itself says: OK you can even live through war. You feel that music as if war is somewhere here and you are somewhere there, even though you’re inside of it.
To explain how the music works, rather than the lyrics, Alex turns to the album cover. Its imagery names the time and space, the fragility of each moment of human experience. By naming music—abelites in their prismatic capacity to break the flow of life apart into experience, “manageable small pieces,” (below) Alex names the musical moment as a human moment, an instance of experiencing a specific time and place, one specific spectrum of being in the world.

Alex: You have that prism … You take a perfectly white thing, and then you break it into multiple colors … you can take the greed, the anti-war, the lunacy, dreaming, economy and everything there is in the album. They took the light and broke it into manageable small pieces. That’s why a song is just a moment of life and not the whole life. Meaning that the white is the life, but the colors are just the moments of life.

Randy: Is there any sense of what the prism is?
Alex: It’s a person.

Ken focuses not on the music per se, but on the quality of perception he has arrived at, and still strives forward from: a life-long practice of attending to the nuances of musical listening. Below, Ken says, “I don’t have that mastery yet… it gives me something I can strive for.” Through this listening, the lessons of the music, over time, become embodied and part of who we are as listeners. The value and truth that Ken strives toward, he clearly externalizes in the personage of the ‘producer’: each voice, artistically incorporated within the weave of the whole. As philosophized by Lyotard (1979), what Ken strives toward: an authentic retelling of what he has faithfully heard. Not an imitation, but as participation in a hermeneutic cycle.

Ken: I mean I don’t want to sound conceited. There’s a lot of people who could listen to this song and they wouldn’t hear what I’m hearing. Not just because they’re different but because they’re either just not experienced with it or they are not listening closely enough. … There’s kind of a feeling. I’m really hearing what they’re trying to tell me. I mean what the producer is trying to tell me is getting through to me. When I was doing home recording, I did learn to have a great appreciation for how complicated it is to do production outside just a flat recording. A good producer can actually be a member of the band. And sort of, the band is the paint and the canvas, and the producer can actually make the painting out of the band. An appreciation for being able to think and conceive of putting different voices into the recording. And on my side, a sense that I don’t have
that mastery yet, but it gives me happiness to be pursuing or learning. When I start recording again and producing, it gives me something I can strive for. This would almost be like a good exercise. To try to reproduce this song.

Mila confesses a truth. She names a specific time and place of personal vulnerability.

When this music speaks to her, it speaks of a holding on to, and a letting go of, what has been held as true, dear, authentic. When Mila shares her experience with me, I hear a loss of innocence so profound that the loss returns to innocence. There is no blame, only loss, and in that loss, a return to the living.

Mila: You know, I don’t remember if I told you before, but I dreamt to be an astronomer [laughing] when I was in kindergarten. So, as I got to middle school, my high school, I was always in a local astronomy club. Then I became the president of the club! Passed the exams to the university. And when I chose a major, I decided to study astronomy. My whole family said no. It really—really hurt at that time. It feels terrible when nobody supports you. From my parents’ perspective, traditional Chinese parents, they want their kids to live a more, to live an easier life, to become a government official or work in a bank. Astronomer, of course is not on the list. So, they called it a quite stupid choice. They thought I couldn’t make any money, no future development. They saw a career path would be unclear and very, very, challenging. Hard especially for a girl. So, I gave up. You know, I struggled. But I gave up at the end. When I heard this song: the lady she just jumped into the river and they said that she’s a fool to dream. I used to be a fool. And I used to dream. And then I gave up.

In the retelling, Mila recognizes not only herself in this song, but others as well. We all dream, we all give up something dear, and we all continue with life, ever more vulnerable in our losses. In doing so, we question, “who have I become?” And as always, the answer lies yet in conjunction with another question, “if I am not for others, what am I?”

Mila: So, every time I use this song, it makes me feel connected. Maybe because I have similar experiences or maybe, just, when you can connect something to your everyday life or to something you want to experience, then that song will also be something special to you. [emphasis added]

Note the word “use,” above. In Spanish, “usar,” means also, “to wear.” In a very real sense, Mila, in the listening, wears this song. Music moves between the explicit, into that which is
implicitly worn in the iteration. In the implicit vulnerability of personal loss, we find ourselves in the iteration of this music, and in the music we find ourselves vulnerable to— and supported by— each other.

Rich names the space of the song in terms of the transparency of its production qualities. Here is a moment of time that is logical, identifiable, parsed down, taken apart and put back together. Rich’s description of the song draws my attention to its flow and beauty of design. The music is completely unapologetic in its honesty of expression. Rich shows us that there is nothing hidden or obscured here. The music is an honest expression of being in the world.

Rich: It’s logical. It builds. It’s got these pieces that you can easily identify. There’s something interesting about that. Because so many songs — and it’s not that I prefer that to all kinds of songs — but that’s what I find interesting about this song. There’s a lot of songs where they’re so over-produced and you can’t tell. You may never hear some of the sounds because the label’s producer has engineered some background just to fill it out, to make it more catchy… You just have no idea what going on. It’s like eating a bag of Skittles or something. It’s like, wow! This huge flavor, what is going on? But this is parsed down. Obviously, it’s an electronic song so it’s not as genuine as I’m making it out to be. But you can identify the strings and the ‘you’ and the drums and the piano keys. And, it’s all there for you to pick apart. And he does pick it apart. That’s the whole point. He builds it and picks it apart. And he’s asking you to pick it apart. He picks pieces away. And then puts it all back together at the end right before he finishes it.

Jen reminds me that music too, tells a story. The classic narrative form is the canvas in which the sounds make sense. It provides the requisite “denouement” — a coming together of form and content in the poetic and narrative flow.

Jen: What makes sense about the piece is [that it incorporates] all of the pattern of any good novel that you read or story that you tell, or anything. You start out slow with a build up. And then you build. Then there’s the… climax! Then there’s — I threw this out there the other day — the denouement — [much laughing] that’s the right word, right? I learned that word when I was in high school. I can’t remember if it was pertaining to Shakespearian plays or whatever, where you know, there’s the, there’s sort of the set up and then there’s the climax and every story kind of goes that way. Then there’s the resolution.
Even as Jen insists on accounting for the music in classic narrative form, in our listening together, cohesion was elusive. The music seems at once to butt up against the impartiality of the form it embodies. Judith Butler’s (2005) words are brought to mind.

My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I can devise no definitive story. I cannot explain exactly why I have emerged in this way, and my efforts at narrative reconstruction are always undergoing revision. There is that in me and of me for which I can give no account. (Butler, 2005, p. 40)

In life’s persistence – in our retellings – we hear in the iteration a rhythm, harmony and counterpoint. In this music, we are vulnerable not only to the world around us challenging our coherence, but also, against this rhythm and harmony, a sound – a counterpoint or melody – might emerge either from within, or from another, for which we have no explanation and which may seem out of time, out of tune, incoherent, a Jen related, a “banging on the keys.” An irreconcilable longing for otherness emerges, angrily asserting itself. George Winston’s improvisations are at once bound by and liberated by its canonic and ground base form. In relating to the music, Jen poignantly names this vulnerability of being undone in the process of being made visible:

Jen: When you have something like that – where you have a swell of something that could be a good swell or a bad swell – that’s not the end of the story, and it doesn’t have to be the end of the story. Sometimes when those things happen, they are the end of the story. But the conflict doesn’t always resolve. From that perspective – of song or story or anything – well not all stories resolve in good ways. People need to learn that it is okay to apologize, it is okay to retract, it is okay to calm down after you’ve blown up, and hopefully you can move on. It doesn’t mean that whoever makes angry remarks or anything like that, it doesn’t mean they’re a bad person. Sometimes you just say or do stuff. Depending on the situation, it’s not worth resolving. Sometimes you just have to move on.

Randy: I think you described it as: he was pounding on the keys.

Jen: But he’s decided to move on. I don’t know that he resolved his anger. He just said, time to move on, and puts this pretty little trill at the end.
In the music, it is in this undoing, the interruption of classic narrative form, that the limits and vulnerabilities of Pachelbel’s canonic form are made visible, and in their visibility, given room for transformation.

Jen: Not that he comes back to the beginning, because the trills are—you definitely leave with more than what you started with.

Linda is very much at peace with the song we have listened to and have been speaking about. Words and music are unified. They speak to—retell—a sustaining personal and professional ‘practice.’

Linda: I’ve been really practicing that. Which is, ‘I’m here for you.’ It’s like, I’m here for you a hundred percent and will give you one hundred percent of my listening, and I will do whatever I can to help. Whatever that means. Obviously, I know I can’t alleviate pain and suffering. But I can be there. I can offer resources. I can provide guidance. I can be just incredibly understanding and caring.

The song is not just about giving, but about being vulnerable to another person and being accessible to another person in a responsible, sustainable, and mutually nurturing way.

Linda: I also need to know when to surrender and shift my focus. Because I can’t let it take hold of me. Because then you can’t be in control. So that’s when you’re down. What resonated here was when it says, ‘When I’m strong, strong enough to carry him, he ain’t heavy he’s my brother.’ Caring about someone can make you strong. But, you also can’t carry somebody through life. You can carry them for a moment, and then you have to let them stand up on their own two feet. That’s kind of the balance. ‘His welfare is my concern.’ Sure, to feel the way that we’re all on one planet, we’re all connected, we’re all human. And to not think that your caring about somebody else is a burden. But rather, just having an open heart, it’s not a burden. It makes you feel more alive. By having that compassion, it doesn’t weigh you down. ‘And the load doesn’t weigh me down at all. He ain’t heavy he’s my brother.’ It’s just a beautiful expression.

**Integration: Music in the Workplace?**

When asking participants about differences between their meeting and music listening perspectives, overall, their responses were reflexive and personal. In this final part of the interview, there was far less externalizing into narrative storytelling and far less projection of
personal values into the music. Although the questions I had asked about the meeting and music listening were identical, participants tended to feel that the comparison, although an interesting query, was nonsensical. After all, the intent and purpose of work is to accomplish something useful, and the intent and purpose of music is to enjoy listening. Part of the problem could be that these were just very different experiences. Like asking, ‘How loud?’ about a puppy and an HVAC system, the comparison seemed uninformative.

However, there was also an element of Aristotelian fore-projection about music that persisted throughout all our interviews.

“Our fathers admitted music into education, not on the ground either of its necessity or utility, for it is not necessary, nor indeed useful in the same manner as reading and writing, which are useful in money-making... evidently the reason of its introduction, this being one of the ways in which it is thought that a freeman should pass his leisure” (Aristotle, Politics, Book 8, Part 3).

Invariably, music stood for itself, not for work. However, pushing Aristotelian fore-projections aside for a moment, just as invariably, the idea that one could listen from a musical perspective, even in the workplace, seemed worth considering for all the participants.

Alex is quick to note that music is for its own sake – about the music. That said, the type of listening evoked by music is worth bringing into the organization. Alex suggests that being able to separate what works in conversation from what does not work involves a musical kind of aesthetic judgement.

Alex: You can see, hear a false move immediately if something is said out of the ordinary or out of some kind of unknown psychic world where it came from. You can hear that thought in the music. You can hear that thought in the meeting. I’m not necessarily going to use the music as a normality. But I would use the orchestration of the music as the normality. Because you can play the music differently and will hear some as right and some will not sound right. Even if it is exactly the same music and exactly the same note. So, the orchestration is a very big component of all of this.
Ken too is very clear with me that the music is for its own sake, it is not there to educate us on what it means to work in harmony. That said, the music does demonstrate a somewhat utopian state applicable to the workplace – again, through the production and orchestration.

Ken: Each instrument gets its voice and can be heard, can play something that’s not the same as everyone else. And even though some are louder than others, you can still identify each one individually. When they wrote it and recorded it, there was probably collaboration and saying, I want to add something here, what do you think of that? There is a way in. There is a way you can set up a statement. There’s almost a rhythm to the structure of the sentences that sets up the problem and you say, here’s what we need to do. And still make sure each voice has a position in the mix.

For Ken, to hear and speak musically is a matter of personal practice, not a matter of the music per se.

Ken: It would be hard to evaluate and measure the relationship. But I bet people who are better music listeners and can describe the things we were talking about have very different attitudes about work at the office than from people who don’t really notice that much about what they’re listening to in music. I mean it goes beyond music and hearing. It really has to do with the structure of our brains – developed differently.

For Mila too, it’s not that there is some music, ‘out there,’ driving the workplace conversation. For her, the music that underlies the conversation always belongs to and is created by the team – yet again a question of orchestration.

Mila: It’s some other song, but they’re the musicians. They’re really like a band, I mean, a very good one.

Not all participants brought music listening into the meetings they described to me. This is not to say those who did not actively listen to their meetings from a musical perspective did not hear musical qualities in their speech patterns. Nor is it to say that if I were to ask again, differently, a different response would not be forthcoming. Simply put, the utility of listening musically did not immediately appear relevant to some of the participants in relation to the meetings we were discussing. From this perspective, the qualities of the participants’ meetings, whether productive, tense, toxic, calm, stuck, or compassionate, did not in any way seem to be
mediated by the participant’s self-reported attentiveness to musical listening. For anyone looking for a quick fix, musical listening to conversation does not appear to mediate consternation or anxiety in a group setting.

Rich is clear with me that music listening was not on his mind when he was in his meeting. He believes that he could have been more ‘present’ and available to his coworkers if he had taken a deep breath, stepped back and allowed himself to be more in the moment with the sounds of others, rather than playing defense.

Rich: I don’t [listen musically]. In that meeting, I did not listen to it the way I listened to this song. I tend not to listen to people the way I listen to that song. Although sometimes I do a little bit. But ninety-nine percent of the time I don’t. Could I? Does it make sense to? ... I wasn’t listening so much in that meeting as I was thinking about the right thing to say. I didn’t initiate it and it happened faster than I was planning for. They just walked into my office. I was just trying to think, how do I say this without offending Sofia but also, deliver the message and get this over with as quickly as possible. I know I could have listened better. If I had listened, I would have been more in the moment and maybe more at peace while it was happening. And if I had been more present, I would have listened more. I was more in the fight or flight mode. It was uncomfortable and so I wanted it to be over. I didn’t want to hurt her feelings: that in and of itself is the right call. I was just—I was disappointed. It was more like, ‘Oh man, why did this just happen?’

Jen took a similar point of view about attentiveness. Sometimes, being emotionally close is the last thing we want to step into. Her point of view implicitly suggests that we are emotionally vulnerable to the music that we listen to. We accept this vulnerability because we can choose our preferred music. We do not have to listen to ‘offensive’ songs. Because we cannot always pick who we are meeting with, one might not want to listen with that level of commitment or personal vulnerability. Why open yourself up or submit yourself to something painful?

Jen: I think we listen to music and people differently because music’s just an innocent bystander that we choose. You don’t always choose who you want to listen to. You don’t always choose who you’re hearing. I think we would all benefit if we could listen to people – to other people – as much as we choose to listen to our favorite piece that we
might like. Our favorite musical piece. I know I certainly could. But, I don’t know how
to get there because I certainly don’t listen to music that I don’t like. But, but I have to
sometimes listen to people I don’t like. Or, listen to things that I don’t like what they’re
saying. So, it’s different. Right? If I’m in the car and I don’t like what’s playing on the
radio I can change it.

Alex noticed a similar construct in that musicians – artist in general – pick and choose
what they present, making sense of a fictional world. Of the hundreds of ‘takes,’ we hear only
the ones selected for the album. In the real world, we are vulnerable to unplanned events that
make no sense – that sometimes hurt. In life there are no rehearsals: all takes, permanent and
inscribed. I asked Alex about Clare Torry’s unplanned, but brilliant improvisation on The Gig in
the Sky (Wright & Torry, 1973).

Alex: No, no, no, understood. I mean, yeah. Somebody improvises. But they liked it, so
they didn’t change it. But if they didn’t like it, they would have changed it [on the
recording]. You cannot do that in real life. –But maybe there will be a second way or
retrying for the project.

Mila, describes this sense of vulnerability to the ‘first take,’ the unknown or the unwanted
as a distinction between what can be most readily accomplished in words versus with music.

Somehow the music seems to absorb the implicit risk of being hurt.

Mila: I think songs can express just the thing I want to let others know. But to talk in
words, to speak, it’s hard. You may feel embarrassed sometimes if you need to speak, to
make up the words and to speak your feelings. But it’s quite easy to share a song, or
music. Through that you can express yourself, your moods and your feelings. I’m not
feeling well, or whatever kind of mood. When communication is the gestures, the words,
it seems like they’re the most important. But for me, I think sometimes music is the most
comfortable way.

Can the music of shared words do what the music of shared music does? Linda’s
comments moved toward an integrative assessment. Her extensive experience as an art therapist
became increasingly transparent in our discussion. At the point in our discussion that follows,
we had been talking about how or why the recording she had picked did not seem to have the
flow or motion – the improvised dance sensation – that she had described in her student meeting.
Was the music providing the type of steady, low, supportive voice Linda had provided to her student? Were the *dance* and the *unison* in partnership in both, one explicit, the other implicit, interchangeable?

Linda: I think the difference is that in the conversation it was a call and response kind of thing. Like an improvisation where you’re doing this and I’m doing that, and I’m responding this way and you’re responding that way. But in the music, it was, what I see that is, as humanity, it’s like a unison. I see it visually, a thousand voices all singing together. In unison. If there was movement, whatever it is, we would all be doing it in unison. It just speaks to, we are all one. We’re all made up of the same matter. You know, why is one person any less important than another? In the conversation I was excited about what I saw as progress. Certainly, there is compassion and strength that goes with that. I was excited that she seemed in a place where she wanted to have this conversation. But, unless somebody is willing to be vulnerable themselves—.

Linda understood this might sound too simplistic and over-optimistic. Truly, why would one open themselves up in a conversation with someone being self-destructive, destructive to the group or inflicting verbal violence upon members of the group?

Linda: I don’t want to be blind, Pollyannaish. There are people who when they are really, really depressed, can be very difficult to be around. That can be very draining even for the most compassionate person. Obviously, the bottom line is you’ve got to know when to take care of yourself — when you have to raise that white flag.

In our conversation, the sense we arrived at was this: When listening musically, hearing the pain is not equivalent to being hurt by another nor to inflicting self-injury. Being vulnerable is different from being attacked or being defenseless. Music listening requires vulnerability because music – whether in a performance, preferred recording, or in the voices of those who speak – is visceral. To hear the music requires a certain level of physical and mental openness to what is viscerally expressed and experienced.

Linda: I feel sad. I don’t know if sad is the right word, but just recognizing that part of the, the wise part of humanity is the accepting part. There’s an acknowledgment about suffering there. Being present — not being afraid—. People are afraid to feel the pain, to feel suffering of others, *and to feel the good harmony*. To me it’s like embracing but also of feeling strengthened by it. Not diminished. It’s the whole argument about letting yourself be vulnerable. That doesn’t make you weak. It will make you stronger. To not
have fear, it doesn’t sound very important, but then you go to not experiencing, stepping back, and putting a wall up. For me personally — it’s almost like a choice. I choose to live my life as fully as I can. Which means to open my heart to experience. And not to have to, to not feel I have to protect my heart by not feeling. I’m grounded enough to know when I need to shift my focus so I don’t drown in emotion. The choice is to experience, around having feelings. To feel. You know, even if it’s sad. It is a practice.
V. Aesthetic Closeness

The creative power of the individual appears not when one ‘wish’ dominates others, but when all ‘wishes’ unite in a working whole. We see this same process in studying the group. It is the essential life process. The most familiar example of integrating as the social process is when two or three people meet to decide on some course of action, and separate with a purpose, a will, which was not possessed by anyone when he came to the meeting but is the result of the interweaving of all. In this true social process there takes place neither absorption nor compromise. (Mary Parker Follett, 1919, p. 576)

Employee Engagement: Problem, Practice or Disease? Reprieve

In our externalizing conversations (Carey & Russell, 2009; White, 2007), the absent but implicit (Carey & Russell, 2009), and the retelling of the retelling (Freedman & Combs, 2009), research participants invariably discussed dearly held values. They did so as they spoke about their workplace as well as when they discussed their preferred music. Whether creating an externalized “I” as the subject of the narrative in a business meeting, or when externalizing a sense of self in the sounds of the music, personal values emerged as catalysts to guide our ears in listening and our voices in interview conversation.

Alex: The relationships are more important rather than the outcomes.

Ken: The voice of each instrument is its own independent thing wanting to be heard. But only in a way that adds to the collection of the whole.

Mila: It’s not the vocal is leading and then the instruments are supporting in the background. They’re just working together.

Rich: I love how that’s there. Just that sustained thought of ‘you.’ I think about my wife when I think about that song.

Jen: People need to learn that it is okay to apologize, it is okay to retract, it is okay to calm down after you’ve blown up, and hopefully you can move on. It doesn’t mean that whoever makes angry remarks or anything like that, it doesn’t mean they’re a bad person.

Linda: It’s the whole argument about letting yourself be vulnerable. That doesn’t make you weak. It will make you stronger.
As can be seen in these quotes, just as invariably as personal values were expressed, each personal value was embodied and performed within the scope of the questions posited by Hillel at the outset of this journey: “If I am not for myself who will be for me? Yet, if I am for myself only, what am I? And if not now, when?” (Hillel, Avot, 1:14). Each participant expressed personal values as a process of acting in concert with others. Each participant’s acting values spoke directly to the courage and vulnerability associated with the ongoing act of undoing alienation. Participants discussed a “process” of “interweaving” internal conflicting values within oneself, but unveiled as a process of “interweaving” within one’s communities, requiring “neither absorption nor compromise” (Follett, 1919, p. 576). This unveiling process, I have asserted, is a musical one – done in rhythm, harmony, counterpoint, and inflection in discourse.

Following Butler (2005, 2012), and Adorno (2001), I have repeatedly asked regarding the employee engagement problem, “what has set itself up in us?” (Adorno, 2001, p. 169). By asking this question I asserted that each of us, without exception, is part of the engagement problem. This assertion arose with an increased awareness of four specific observations: (1) The seminal definition of employee engagement – “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles” (W. A. Kahn, 1990, p. 694) – creates a self-fulfilling alienating practice, similar in form to Follett’s (1919) warning about ‘absorption.’ In its ‘harnessing’ of employees, it replicates Weber’s iron cage (M. Weber, 1948) and Marx’s alienating tendencies of capital production (Marx, 1844). (2) Employee engagement is a broadly social system, both internal and external to the organization. The problem is more systemic than any one firm or location (Hellebuyck et al., 2017; Siegrist, 2014). (3) Even as we boast record low unemployment rates, in the United States workers and employment have become increasingly separated, driving the workforce dropout rates to levels not seen in over 30 years (Braun et al., 2014; Council of
Economic Advisers, 2016; Mazumder, 2011). (4) Separation of workers from the workforce seems to have contributed to a pandemic of despair (Case & Deaton, 2015, 2017).

Research participants confirmed that in fact, the pandemic of alienation does appear to affect each of us – but not in linearly causal ways. As awareness of ‘what has set itself up in us’ emerged in our interviews, each participant named contestations contextualized by or generated within constructs of alienation. Importantly each of these contestations was expressed in opposition to the core positive values just quoted above. Mila described her feeling about these contentions, “But to talk in words, to speak, it’s hard. You may feel embarrassed sometimes if you need to speak, to make up the words and to speak your feelings. But it’s quite easy to share a song, or music.”

Two counterpoints were active in the interviews. The first counterpoint, already discussed in the analysis, existed between the subjective and objectified self as the “I” of the participant as the narrator in our interview (subjective) performed a unified self in harmony and counterpoint with the “I” as reflected back in the music or the “I” of the participant in a business meeting (objective). In the contentions about alienation just described, the second counterpoint emerged, bound between self and others. The values quoted above, stood in harmony and counterpoint, contesting – bringing to life – each participant’s alienating workplace contingencies.

**Alex:** And those politics are, could be relied upon, really relied upon basis of relationship… you can not necessarily exploit, but you can ride those politics, to the target success. Of course, if you propose something wrong, you cannot do this.

**Ken:** And when someone like myself raises an important issue and gives a good example of why it’s important, and the response is dead silence, it’s, it’s as though they’re not disagreeing with you. They just don’t want to say anything. … You know, you’re lucky to have a job. Keep your mouth shut.
Mila: They’re each playing their own music. It’s noisy. They just only focus on their own chord. They’re not listening to the drum or to the bass – even if you had Jimmy Hendrix, then you still couldn’t play very good music. Right? [And in another context] We feel like we’ve lost connection with the bigger team…

Rich: It was pretty quiet actually. I think we were all making an effort not to seem upset. Maybe we overcompensated in calmness – or perceived calmness. … I think everybody needed their space. It emphasized that nobody was being ganged up on.

Jen: To me, that was a bad note. And I don’t, can’t figure out what’s going on there. … He won’t make eye contact with me. …. [And in another context] it’s like playing the same song, just that record got stuck with the needle and it won’t move forward. And nothing that I do is making it move forward. Even if I try to like scratch it across, it’s not moving.

Linda: So, the conversation really came down to her being more clear about what she will say no to. Not comparing herself to the culture at the high school… [And in another context] I don’t want to be blind, Pollyannaish. There are people who when they are really, really depressed, can be very difficult to be around. That can be very draining even for the most compassionate person.

Following Foucauldian logic, these personal contestations are not purely private. In each interview our discussions came face to face with the iterations of broader social norms and practices that participants perform themselves in the time and place of their workplaces (Borgerson, 2005; Butler, 1988). Seen from the outside, participants’ ‘politics,’ ‘silence,’ ‘noise,’ ‘space,’ ‘bad note,’ and ‘depression’ were not isolated instances, but iterations of social contentions that the participants live with and push against daily. By ‘live with’ I suggest that these are participations in that ‘something that sets itself up in us.’ In looking at these workplace contestations, “We must bear in mind that a principle exists long before us and extends far beyond us” (Jung, 1960, p. 91). I assert that these are iterations of the broad-based workplace alienation problem. As stated by education policy scholar Stephen Ball:

The subject becomes contingent, an historical production, not something prior to discourse and discipline, rather an effect of ‘a particular stage of forces’—what Foucault following Nietzsche calls ‘emergence.’ What seems ‘natural’ or truthful or inevitable is in fact enabled by clashes of forces, everything has a history and has lowly beginnings. (Ball, 2013, p. 34)
Three Faces of Alienation: Social, Cognitive and Neurological. Reprieve

In effect, these iterations of social contestations in the workplace are iterations of a broader social discourse. They are not imitations of an ideal form in the Platonic sense – not the doings of a unified phantasmagoric social force (Smith, 2012). Nor from a critical perspective are they things we do for lack of social consciousness (Freire, 1998). These contestations are specific, finite and embodied by workplace participants. The power of these alienating forces comes in the form of Follett’s ‘interweaving,’ or as Walter Benjamin might posit within a “distinction between ‘iterability’ and ‘iteration,’ ‘repeatability’ and ‘repetition,’ between empirically observable fact and structural possibility, … their –ability, rather than their actuality as mere facts” (S. Weber, 2008, p. 6). In other words, these alienating forces exists only in their specific iterations; they exert force in their iterability. From a neurological perspective, the iterability of these constructs is unconscious, taking form in an entirely seamless process as we work together. “The self-system serves as a Trojan horse, sneaking in the values and beliefs of those around us under the cover of night without our ever being the wiser” (Lieberman, 2013, p. 301).

From a macro perspective, with codes of social practice creeping into our belief systems ‘under the cover of night,’ from a cognitive perspective we must ask: Whose alienation problems may we be privileging without ever knowing? Recall the Jesuit students rushing past those in obvious need and pain on their pathway because they were late for delivering a lecture on the Good Samaritan (Darley & Batson, 1973). In examining interview responses, we must ask, even as participants courageously demonstrated compassionate humanist values and personal vulnerability in contenting with alienating workplace practices, has the entire discourse still
failed to recognize core systemic vulnerabilities of others? “One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 48). Have the central alienation problems of racism and capitalism been structuralized away from recognition as we trace around its frame in our personal narcissisms?

*When you arrive in your driveway and turn off the car, you remain behind the wheel another ten minutes. You fear the night is being locked in and coded on a cellular level and want time to function as a power wash. Sitting there staring at the closed garage door you are reminded that a friend once told you there exists the medical term – John Henryism – for people exposed to stress stemming from racism. They achieve themselves to death trying to dodge the buildup of erasure. (Rankine, 2014, p. 11)*

To reiterate: Participants named alienating forces in their workplace: ‘politics,’ ‘silence,’ ‘noise,’ ‘space,’ ‘bad notes,’ and ‘depression.’ They also named personal values that engage with these alienating forces as they create positive, creative, supportive, engaging environments in the workplace. Participants said, ‘relationships are more important,’ ‘add to the collection of the whole,’ ‘just working together,’ ‘it is okay to retract, it is okay to calm down,’ and ‘letting yourself be vulnerable...will make you stronger.’ From a Foucauldian perspective, I have suggested that these contestations between alienating forces and personal values iterate the working through of socially contingent alienation problems.

Is this assertion valid? Do these contestations work to lock pandemic systems of alienation in place by the avoidance caused by privileging personal contestations? Or alternatively, do they help dismantle systemic alienation at the time and place of confrontations; do we work to weaken broader social problems of racism and capitalism that drive the broader pandemic issues of employee alienation? To look at these questions I return to the central thesis: How might music, used as an opportunity for reflection, inform employees narratives of engagement?
Has Anything Been Gained in Musical Listening?


Critique doesn’t have to be the premise of a deduction which concludes: this then is what needs to be done. It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. It doesn’t have to lay down the law for the law. It isn’t a stage of programming. It is a challenge directed to what is. (Foucault, 1991, p. 84)

For each participant, as shown in the following quotes from the analysis, music did not ‘lay down the law for the law’ as a ‘stage of programming.’ Music sounded within the specific spaces afforded by personal contentions of broader forces of social alienation ‘directed to what is.’ Personal agency worked in rhythm, meter, counterpoint, and harmony between personal values and specific iterations of alienating practice. As participants described their preferred music they described a quality of personal agency relevant to their specific active listening.

Alex: You have that prism … You take a perfectly white thing, and then you break it into multiple colors … you can take the greed, the anti-war, the lunacy, dreaming, economy and everything there is in the album. They took the light and broke it into manageable small pieces. That’s why a song is just a moment of life and not the whole life. Meaning that the white is the life, but the colors are just the moments of life. Randy: Is there any sense of what the prism is? Alex: It’s a person.

Ken: Sometimes I sing along with it. But usually when I’m listening to it, I’m listening for each little voice that I can hear in it, and see if there is something I didn’t hear previously.

Mila: So, every time I use this song, it makes me feel connected. Maybe because I have similar experiences or maybe, just, when you can connect something to your everyday life or to something you want to experience, then that song will also be something special to you.
**Rich:** And it’s all there for you to pick apart. And he does pick it apart. That’s the whole point. He builds it and picks it apart. And he’s asking you to pick it apart.

**Jen:** Sometimes when those things happen, they are the end of the story. But the conflict doesn’t always resolve. From that perspective – of song or story or anything -- well not all stories resolve in good ways. People need to learn that it is okay to apologize, it is okay to retract, it is okay to calm down after you’ve blown up, and hopefully you can move on.

**Linda:** And to not think that your caring about somebody else is a burden. But rather, just having an open heart, it’s not a burden. It makes you feel more alive. By having that compassion, it doesn’t weigh you down.

To fully explicate how these comments about the music work in specific spaces of social contestation, we could look closely at any one of the participants. Each participant’s context, listening and values are completely unrelated to any other participant. The one exception is that that each participant’s description of the music described ways of engaging that neatly fit between dearly held personal values and the contestations of alienation and participation in the workplace. For example, Alex named a space of personal values he practices and respects in his organization (“The relationships are more important rather than the outcomes”). In contention, he named iterations of potentially alienating practices (“You can ride those politics, to the target success”). Alex names a music that embodies a way of allowing the politics to be enfranchising of participative engagement rather than devolving into an alienating force (“They [Pink Floyd] took the light and broke it into manageable small pieces”). The musical force that breaks the light up, and expresses life in inclusive and manageable forms is, “A person.”

Rich expressed a similar construct of encapsulation as he spoke about managing a rogue email. In stating, “it’s all there for you to pick apart,” he called attention to how the music was able to not only encapsulate many sounds, but also many emotions, “it’s mostly optimistic. But, there’s a little bit of — I don’t want to say pessimism — but there’s a hint of darkness that this
song has...” This capacity to encapsulate and work simultaneously at many levels helps Rich create the trusting spaces his firm relies on day in and day out, “It emphasized that nobody was being ganged up on.”

This is not to single out Alex or Rich. For each participant, their preferred song performed in the spaces where participation and alienation fell into contestation. Music performed in this way not because it was some “critique” as a “premise of a deduction which concludes” (Foucault, 1991, p. 84). Nor was music some metaphorical lens which named a particular practice of organizing (Morgan, 2006). To be clear, participants’ preferred music was not required to be ‘about’ the workplace. These workplace interactions and preferred recordings intersected because the physicalness, the ‘interweaving’ (Follett, 1919), of human interaction occurs in harmony, counterpoint, inflection, rhythm, and structural form. The iterations of engagement artistically worked in subjective time as participants ‘wove’ their meetings. Music – abilities named the qualities of that process of weaving. Participants described their music as a weaving into the broader implicit constructs of social discourse.

**Does Any of This Matter? For Whom?**

This research has been helpful to scholars in providing a discussion about music and the workplace that offers an alternative to discussions of music as a metaphor for organizational development (Daykin, 2004; Ericson, 2008; Gustafsson & Lindahl, 2017; Hatch, 1999; Kramer & Crespy, 2011; Mueller, 2002; Weick, 1998). While one could argue that all human understanding is linguistic relatedness and therefore metaphoric (Rorty, 1989), or that music is itself essentially a system of linguistic metaphor (Bernstein, 1976), the point I wish to make here is that what makes employee engagement musical is not some musical artform that is suitable as a metaphor for organizing. Rather, what makes ‘music’ musical and organizing musical are self-
same: the same music –abilities. There is no borrowing words from the musical language game to name the unspoken in the organizational language game. Harmony is still harmony, counterpoint is just counterpoint. Musical terms are not any more metaphoric in describing organizing phenomena than any of the other words that describe organizing. Organizing is musical, full stop.

This research has taken the point of view that participants’ meetings were no more or less musical than their preferred recordings. Music –abilities were defined at the outset as facilitating the art of temporality, whether in conducting business meetings or preforming musical artifacts. Because we exist together in time, regardless of the contingent values or qualities of our performances, our existence is musical.

Perhaps because of this aesthetic weave, over the last three decades arts and aesthetic have become increasingly important to corporations. Organizations have invested in art collecting, artist-based interventions, and participative artistic experimentation (Johansson Sköldberg, Woodilla, & Berthoin Antal, 2016). In a study of 239 companies that have partnered with artists and art institutions, it was found that actively collaborating can provide substantial productivity benefits (Lewandowska, 2015).

In these terms, the importance of art and esthetics in the corporate setting are typically calibrated in terms of profitable product innovations, increased efficiencies, cross team harmonization, and turnarounds of impending project or organizational failures (Barry & Meisiek, 2010). Arts based curriculum success is typically defined as a program that promotes employee learning motivation, confidence, creativity, and communication skills (Manning, Verenikina, & Brown, 2010), as well as intuitive, emotionally integrative management and innovation practices (Robson, 2016). However, lack of authenticity in initiating artistic
interventions – the perception that management is simply trying to get more for less – is the most commonly cited source of art intervention failure (Barry & Meisiek, 2010; Johansson Sköldberg et al., 2016; Lewandowska, 2015; Manning et al., 2010).

Moreover, in this research, in follow-up calls with participants, only two of four participants found the interviews helpful in their day-to-day work experience. And for both of those participants, the interviews were not reported as helpful in terms of productivity or creativity. To paraphrase, ‘Putting into words things that I had felt but not previously had the words to say,’ does not directly raise the quarterly bottom line.

I cannot recommend this approach to HR managers or organizational leaders seeking a direct return on investment. To this point, music can be used to give voice to those whose voices are muted in the face of hegemony (Hilal, 2015), or alternatively, to codify and embolden fascism and white supremacy (Richardson, 2017). In other words, music may break the silences of employee alienation, but like Ranciere’s, “mute pebbles” (2004b, pp. 14-15) music –abilities remain mute regarding on whose terms the silence is broken.

Opportunities for Further Research

Employee-based research.

Because from the perspective of this research, regardless of the systems of value promoted, listening to each other from a musical perspective opens personal vulnerability and compassion, an arts intervention agenda could seek to develop a practice of speaking where language plays an active “role in authoring” our society and culture (Ward, 2017). A program designed around employee authorship of the aesthetic weave of the organization seems entirely possible. A participative music/organizational listening curriculum could be focused on externalizing, recognizing the implicit and creating truth in the retelling. “An ethics of
recognition that emphasizes relationality rather than autonomy can link moral source and outcome by focusing on the multi-layered process of mutual respect and recognition towards the attribution of dignity” (Pless, Maak, & Harris, 2017, p. 226).

To these ends, further research is needed to understand more precisely what could be done to directly support participants as they author their communities of practice. This type of research includes homing in the working problem of practice to more specific situations, and to including workers beyond the six white-collar and educational participants that so graciously agreed to participate in this study.

**Definitional clarity.**

Throughout this study I have been lax with my definitions and distinctions between ‘artistic’ and ‘aesthetic.’ Hopefully, I have used these terms reasonably consistently. For the record, throughout this work I have attempted to assure that the word ‘artistic’ deals with engagement with the arts and the word ‘aesthetic’ deals with appreciation of the arts. I have tried to leave ‘beauty’ aside. Those who may have expected some sort of assessment of ‘beauty’ in terms of art participation or appreciation may be disappointed with this study. That said, more rigor around the terms ‘artistic’ and ‘aesthetic’ may have improved not only the readability of the study, but perhaps would have also improved the research process as I worked with participants. Developing more clarity in these regards, particularly as related to organizational development, provides opportunity for additional research.

**Development of the research methodology.**

Some may argue that the research process led to the results of the study – not the music listening. Yes, this is true. The research process, not just the music listening, was created to look holistically at, “How might music listening used as an opportunity for reflection, inform
employee’s narratives of engagement?” Clearly other research questions about music listening or engagement, different methodologies, rewording of the interview protocol, or different interviewers or participants would have led to other interviews. However, the research question has been developed rigorously and been well articulated in the problem statement, literature review, methodology and analysis. The ‘resulting’ association between employees existing in harmony, rhythm and counterpoint with each other as an expression of personal vulnerability and compassion in the face of employee alienation is coherent and well demonstrated in the study.

A similar criticism might be that an existing rigorous research approach to the arts, like Visual Thinking Strategies (Housen, 1999) could have been applied, and that would have eliminated subjective bias on the part of the researcher. I cannot argue with this critique. The analysis was subjective. Moreover, the process was hermeneutic in that understanding was built from ‘time to time’ in the ‘empty spaces of understanding’ between researcher and participant (Gadamer, 1989).

An established approach was rejected for two reasons. Using VTS to exemplify: First, while VTS is open-ended in the research gathering, it is close-ended in the analysis. This approach codes responses within pre-established classifications. In effect, what is studied is the coder’s reliability within the methodology and the methodology itself. Second, following Wittgenstein, central to the research thesis is that understanding personal intent is central when seeking to understanding the art of engagement. The methodology question, "How did you get there?" was essential in this regard, and not included in VTS. Moreover, the interviews attended to the participants and the flow of the stories we shaped in the interview – not the fixed method. And third, most of the final analysis was done by participants themselves in the third stage of the research. Participants analyzed their own responses to their own stories. While this did not
eliminate subjectivity, it expanded the scope of subjectivity to include the research subjects’

subjectivities – which was the topic of the research.

All this said, in transcribing the interviews I found, not for lack of trying, that sometimes
I was not nearly as articulate as I would have preferred when interviewing participants. Because
I chose a methodology that stretched between music semiotics and narrative theory, a semi-
structured interview protocol was needed. As already noted, I was always on edge in the
interviews, seeking a balance between following the interview protocol and engaging in the
unfolding dialogue as it emerged. Since there was no consistency in the workplace contexts of
the interviews, there was little circumstantial footing to be gained throughout the research. A
more seasoned researcher, used to such variances, may have either provided more immediate
value to the research participants or ended up with other outcomes of the study. There is
doubtlessly room for a more rigorous version of this study by refocusing the scope of
participants, homing in the methodology, or improving the quality of execution.

**Music semiology.**

Three drafts of the literature review were initiated, each with a different approach to
music semiology. In the first, a critical approach was taken, weaving in jazz improvisation and
harmonic theory as well as standard “conservatory” theory. This first approach followed in the
footsteps of Leonard Bernstein (1976) and (Meyer, 2008) by attempting to integrate the standard
body of music theory with literary criticism drawing heavily on literary criticism as summarized
by Paul Fry (2012). Here, the poetics of the participants’ music per se would have been
privileged in conjunction with what participants said of their preferred listening. The scope
became too focused on phonology, syntax and semantics and away from engagement.
In the second draft, I more rigorously followed the tradition established by Wittgenstein, Austin and Searle, noting that music was meaningless outside its intended uses. The musical meanings of the beeps of a microwave oven are not arrived at in the same way as in a rock concert, a ballet performance to the works of Stravinsky, nor in a four-year old’s rendition of *Baby Beluga* (Raffi & Whiteley, 1980). Claiming that one music ‘game’ is more beautiful, interesting, or sophisticated than another is inadequate. This approach suggests that there are many uses of the musical language, including the music–abilities of workplace conversations. There is much to learn from how we socialize by researching the way music–abilities work in the workplace, as compared to music’s other uses. Unfortunately, this approach was overwhelming in that it exasperated the complexities of the first approach by *additionally* asking, what intentional acts transpire that allow music to act? At work? In our interview? In the concert hall? There is much more to be researched about how musical *intention* works “in-use.”

In the end, the third draft skipped the complexities of the first two approaches and named just three features of what acts when music acts: externalizing, absent but implicit, and retelling. These three features were picked because of their direct correspondence with the literature on narrative psychology. Thus, a tight bond was created between workplace and music listening meaning-making. This approach was selected not because it was better than the other two, but because it was more expedient. More research is needed on critical musical discourse as it affects the poetics of the workplace. More research is also needed to understand the broad range of music-in-use from the perspective of a continuum of musical language games.

**Reflexive Comments**

Six years ago, I was working as a director of business systems analysis and architecture for a global financial services firm. Honestly, I had long been at my wits ends on how I could
help shift the paradigm of strategic thinking to an approach that included some sort of intrinsic trust in liberal education. I wanted to see principles of curriculum development not just in the employee development program, but at the heart of daily practice and as the driver of strategic management.

Towards these ends, I applied to the EdD program at Northeastern University’s College of Professional Studies. When my application was accepted, I spoke about organizational development learning possibilities with my mother-in-law. Many people over the years spoke with her about those personally important things that call out for yet another witness. She was a good listener, well studied, honest, direct, an artist, a musician, compassionate, and caring. In her non-imposing way, she coyly complimented me on the level of trust and optimism I was placing in the human capacity to understand workplace engagement. So gentle were her words that one would have had to be familiar with her unrelenting cynicism to hear the sarcasm.

It was my mother-in-law who had introduced me to Hillel’s words, bestowing upon my wife and I at the time of our wedding a beautiful work of calligraphy she had drawn and silkscreened. The Hebrew and English translation were etched so that it seemed the city of God was emanating around the space calling out between the two languages. She was a woman of action. While her appetite for understanding was veracious, her trust was placed in our abilities to act with compassion. When my brother died, and then shortly following, my mother-in-law also passed away, I knew she was right. She was correct both in prizing Hillel’s words, and in her trust in our abilities to act with compassion without really knowing.

At the same time, I had learned from my brother how short life truly is. There was no longer a choice for me. I had to return to my passion for hearing, trusting, and naming the music that emerges within our everyday engagements. In learning to live in the aftermath of the
terrifying realities of my childhood, I have found that no matter how contentious disagreements may seem (whether the disagreements are internal or external), there is a musical quality of relatedness that emerges in the engaging. In that music, there is a space of vulnerability – an opportunity to see into another’s experience and the incitement to act with compassion.

In short, to me this work is important as I continue to learn to act with compassion towards others and myself – vulnerable, without fully knowing or understanding what is truly needed or required. There is music here, in the heart of what I have come to understand as education. I am grateful to the participants of this study, who liberated this work. My hope is that these words now find a life of their own, and in some way stimulate awareness helpful to others who also strive to act in this capacity:

If I am not for myself who will be for me?
Yet, if I am for myself only, what am I?
And if not now, when? (Hillel, Avot, 1:14)
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Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964a). Eye and Mind (C. Dallery, Trans.). In J. M. Edie (Ed.), *The primacy of perception and other essays on phenomenological psychology, the philosophy of art, history and politics* (pp. 159-192). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964b). Phenomenology and the sciences of man (J. M. Edie, Trans.). In J. M. Edie (Ed.), *The primacy of perception and other essays on phenomenological psychology, the philosophy of art, history and politics* (pp. 159-192). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.


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Footnotes

1 In 2017: Clifton (2017) reported 33% of U.S. Workforce was engaged. Moeller et al. (2018) reported nearly half the U.S. workforce was moderately to highly engaged but also exhausted to the point of considering termination of employment with their current organization. And Aon Hewitt (2017) reported that 64% of the US Workforce was engaged.

2 Interestingly, Case and Deaton (2017) attribute the increase of death by despair to loss of employment. Here, the increase in mortality is three to one against the longevity of women. Alternatively, Clark et al. (2008) find that men recover from employment related economic events more slowly than women. Overall, men are more unlikely to adapt to long-term unemployment. Notably, Clark et al. (2008) only look at participants in Germany and “leave to one side the vexed question of adaptation to income” (p.225). Additionally, this German study is from 1984 to 2003, leaving the critical years of United States observations out of scope. While Clark et al. (2008) reasonably concludes that unemployment is for the most part a non-adaptable situation and devastating, caution is due when applying the study outside its scope.

3 Technically speaking, “burndown” is a term used in Agile software development framework referring to a type of line chart that depicts the quantity of work remaining (y axis) against available remaining person-hours (x-axis) within a specified work-time commitment (Kocurek, 2011). The Agile concept of burndown differs from the popular Lean management concepts. Where Agile seeks to time-box deliverables to focus scope-of-effort and drive out excess activity (Miyachi, 2011), Lean focuses on elimination of waste in a more Tayloristic efficiency model fashion. “Lean is both a management philosophy and a practical operational perspective focused on systematically identifying and eliminating waste in human effort, inventory, time and manufacturing space, while producing excellent goods and remaining highly responsive to customers’ needs and desires” (Sparrow & Otaye-Ebede, 2014, p. 2892). In both Lean and Agile practices, organizational output is a function of material and human resource capital inputs. The goal of employee engagement management in both is to optimize the productivity equation without burning out the organization’s human resource capital.

4 Note however that in 2001, the top 10 percent wealthiest families held 69 percent of stock, and by 2016 the top 10 percent concentration reached 78 percent of stock ownership (Ravikumar & Karson, 2018). This does not change the underlying argument, but further suggests that many of us participate in a system of alienation that increasingly favors the few at the expense of the many.

5 Subsequent research has shown that the distinction between decisions requiring emotional axiomatic thought and decisions requiring empirical thought is extremely difficult to distinctly identify (Greene, 2009, 2010). Moreover, Greene’s (2010) distinctions are part of a broader theory he puts forth on the brain, ethics and emotions: “What should we expect from creatures who (1) exhibit social/moral behavior that is driven largely by intuitive emotional responses, and (2) are prone to rationalization of their behaviors? The answer, I believe, is deontological moral philosophy” (Greene, 2010, p. 36). Although important, for the purposes of this study, it does not matter so much why or how different neural pathways are activated. The important finding here is that there is no single determinant physiological manner in which any
one person perceives moral truth. As Greene (2010) suggests, “it is exceedingly unlikely that there is any rationally coherent normative moral theory that can accommodate our moral intuitions” (p.47). Different settings of the same question will neurologically evoke different responses, justifications and consequences from the same person. Further, this blur in distinction between emotional and empirical is interestingly consistent with linguist Ray Jackenoff’s (2012) conjectures that it is an emotional response that informs discrimination between real and fictional communication. Overall, circumstances and emotions distinguish truth from fiction, as well as contingent from deontological moral circumstances.


7 Arnold Berleant (2016) exemplifies the sentiment that the function of art is to provide a foundation for beautifying the world, our experiences of each other and the artifacts of modern civilization: “To see the world as beautiful is to see it as new, and this ability gives us an incentive to encourage beauty in all regions of daily life” (Berleant, 2012, p. 207). He takes a naturalist perspective drawing inspiration from Dewey (1934), and more generally from Thoreau, Wordsworth, Henry James, etc., trusting that nature itself pronounces the indisputable essence of beauty. These constructs suggest that the function of art is to restore natural beauty to the everyday human experience.

8 In contrast to Goodman (1968) who firmly establishes music as non-propositional, Reich (2012) disagrees. Music, such as leitmotivs and musical signaling in other animals, can be specific and explicit in reference.

At a closer look, we find that it is not the attribution of the values true and false that distinguishes linguistic propositional semantics from other forms of meaning, since bee dances (*There is the nectar!* or musical leitmotivs (*Siegfried is approaching!* ) can also describe a world to which we can attribute these values. [emphasis in original] (Reich, 2012, p. 85)

We might appropriately add theme songs, jingles, birthday songs, and holiday songs to the list of musical utterances that either directly or indirectly point to specific truth-values. Reich further attributes the difference between speech and music to the vast array of semantic ‘operators’ that allow us to linguistically manage complex propositions.

The very difference seems to lie rather in special operators which I believe are hard, if not impossible to find both in music and in communicative systems of other species. ... not even Wagner could compose a meaning like *Siegfried didn’t come yesterday*. [emphasis in original] (Reich, 2012, p. 85)

This said, my argument is closer to Edwards (2002), who discusses Louis Armstrong’s scat singing. Edwards suggests that in music, “words drop away” (Edwards, 2002, p. 649) such that music is a reference (“index”) to that something in life which words seem to interrupt. The function of music, at least for humans, is not to reference complex propositions (Reich’s “*Siegfried didn’t come yesterday*”), but to point to what words interrupt (the qualities of Siegfried that transcend words). That is, to hear the name ‘Siegfried,’ in comparison to hearing his leitmotiv would be like hearing only his outline. While spoken words provision complex propositional understanding, music provisions complex aesthetic experience.
Plato’s discussion concerns the creation of furniture: “God, whether from choice or from necessity, made one bed in nature and one only...He desired to be the real maker of a real bed, not a particular maker of a particular bed...by nature one only. ...And what shall we say of the carpenter—is not he also the maker of the bed? Yes. But would you call the painter a creator and maker? Certainly not. ...then you call him who is third in the descent from nature an imitator? Certainly, he said. And the tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is thrice removed from the king and from the truth? That appears to be so.” (Plato, Republic, Book X)

Elvin Semrad, psychologist, eloquently states the concept of the individual as a work of art. Marcia Drootin has been gracious in sharing with me her personal notes referring to her work under Semrad’s direction at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center.

I have never forgotten the very first day we arrived. There were twenty-two of us, scared to death. Semrad gathered us into his office and gave us the following lecture: “Very shortly, you will be going onto your assigned wards. Within those wards, you will see over fifty of the sickest, craziest, most bizarre people you will ever encounter. They will be hallucinating, gesticulating, and delusional in the most grotesque ways. Every cell in your body will rebel and want to block out the experience. But here is the thing you must remember. Every one of those symptoms, as strange as they may seem to you, makes perfect sense to those people. Every single one, has been evolved and carefully crafted, to try to deal with some impossible family situation. Every one represents an attempt by that person to adapt to the hand that fate has dealt him. You are to regard each one as an artistic, creative endeavor, to survive. Your job, and your only job, is to appreciate, and admire that effort!” (M. Drootin, personal communication, June 16, 2017)
Appendixes

Appendix 1 – LinkedIn Article

Headline Photo

Headline

Employee Engagement and Music Listening

Body

How might music listening, used as an opportunity for reflection, inform employees' narratives of workplace engagement?

I am seeking six to eight research participants to explore this question.

Workplace alienation has been an on-going issue at least since Marx took note of the issue over 170 years ago. If our human relationships are harmonic, rhythmic, exercise inflections and articulations and allow for soloing and accompaniment, what might our music abilities tell us about working together?

Participants must be currently employed at any level within a large corporation in the greater Boston area and be willing to contribute to this work anonymously. No specific level of musical knowledge is required. Participants will be asked to: (1) complete a short information request form to narrow the scope of the interview, (2) engage in a 90-minute in-person interview including discussing workplace engagement and listening to and discussing a preferred recording suggested by the participant, and (3) follow-up with a 10-20-minute telephone interview to review and verify insights gained from the interview process. Research will be conducted at a time and place convenient to participants. Reimbursement for childcare while participating in the research is available on request.

If you are interested in participating, please reach out to me directly at kravette.r@husky.neu.edu. This research is central to my EdD dissertation at the Northeastern University College of Professional Studies, Graduate School of Education.
Appendix 2 – Facebook Post

Friends:
As part of my EdD Thesis at Northeastern University I am working on an exciting research project. If you or any of your friends or associates work in a corporation in the greater Boston area and might be interested in exploring as a research participant the question, "How might music listening, as an opportunity for reflection, inform employees’ narratives of engagement?", please take a look at [LinkedIn Article link].

Thank you.

Appendix 3 – Alumni Post

Fellow Alumni:
I am currently working toward my EdD at Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies. I have started an exciting dissertation research project. If you or any of your friends or associates work in a corporation in the greater Boston area and might be interested in exploring as a research participant the question, "How might music listening, as an opportunity for reflection, inform employees’ narratives of engagement?", please take a look at [LinkedIn Article link].

Thank you.

Appendix 4 – E-Mail Response to Participant Solicitations

[Name of potential participant],

Thank you for expressing interest in my research. I am delighted that we may have a chance to work together on this. [Respond briefly to any personal inquiries included in e-mail.]

I want to be sure that you understand what this research is about, so I have attached an Informed Consent Form for the project. It provides a comprehensive overview of what your role as a research participant would be, should you decide to participate. Please note that participation is completely voluntary.

If you would like to get started, please give me a call at 339-364-4138 at any time or e-mail me (kravette.r@husky.neu.edu) your phone number and a convenient time when we can review the research process to be sure all that your questions are addressed. Having read the attached information, if you decide that you do not want to participate, it would be helpful for my record keeping if you could let me know.

Kind regards, Randy
Appendix 5 – Informed Consent Form

Music -abilities: Narratives of Employee Engagement through Music Listening
Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Graduate School of Education Principle
Investigator: Kristal Clemons, Ph.D.
Student Reacher: Randolph S. Kravette, MM, MBA, EdD Candidate
Title: Music -abilities: Narratives of Employee Engagement Through Music Listening

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form provides a written record of information about your role as a participant in the study. We will review this information verbally prior to starting the study. I have provided my contact information above. Please let me know at any time if you have questions or concerns. If you do decide to participate, I will ask you to sign a copy of the form for each of us at our in-person interview. Signing the form indicates that you understand what is expected from your participation.

Signing the form does not obligate you to participate in this study. You may decide that you do not want to participate and quit the study at any time.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

This study is focused on employee engagement and issues of alienation in the workplace. It uses music listening skills to better understand how we interact with each other in the workplace. You have been asked to take part in this study because you work in a corporation in the greater Boston area and have expressed interest in participating in the study.

Why is this research study being done?

This research is being done in support of workers who are discontent, seek to improve or simply question engagement practices in the workplace. Because music listening is fully embodied - something that happens inside of us - and because art functions to allow individuals access to others' ways of thinking and perceiving the world, the goal of this research is to explore how a music listening point of view might invite a more inclusive, less alienating understanding of workplace participation than currently experienced in many corporate settings. It is hoped that by documenting aesthetic perspectives of employee engagement, employees, scholars and administrators will have access to additional research in support of less alienating workplace behavior.
What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to participate in the research, you will be asked to:

1. **Complete a Participant Information Request Form:** I will e-mail you a Participant Information Request Form. The form will take about 10 to 20 minutes to fill out and return via e-mail. You will be asked:
   
   a. To provide some basic information about your current work role.
   b. To briefly describe a workplace meeting or discussion that seemed significant to you. We will discuss this encounter during the interview.
   c. To provide a web URL or the name and specifics of a music recording that you prefer. We will listen to the music and discuss it during the interview.
   d. Select a convenient time and place for the interview.

2. **90 Minute In-Person Interview:** This interview is designed to take about 90 minutes. This interview will be audio recorded. I will transcribe the audio recordings. The interview includes three dialogues between the participant and researcher. You will be given the opportunity to close your eyes when recalling what you heard; eye-closing is optional.
   
   a. You will be asked to discuss a significant workplace meeting or discussion. How did you arrive at your current role? Regarding the significant workplace encounter: What did you hear? How did that feel? What did that tell you?
   b. You will be asked to discuss a music recording that you have selected. How did you come to arrive at preferring this musical recording? We will listen to your preferred music: What did you hear? How did that feel? What did that tell you?
   c. You will be asked to discuss and compare responses to parts (A) and (B) of the interview.

3. **Follow-up 10-20 Minute Phone Call:** After participating in the interview, I will transcribe and e-mail you a summary of our discussion. You are asked to participate in a 10-20-minute follow-up phone call to: (a) clarify information obtained in the interview, (b) discuss your experience of the interview process, and (c) verify that the interview summary expresses your thoughts and feelings accurately, and that it preserves your anonymity. On your request, I would be glad to conduct follow-up interviews in person.

You may contact me with questions or concerns at any time during the study. You may change or revoke any or all of the information you provide at any time during the study up until the research is submitted for review to the dissertation committee.

*Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?*

Your total time commitment is expected to be about 2 hours. The Participant Information Request Form that I will e-mail to you will take 10-20 minutes to complete and return to me via e-mail. You will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will take about 90 minutes. About three weeks after the interview I will e-mail you a summary of our interview and schedule a 10-20-minute phone call to follow up.

*Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?*

This research specifically asks about a workplace experience that is significant to you and a music recording that you prefer. Specifically, we will investigate “What did you hear?”, “How did that feel?” and, “What did this tell you?” If this is more revealing than you are accustom, some emotional discomfort may be felt. This study could surface emotional conflicts related to the workplace. This research is not intended to be therapeutic or to resolve emotional issues. To focus more intently, I will give you an opportunity to close your eyes when focusing on what you heard. Eye-closing is optional, so you will not have to close your eyes if it is uncomfortable. Additionally, it is possible that being articulate about these
questions may raise more questions than we can address in the study about your workplace, role or participation. This research is not designed to resolve workplace issues.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**
There are no direct benefits for you. However, potential benefits include the opportunity to reflect on and gain insight on workplace engagement behaviors and practices.

**Who will see the information about me?**
Your part in this study will be confidential, but not anonymous. You will be asked to provide aliases for personal and company identifiers in the Participant Information Request Form. If you do not provide an alias, I will pick one for you. Only the principal investigator and the student researcher will see identifying information. No transcription service will be hired. No reports or publications will provide information that could be pieced together to identify you, your workplace or any other individual you refer to as being part of this research. The information collected in this research will be used solely for the purposes of this study and will not be made available or used for secondary research. However, although precautions are taken, it is possible that circumstantially, confidentiality could be broken by events outside my control (for example: our interview was unexpectedly interrupted, or e-mails were exchanged and audited on your office e-mail account).

All digital research data including recordings of interviews will be stored only on removable USB drives or chips and maintained in a locked file cabinet when not in use. All physical notes and Informed Consent Forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet. All records are destroyed (deleted and shredded) three years after the publication date of the dissertation.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. I would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**
No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit and revoke your comments at any time up until the research is submitted to the dissertation review committee. Your participation will not be included in the research if you elect to withdraw.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the person mainly responsible for the research, Randolph S. Kravette, MM, MBA, EdD Candidate. Email: kravette.r@husky.neu.edu. Tel: 781-784-4095. You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Kristal Clemons, Ph.D. Email: K.Clemons@northeastern.edu. Tel: 773-396-8499

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617-373-4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.
**Will I be paid for my participation?**
No. You will not receive payment for participating in the research.

**Will it cost me anything to participate in this research?**
Other than the time requested for your participation there are no other costs or obligations. Interviews are scheduled based on your preferred time and location. If applicable, you will be responsible for your own transportation and parking costs. On request, if childcare is required for you to participate in this research, that cost will be reimbursed.

__________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part  Date

__________________________________________
Printed name of person above

__________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  Date

__________________________________________
Printed name of person above

IRB# CPS19-02-16
Approved: 3/18/19
Expiration Date: 3/17/20
Appendix 6 – Participant Information Request Form

Music -abilities: Narratives of Employee Engagement through Music Listening

Participant Information Request Form

Please complete the following information. This form is intended to facilitate our upcoming interview. It asks for contact, background and scheduling information and for you to provide a significant workplace experience and preferred music listening recording that we can focus on during your interview. You and I will be the only people with access to this information.

Information Request

**General Background**
This general information will help contextualize our conversation about workplace engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Pronoun (he, she, they, ze...)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your role in organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years in current role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Aliases for Research Publication**
Personal identifying information will be treated confidentially. In the published work, you will be given an alias. Please let me know if you have preferred pseudonyms. If you do not have a preference, you may leave this section blank and I will assign these aliases for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Name Alias</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Pronoun Alias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization’s Name Alias</td>
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**Significant Engagement**
Please provide a short outline of a consequential meeting or discussion that we can discuss in the interview. Please recall a meeting or discussion that confirmed or challenged your thoughts, feelings or behaviors about the workplace.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles of participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topics covered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone of the meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome(s)</td>
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</table>

*In the Interview* The questions we will discuss regarding this information will be centered on: (1) What brought you to your role in this meeting? (2) What did you hear? (3) How did that feel and (4) What did that tell you?
Music Listening
Please provide the name of a preferred music recording (or music video) that we can listen to during our interview. This does not have to be your “favorite” piece of music, nor does it have to be related to your workplace experience. Please pick a recording that you feel a personal connection with. (Complete the top or lower portion.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of recording</th>
<th>URL</th>
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</table>

Or, alternatively, please let me know how to locate the recording:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Song</th>
<th>Name of Artist (or composer)</th>
<th>Preferred Performance (or album, etc.)</th>
</tr>
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In the interview: The questions we will discuss regarding this listening will be centered on: (1) How did you come to prefer this music? (2) What did you hear? (3) How did that feel and (4) What did that tell you?

Comparing the significant conversation and music recording
In the interview: In the third part of the interview we will compare your responses to the questions regarding your significant engagement and preferred music recording. No preparation is necessary. However, if you feel it would be helpful, please feel free to bring personal notes to the interview.

Scheduling
Please pick a time and place for this interview that is convenient to you. We will need about 90 minutes of uninterrupted time conducive to an in-depth personal dialogue. Please let me know if you would like me to reserve a conference room at Northeastern University or a similar neutral location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Phone Number</th>
<th>Preferred E-Mail Address</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred Mode of Contact (E-Mail, Text, Phone)</th>
<th>Location for interview (Name of location and address)</th>
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<tr>
<th>Preferred Date &amp; Time for Interview</th>
<th>Option 1:</th>
<th>Option 2:</th>
<th>Option 3:</th>
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Researcher’s Contact Information
Please contact me at any time if you have questions or concerns. I may be reached at 30 Glendale Road, Sharon, MA 02067. Cell Phone and Text: 339-364-4138. E-Mail: Kravette.r@husky.neu.edu
Appendix 7 – Participant Information Request Form – E-Mail Cover Letter

[Name of participant]:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am grateful that we will have an opportunity to work together.

As we have discussed, I have attached a Participant Information Request Form. Please open the document and fill in the information requested using MS Word. This will help us focus and schedule the interview. This form may take you from 10 to 20 minutes to complete. Return it to me via e-mail when you have completed it.

Please call, text or e-mail (kravette.r@husky.neu.edu) me if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Randy
(cell) 339.364.4138
Appendix 8 – Lyrics: Us and Them

Us, and them
And after all we’re only ordinary men.
Me, and you.
God only knows it’s not what we would choose to do.
Forward he cried from the rear
and the front rank died.
And the general sat and the lines on the map
moved from side to side.

Black and blue
And who knows which is which and who is who.
Up and down.
But in the end it’s only round and round.
Haven’t you heard it’s a battle of words
The poster bearer cried.
Listen son, said the man with the gun
There’s room for you inside.

“I mean, they’re not gunna kill ya, so if you give ‘em a quick short,
sharp, shock, they won’t do it again. Dig it? I mean he get off
lightly, ‘cos I would’ve given him a thrashing – I only hit him once!
It was only a difference of opinion, but really...I mean good manners
don’t cost nothing do they, eh?”

Down and out
It can’t be helped but there’s a lot of it about.
With, without.
And who’ll deny it’s what the fighting’s all about?
Out of the way, it’s a busy day
I’ve got things on my mind.
For the want of the price of tea and a slice
The old man died.

Wright, R., & Waters, R. (1973). Us and them [Recorded by Pink Floyd]. On Dark Side of the
Moon [Album]. United Kingdom: Abbey Road Studios.
Appendix 9 – Lyrics: All That Money Wants

city sky comes down like rain
through all the alleys to the sea
i hear footsteps getting louder
drowning in my sleep

painted lies on painted lips
that promise heaven tastes like this
i don’t believe that i believed in you
all that money wants

all that money wants
all that money wants

sunday’s child will fall through faith
i feel i’m falling out of grace
grey city sky comes down like rain
to drown me in my sleep

people fade and i forget you
i hear footsteps icy faces
but it all means nothing to me now
all that money wants

all that money wants
all that money wants

Appendix 10 – Lyrics: Mia’s Audition Song (The Fools Who Dream)

My aunt used to live in Paris
I remember, she used to come home and tell us these stories about being abroad
And I remember she told us that she jumped into the river once, barefoot
She smiled

Leapt, without looking
And tumbled into the Seine
The water was freezing
She spent a month sneezing
But said she would do it again

Here’s to the ones who dream
Foolish as they may seem
Here’s to the hearts that ache
Here’s to the mess we make

She captured a feeling
Sky with no ceiling
The sunset inside a frame
She lived in her liquor
And died with a flicker
I’ll always remember the flame

Here’s to the ones who dream
Foolish as they may seem
Here’s to the hearts that ache

She told me
“A bit of madness is key
To give us new colors to see
Who knows where it will lead us?
And that’s why they need us”

So bring on the rebels
The ripples from pebbles
The painters, and poets, and plays

And here’s to the fools who dream
Crazy as they may seem
Here’s to the hearts that break
Here’s to the mess we make
I trace it all back to then
Her, and the snow, and the Seine
Smiling through it
She said she’d do it again

Appendix 11 – Lyrics: He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother

The road is long
With many a winding turn
That leads us to who knows where
Who knows where

But I’m strong
Strong enough to carry him
He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother
So on we go

His welfare is of my concern
No burden is he to bear
We’ll get there

For I know
He would not encumber me
He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother

If I’m laden at all
I’m laden with sadness
That everyone’s heart
Isn’t filled with the gladness
Of love for one another

It’s a long, long road
From which there is no return
While we’re on the way to there
Why not share

And the load
Doesn’t weigh me down at all
He ain’t heavy he’s my brother
He’s my brother
He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother, he ain’t heavy

Russell, B., & Scott, B. (1969). He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother [Recorded by The Hollies]. On He ain’t heavy... he’s my brother [Single]. United Kingdom: Parlophone - Epic.