Quibble or QBL?
Do We Want Another (Aesthetic) Bottom Line?

by

Nanette Monin, Janet Sayers & John Monin

Department of Management & International Business
Massey University
Albany Campus
Auckland
NEW ZEALAND

DR NANETTE MONIN
Senior Lecturer
☎ +64 9 441 0800 Ext 9574
e-mail: n.monin@massey.ac.nz

DR JANET SAYERS
Senior Lecturer
e-mail: j.sayers@massey.ac.nz

ASSOC PROFJOHN MONIN
Head of Department
e-mail: d.monin@massey.ac.nz
Critical management theorists recognize that corporate-acts and corporate-speak are
great colonisers: responsibility for health, education, and safety; cultural, spiritual and
emotional welling, and environmental awareness, have already all been absorbed into
a spin-doctored image of the caring corporate, of paternalistic patronage as a ‘good
thing’. So with Orwellian prescience we suggest that if we persist in not only
articulating and advocating, but economically supporting, corporate responsibility for
the funding of artworks, our scholarship will inevitably contribute to this empire-
building.

Corporates are not the only appropriators. Academics too share a long history of
marking out territory, arguing about boundaries and the rights of ‘indigenous’ settlers,
defending discovered regions that were always there, and then, sometimes,
capitulating (perhaps under the guise of ‘just regrouping’) to the marauding hoards
published Organizational Culture in 1985, recognised that although the early and mid
1980s ‘had been a time of faddishness about the topic … by 1986 the peak of this fad
seemed to have passed’ (p.1). They cite Smircich and Calas (1987) as being among
those who recognised that the concept of culture had been absorbed into the thinking
of those who ‘dominate thinking about organizational life’ and had transformed it into
a functionalist tool. The speed with which it had been ‘uncritically adopted into the
lexicon of organizational science’ (Frost et al., 1991:2) contributed to the slippage
noted by Barley et al, (1988) as careful theoretical inquiry into organizational culture
transmogrified into a determination, spread by academics, to promote managerialist
models of organizational culture as an instrument of control. Robbins and Mulerji
(1994) for example (in a widely used classroom text then in its second edition),
although they admit that to having found no definitive method for measuring an
organization’s culture, claim that research points to the identification of the ten
characteristics by which an organization’s culture can be analysed, assessed, and by
implication managed and controlled.

Since the 1980s faddishness, appropriation and management theory have continued to
feed on one another (Abrahamson, 1991 & 1996; Alvesson & Willmott, 1996;
Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 1996; Collins, 2000) yet we are still less than inclined to
own the offspring that our theorising, publishing and teaching may have spawned
when it is adopted and put to work in the fields and factories of big corporate players, and in the offices of their lackeys, the ‘business’ protégées of civic bureaucracies. Translated by profit-seekers and accountants, our pretty theories are often recast as camouflage for the unpalatable.

For example: the notion of Triple Bottom Line (TBL) reporting, was introduced to business schools and the corporate world, in the best-seller Cannibals with Forks (Elkington, 1999) as an auditing instrument that would enable companies to monitor their environmental and social responsibility with the same care that they have always lavished on their financial activity and its outcomes. But by the time it hit the bookstores, theories of corporate social responsibility (CSR), the darling of environmental lobby groups and taken up by management-think in the 90s, was already in trouble. Hard on the heels of heightened environmental awareness and concern for the many-faceted needs of diverse stakeholders, came ‘greenwash’: the most environmentally destructive companies and those with the most outrageously irresponsible social agendas were the first to find ways of reporting positively on their newly perceived responsibility (Beder, 1997). Norman and MacDonald (2004) have recently published a strenuously supported accusation that TBL rhetoric is similarly being quickly adopted by very prominent multinationals without traditions of support for green and CSR and principles, as they try to shake off recent reputations for decidedly irresponsible business practices - firms like Shell and BP, Telecom, AT&T and Dow Chemical:

> The concept of a Triple Bottom Line in fact turns out to be a “Good old-fashioned Single Bottom Line plus Vague Commitments to Social and Environmental Concerns”. And it so happens that this is exceedingly easy for almost any firm to embrace. By committing themselves to the principle of the 3BL it sounds like companies are making a more concrete, verifiable commitment to CSR and sustainability. And no doubt many are. But it also allows them to make almost no commitment whatsoever (p.259).

They conclude that we should all be very troubled by the inherently misleading nature of TBL which is, as they sum it up, essentially counterproductive. If image is all, then providing spin doctors with both the research that pinpoints areas of popular concern
and the tools to ‘audit’ our perceptions of ‘what is important’, simply speeds the rapidity with which they manufacture an image to fit the bill.

The would-be guru who notes the developing emphasis on aesthetics in organization theory (Strati, 1999) will surely promote the concept of a fourth ‘bottom line’: will advise rich and powerful institutions that they should think seriously about auditing their responsibility for ensuring that the arts flourish under their patronage; that they have a duty of care for the civilizing role of aesthetics in our societies. Already some organizations are adopting a fourth bottom line, vaguely understood to be ‘cultural’.

We suggest that the addition of a fourth audit, of aesthetic performance, to the TBL reporting that has been so widely and rapidly adopted, will be promoted as Quadruple Bottom Line (QBL) reporting. It will tell corporates how to assess the intangible with the tools and words that they know best, those of accounting, and so provide them with an instrument for controlling and/or denying the essential otherness of art.

We envisage that a best-selling business book will soon be written promoting an Aesthetic Bottom-line for Corporates. It will be called something like An ABC for Global Companies. It will propose that corporates should voluntarily keep a register of aesthetic debits and credits – with a framework modelled on the environmental responsibility envisioned and initiated by the Kyoto Protocol. We suspect that strategic corporate planners would immediately see the marketing potential of the new QBL and would race to develop quality assured aesthetic accountability - which would then be proudly presented in the Annual Report to shareholders, and displayed in all corporate communications.

Our dystopian vision is based on a hypothetical case study, but one which is built around our observations of a much-admired architectural achievement: the foyer of a city tower block which is both the portal to the offices of the high-flying business and professional tenants above, and a gallery housing a unique and inspiring collection of art installations. We also talked to a diverse range of representative stakeholders.

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1 See for example, the Local Government (Auckland) Amendment Act 2004: http://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/Files/auckland/$file/auckland.pdf
2 Norman & MacDonald (2004) provide statistical information, Footnotes 2 & 6, to support this claim.
(property developers, architects, tenant businesses, visiting clients, city art managers, artists, rate-paying members of the public, city council planners, and spokespersons from the arts world) but we have protected their privacy by concealing their names. We have further disguised their, sometimes passionate and provocative responses, by weaving our own inventions through what has become a fictional narrative.

If business is to take on a responsibility for supporting the place of the arts in our built environment, a responsibility that moves beyond self-interested image-building and investment in private collections, then we need to explore the multi-faceted relationship that corporates now have with the public and local government administrators as well as their clients and the art world; to wonder about the direction in which these relationships are presently moving; and to question the outcomes that we should expect. We argue that the dissent and critical commentary that is one of the intellectual functions of art will always be a fringe movement that challenges the dominance of established institutions: that the predominant corporate business relationship with the arts is one in which the arts are colonised for business ends. We intend to share our experience of the story of the foyer of an inner city, commercial tower block, teasing apart some strands of the meanings that emerge as we tell it, and will finally use it as ‘the case’ that will illustrate how an aesthetic audit, the fourth leg of a QBL, will ‘measure what it can measure’.

**When one author went for a walk**

We were out on a quiet evening walk the first time I saw it. ‘It’ loomed sideways at us, well above our heads and angled away from the stairs leading up from street level. We climbed the stairs, shielding our eyes from slanting street lights that fought with the dimly lit interior. ‘It’ was a Wall of Words, 20m x 15m, sprawling through time and place. To the right a giant wheel dreamily rotated its two-storied height. But we couldn’t really see much. It was a Sunday and we were shut out by huge plate-glass doors and the subdued lighting.

I went back on Monday, around lunchtime. The doors were wide open so I walked up to the wall and began reading. In script and scrawl New Zealanders of all creeds and race and gender, of all ages and dotting the short history of our nation, spoke in aphorisms, jingles and wistful poetry. It took a while – reading – before I glanced back at the giant wheel.
There was a coffee bar at the far end of what seemed to be a vast lobby, and a
glimpse of a park-like garden beyond a more formal-looking bar and restaurant,
soft-furnished intimate corners everywhere, and awesome art works installed on
grand walls and in vast spaces. But dominating everything else in this massive
edifice, a huge, vaguely organic, pillar seemed to grow through the centre of it
all, supporting, reaching, and dividing the architecture.

I didn’t stay long. This didn’t feel like ‘my place’. The coffee cups looked like a
stage props, the cornered talk was being efficiently negotiated and timed. There
were cosmetic smiles all around but no laughter, and I began to feel that I had
been tempted into someone else’s house of worship. I was in a temple to
Mammon. With Gothic panache everything reached for the heavens far above;
light filtered through coloured windows onto expensive icons, the beautiful
limestone flooring carried a flow of supplicants towards the steps up to the altar
way above, and down to the crypt below.

I took a smooth ride up through many levels and at each I found side altars,
exquisitely decorated and housing expensive icons. But always, finally, I was
shut out, for the purpose of this ‘public’ space is to let me know that I am
excluded from the private places it introduces. Power, money, status, and even
the most expensive art works, are hidden behind closed doors. Only members of
the congregation, invited initiates, or wealthy patrons ‘go through’.

I walked away to find a café where the tables are too close and crowded, and
where they serve well-thumbed newspapers with the coffee: where the whispered
hush of worship is forgotten and talk of other peoples’ lives rushes between me
and my newspaper. Sipping a bitter espresso I wondered how much gold my
citizenship had paid into the coffers of ‘the temple’. I decide to find out, for I
could already see the next guru title distracting my airport wait: An ABC for
Global Companies.

I have returned several times to ‘the temple’ because some of the art works are
beautiful and I would like to spend more time with them. But on each visit I
shorten my stay – I feel conspicuous just looking, even guilty. Nobody else is
wandering about looking. They are all busy being useful, and if they do glance at
me perhaps they wonder ‘Why is she loitering?’ ‘Is she casing this place?’ ‘Are
the art works secure?’ ‘Who does she work for?’ ‘Does she look foreign?’ ‘Are we the target?’ ‘Are we safe?’ … by then I’m out of there! It’s that kind of place.

The designers’ vision

My experience is not what was intended. The architects and developers, early in the project, began thinking about the way the building would meet and interact with the public environment, the street and the harbour, and with the communities it would serve. From the outset the foyer was visioned as not just space that you traversed, but more like a hotel lobby. The architect in a promotional statement explains:

By marginalising the stereotypical nature of a lobby space as merely a highway to the lifts, I aimed to maximise the experience of entering and navigating a dynamic space designed to inspire, by combining major works from New Zealand’s leading artists with a strong Pacific-based architecture. Materials and forms are used in ways reminiscent of the Pacific Rim weaving and plaiting arts and Oceanic maritime lacing and jointing. This informs the dramatic integration of restaurants, café and the traditional function of entry into the building.

Furniture was designed specifically by my office to reflect and empower the architecture, complement the art and provide a holistic focus to the entire space (Ross, 2003, p. 93)

But even at that early stage the developers were not thinking of the lobby as a public space. It had to be ‘sold’ to investors as a space that would earn a financial return, a space that lawyers and accountants would use and be happy about paying a premium for. So it was promoted as a meeting place, a very comfortable environment, a friendly, softer, more relaxed space outside the offices but within the building where tenants and their clients could meet downstairs and share a coffee or lunch. It was designed to be a place where ‘you could have a meeting, and discuss concepts, and be briefed by somebody and gather information for something else coming up’ (interview with planner X). It was also designed to be a place that would symbolise the status of occupants (Strati, pp. 158-174; Berg & Kreiner (1990).

The result is a floor plan that is all about subdivision and thresholds (Doxtater, 1990: 108-109): it all radiates out in a square, and each area has a demarcation. As you
move through it you can negotiate by the floor textures that refer to the subdivision and boundaries and perimeters that we create in our societies. Places where people sit and relax have a different texture from walking areas: softer materials for the intimacy of sitting and relaxing as opposed to the harder materials for walking only.

This is a private public place and a very public private place. Visitors are invited in, and then made to feel that their trespass is a necessary exclusion, necessary so that those who ‘live’ in the building, as well as their personally invited guests, will feel their privilege more intimately in the presence of the excluded. A partner from one of the city’s top law firms, an art lover and art collector who was on the advisory panel for the building’s art works, and is a tenant on one of the top floors, initially denied that the artwork in the foyer creates PR for his firm:

No, we have our own art collection. If you come to the xx floor, which creates a lot of interest, that creates good PR response – [somewhat reluctantly] I suppose it is enhanced by what is in the lobby.

And when asked if his firm held any functions in the lobby after-hours, he trumped ‘No, we have our own gallery’. At the end of the interview he advised that we should really talk about [he named his firm] own art collection, not in terms of money but deliberately … well, come and see it. Either ring or make an appointment and I will show you it.

This lobby is, in other words, a lobby, a threshold that leads to more thresholds …

Foucault has argued that the present age is the age of space:

We are in an era of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the scattered … Structuralism … is the effort to establish, between elements that may have been distributed over time, a set of relations that makes them appear juxtaposed, opposed, implied by one another, that makes them appear, in short, like a kind of configuration (Foucault, 1998: 175)

and he goes on to divide these arranged spaces into utopias, ‘essentially unreal’ emplacements, and ‘realised utopias’ in which real emplacements are ‘represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable’ (p.178). These places he denotes as heterotopias and he explores...
the principles which explain how we relate to them, theory that explains why this foyer, this private-public place both invites and excludes.

Although it sits well above street level, the massive display of formalised graffiti, the Wall of Words, is clearly visible and suggests an open urban space owned by all city dwellers. Entry is invited through what looks like a ‘pure and simple opening’ but in fact conceals ‘curious exclusions’:

> Everybody can enter these heterotopian emplacements, but actually this is only an illusion: one believes he is going inside and, by the very fact of entering, one is excluded’ (Foucault, 1998:185)

Inside the foyer the casual visitor is excluded from all of the ‘real spaces’ that the foyer provides entry to; and the further in one penetrates the more fierce the exclusion becomes. All of the hard areas move towards the lifts and away from the art installations: they manufacture an expectation of purpose and that same driver propels the wanderer towards the closed, branded doors of the power and wealth that owns and inhabits the tower. Even the most beautiful of the art installations take on a new presence: they all become the mouthpieces of finance, the guardians of materially privileged residents who have put their wealth on display not for the enjoyment of the many but for their aggrandisement of the few.

> Ultimately the visitor is mocked. We have been invited in not as guests, nor even as a humble congregation, but as sycophantic worshippers, pawns in a power hierarchy that can best feel its own status when it builds a temple fit to house the most impressive icons it can find. With their owners, the art works live in ‘a different space, a different real space as perfect, as meticulous, as well-arranged as ours is disorganized, badly arranged, muddled’ (Foucault, 1998: 184). The foyer is a heterotopia of compensation, a perfect ‘Jesuitical’ arrangement for the regulated life of the corporately colonised. They and we are still controlled by Foucault’s ‘unspoken sacrilization’ of spaces and places: we take the oppositions of emplacements for granted (p.177).
Art for air

The galling irony of this experience is that we, the excluded, have contributed in both dollars, and with the sacrifice of natural heritage, to this corporate edifice. In the 1970s the local City Council introduced a scheme encouraging developers to build public spaces in office towers in return for approval to build taller towers: several more plates than are allowed by standard planning regulations can be added to high-rise office towers if public plazas are installed beneath. This is nice for developers: they get to build more premium floors which are sought after by the wealthiest of tenants in return for building the impressive foyers that will attract them to the building. It is not so nice for the city which has found the plazas unfriendly places which people tend to shun (Gibson, 2004, p. C9). The additional floor space is unrated so, over a period of time, this saving pays for the investment in artworks. In other words the city’s rate-payers gift the artworks (in themselves an excellent investment) to the owners of the building.

It is not just the space above their own buildings that property magnates can trade for adding amenities and art works to their own developments. The bonus points scheme that is part of a district plan that allows them, among other ‘civic’ contributions, the right to put larger buildings on their sites if they build ‘covered plazas for more space for pedestrians and visitors’ and buy and display ‘works of art in buildings (5 per cent more space for each 1 per cent of total construction cost spent on paintings, sculptures, installations etc’ (Gibson, 2001: G1). They can also ‘trade these council bonus points with each other and even swap points on one building for points on another. It is common for developers to buy and sell points’ (p.G2). It is even possible to buy fresh air above heritage buildings which, because of their heritage status, cannot of course extend up into their own sky space. A developer openly competing with the benchmarking foyer of our story, bought the fresh air above an historic church, St Matthew-in-the-City, as part of a deal which gave them the right to build an additional 16 levels onto their 34-level skyscraper on the city’s waterfront. After four amendments (an ever-changing trade of bonus points) to their arrangements with the Council for non-notified consents to build the extra 16 floors, the developer finally walked away with 520sq m of extra floor space in exchange for a commitment to install art works, and 3215 sq m of extra floor space by way of a ‘bought’ heritage
bonus within a total bonus allocation of 24,818 sq m or about 16 floors (Gibson, 2001, G1).

While the Council may be engaging in this kind of trading with the best of intentions, residents find that not only are they losing their city sky, but the ‘compensation’ awarded for this loss enables their corporate ‘benefactors’ to glorify their own presence in the central city by their placement of ‘suitable’ art installations. Michael Parekowhai’s work, despite being strongly recommended by some members of the Art Advisory Group, called together to decide on commissioned work for ‘the temple’ was rejected by representatives of the lessees on the grounds that it ‘mocked the object of the building’.³ We may not even get to enjoy very much of the ‘chosen’ works. Vocal critics have already pointed out that the bonuses do not always bring commensurate rewards, that ‘art works, for example, may be located in a private building that is unseen by the general public’ (Yates, 2001, C2); or may be hung so badly, in poor light and awkward positions, as in Sky City Casino, that it is difficult to enjoy them.

It may well be that city bureaucrats should not be left to determine what art we want or where we want it. But then representatives of the established art world also have an agenda that may not be sympathetic to the kind of artworks that most city dwellers are provoked and delighted by. The Art Bonus scheme played no part in the creation of the much-loved Wall of Words. An Advisor from the city Art Gallery, who was consulted by the architect and developer very early on in the project, was totally dismissive of its artistic merit:

… that was nothing to do with the committee. That was entirely X’s little pet project really. But to me, in fact to be honest I think it is a bit trite, and I don’t think there should have been art works near it …. it is not an art work at all it’s just some interesting quotations. … The Art Bonus scheme had nothing to do with those quotations. Effectively they are intellectual décor. It is not the work of art, it is the work of decoration.

³ Parekowai was commissioned by ‘the temple’s’ architect to sculpt the elegant but challenging gates now forming the entrance to the District Court in the most socially disadvantaged region of the city.
His opinion has not been echoed in popular response to the wall and takes no account of the participative process from which it emerged.

**The Wall of Words**

One of the property developers responsible for the building of ‘the temple’, an art-lover, entrepreneur and a man with a great zest for living, wanted to do something beyond ‘good art’ for the people of New Zealand. His commitment and flexibility both drove the Wall of Words project and allowed it to drive itself:

… the commitment was to create a foyer that is unashamedly one about New Zealand [one with] ….. an-other layer. It’s all about our poets, philosophers, leaders, … in the shaping of a nation. …I went to Bill Manhire to begin with [poet laureate] and …Bill of course gave me a very academic response ….so then I went to Gary McCormick [popular poet] and I thought well there is a guy who knows New Zealand culture and [has a] fantastic way with words.

If we were going to do it I had to do it really well, and potentially it could be quite controversial ….. And then I thought well how do I think about this from a New Zealand perspective. I thought well I have got double degree lawyers, I have got a kid who has failed school cert and comes in at night from Otara and is cleaning the floor, and I have got grand-people and I have students, brown, white and yellow, I have male and female, so I have got to try and think of a solution that has found something that appeals to all these diverse parts of society. ….what I then did was I put together lots of workshops, and so I got different groups [together] lots of individual groups, and I gave them the bits and pieces that I had from Bill and Gary … in parallel I started to realise it was a bit of a curatorial role I was providing here. So I rang ‘Z’ at Te Papa [National Museum] ….. and she selected a group [who were working on] portraying history [in museums] through words …I had all these work teams, and what we did we just downloaded millions of bloody quotes, and so we had people pouring over books, and we just poured into everybody lots of quotes, and the different groups threw different ideas up. So we ended up with a huge pile of ideas and then we got the groups to prioritise it. We started to get consensus and there were a lot of things that were coming through that had a lot of common support in the process … we were looking at sports quotes, quotes from the America’s Cup and there are rugby quotes, there is Te Reo (Maori language] and there are classic quotes, a
bit of humour and some serious things. We also wrestled of course about how we were going to go with Maori and we also tried to think sequentially, you know with giving women the vote, also some of them were reasonably controversial. It has been wonderfully successful, people in the building love it and whenever you go in there you will see people stopping and looking.

The wall is an on-going work with another quote from a local hero, Sir Peter Blake who was recently tragically murdered, added earlier this year. But is it art?

‘But is it art?’ is a question that has been working for civilization across the centuries. It is not a question that is likely to be prompted by installations that earn Art Bonus points. The primary outcomes of a fourth, aesthetic, bottom line will necessarily be economic. The art-collecting partner in a top city law firms, the tenant from the top floor who invited our researcher to ‘make an appointment’ and come in to see a ‘real’ art collection, their art collection, comfortably conceded that the motivation behind the introduction of art into the lobby was ‘purely economic’, that ‘one or two of the members of the company building the building were interested in art and not unhappy about that, but that it was a city council concession …[that persuaded]’.

QBL in action
The City Council is already talking about a fourth bottom line which is noted in its most recent Local Government Amendment Act:

2(d) ARH should exhibit a sustainable development approach in its decision-making by taking into account

(i) the social, economic, and cultural well-being of people and communities

(Local Government Amendment Act, July 2004).

Although no-one is quite sure what ‘cultural means’, our council interviewee, quickly corrected our interviewer’s reference to TBL: ‘No. Quadruple’, and referred to the Act above, but could only describe ‘cultural’ as ‘well-being’:

So when you say cultural …

Well-being. Well-being. But to put a qualification on that is difficult. So yeah, it is noted that we need to be aware and accommodate cultural well-being.

Nevertheless, under the banner of an ‘Arts Agenda’ council planners are currently engaged in ‘auditing’ that sounds like this:
The bonus floor area that is available when a work of art is being proposed by a developer works on the basis of a 5% extra floor area for every 1% of the total construction cost that is spent on the commission and execution of the work of art … there are no express policies of objectives that refer to Works of Art …. But the Bonus works on the basis that you, a developer if they apply for this particular bonus feature the essential area is divided into a number of bonus areas, and for most of those bonus areas a work of art would qualify on the basis of a 1:1 floor area ratio. That means at 1:1 you could have additional floor area in the building equal to the actual area of the site. So if the site area was say 500 square meters, you could get up to an additional 500 square meters of building floor area.

*Do you mean upwards or outwards?*

No upwards, because within the core central city area we do not have a maximum height requirement as such, there are other mechanisms or controls that determine the height of the building. The nature of the building can be influenced by the site intensity and bonus provisions. The floor area ratio is based on the floor area of the building in relation to the site area. It is just a ratio at 1:1 so you are talking about a building would equal the area of the site. A basic floor area of 4:1 means that building on that site, if it is covering the whole of the site, it could rise four levels. At the present time for most development within the core area of the city that is the main business district development is permitted. So basically a ratio of 6:1 is permitted and then the various bonuses that provide for either residential accommodation or plazas, or landscaped areas of works of art as previously mentioned and pedestrian facilities all allow the building to rise beyond the basic floor area ration 6:1 but up to a maximum usually around 11 or 13 to one.

We suspect that if the *ABC for Global Companies* hits business booksellers soon it will spawn an industry of bureaucratic ‘accounting’ assessment of the worth of art. City planners working with a QBL audit might note the success of the Wall of Words and then what would happen?? They might well decide that every building seeking high-scoring Art Bonus points should have one! It could become a bench-marking exercise for all aesthetic audits. We know how to create one (and it doesn’t require heavy capital outlay as a commission to an artist who just might do something unexpected and even unwelcome), its artistic impact and popular appeal have already
been demonstrated, and yet it’s very particular attraction is that every new wall could be created anew from a different selection of quotable quotes. The QBL ‘audit’ attaching the credits could instigate the quality control mechanisms that will determine these credits. These could include surveying foyer-users on the time they spend looking at it; count the number of references in the installation to indigenous New Zealanders; describe the quality of the inks used; count the number, gender, ethnicity and age of the authors represented; note the cost of the installation and the monetary return to artists; and survey client users of the foyer on its marketing appeal in terms of a cost-benefit analysis and share-holder profit-margins.

Lots of walls could be so nicely ‘measured, calculated, audited and reported’ for we all know that ‘one of the more enduring clichés of modern management is that ‘if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it’” (Norman and MacDonald, 2004: 243)

Conclusions

Our story of an arts-city- business relationship has revealed a trio that is at its best uneasy and at its worst, destructive of the role that we would like to see the arts play in our communities. We have portrayed the arts-business turn in organizational scholarship as being potentially complicit in the corporate colonising of voices that could otherwise resist the relentless corporate domination of all that is ‘other’ in our made environments. We suggest that if critical business-arts researchers are to establish a ‘useful’ voice in the future we have projected, we need to pre-empt the potential subversion of that which our theorising promotes.

We are not suggesting that arts-business research is as yet encouraging a betrayal of the role and function of art in our communities, but simply flagging the likelihood that the more successfully research in this field profiles it, the more likely it is that would-be guru writers will encourage corporates and their lackeys in local government, to put it to use for their own profit maximising enterprises. With Norman and MacDonald (2004) we assume the desirability of the many socially responsible business practices that TBL seeks to encourage, and allow that there may be potentially useful tools ‘that allow us to measure and report on performance along these dimensions’ (p.243). But we also concur with them in finding controversy in the
promises suggested by the TBL rhetoric (p.244), and concern that it is potentially counterproductive, providing a means to ends they do not think are justifiable.

We suggest that our story of an arts-business relationship is the fore-runner of a wider future fashion promoting a fourth bottom line, aesthetic responsibility, for business firms. We think it is less likely to emerge if our prescience subverts it here.

References


