



Corporate Pleasures for a Corporate Planet

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Newfield**

James K. Sims, the CEO of Cambridge Technology Partners, Inc., says that “Free access to information eliminates the need for hierarchical management systems that existed before.”¹ Michael Hammer, coauthor of *Reengineering the Corporation*, claims that “Organizations need fewer and fewer of better and better people. . . . [Future] jobs are going to be better jobs.”² Track foreman Joseph Stiffarm of Burlington Northern declares the end of autocratic rule. “Now,” he remarks, “you have to listen to your men. They have empowered us so much that we don’t have to do a job if we think it’s unsafe.”³ Welcome to the world of worker democracy—welcome to the Fortune 500.

The meaning of a corporate planet is stranger than we sometimes assume. It is a contradictory mixture of conflicting trends. The past twenty years have witnessed immovable wage stagnation, pervasive job insecurity, restless dissatisfaction with corporate structure, and many more people stuck in serial monogamy with one company after another. But if life got tougher, corporate work got better. As jobs outside the corporate world seem more difficult, scarce, and despotic, jobs on the inside are said to be ever more liberating and democratic.

The emerging picture of life on the corporate inside has two fundamental components. The first involves remodeling the corporation as a global village. The winning business will offer its citizens wealth and happiness in a borderless capitalism where national and local governments are little more than obliging brokers. The second component requires transforming work into pleasure. The two parts are assembled into one whole—some but exciting corporate self: the power of communitarian governance is synthesized with the pleasure of individual autonomy.

This synthesis tries to respond to new conditions but builds on a combination long at the heart of American liberalism. One major version has been hammered in by Robert Reich, secretary of labor in the Clinton administration. In *The Resurgent Liberal*, he rejects the simple notion of freedom as individual autonomy in favor of freedom as interdependence. He reaffirms corporate individualism as the preeminent national model for the successful self.⁴ He instructs us to see “the team as hero”: “To the extent that we continue to celebrate the traditional myth of the entrepreneurial hero, we will slow the progress of change and adaptation that is

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essential to our economic success. If we are to compete effectively in today's world, we must begin to celebrate collective entrepreneurship."⁵ In his next book, *The Work of Nations*, Reich describes this corporate individual's ideal suitor—global companies made of “webs of enterprise.” These consist of relatively delayed or horizontal networks of individuals who come together to produce high value. Organizations convene “problem-identifiers,” “problem-solvers,” and “strategic brokers.”⁶ Made of self-managed teams and integrated computer systems, these organizations are civil societies that seek to replace the diminishing nation-state. Compared to their radical flexibility, global communications, and world-class systems of knowledge, present society is a Hobbesian state of nature. Corporations can act, in this view, as though individuals had come together voluntarily to form enterprise webs for their mutual benefit.

But in the context of today's corporate culture industry, Reich is a prudish moralist. Even his title gives him away: nations are not about wealth but about work. Unlike many other business writers, Reich concedes the existence of a nonbusiness sector. He even regrets its decline. The last six chapters of *The Work of Nations* are much closer to *Bladerunner* than to *Business Week*. Reich criticizes the collapse of public investment and tells a tale of two nations, one of workers tied to a shrinking local economy, the other of “symbolic analysts” who, in tandem with their kindred elites around the world, secede from their home society by withdrawing their financial resources into garrison enclaves.⁷ Reich's cure for this is the business version of “common culture,” which he calls “positive economic nationalism,” but it is born already rent into pieces by the radical class stratification he describes.

Generally speaking, management discourse tries to avoid these unhappy endings. It is less overwhelmed by Darwinist rage than are, say, many national Republican leaders. And it stresses the corporate nurturance of individual potential. Anyone flipping through an issue of the *Harvard Business Review* for March–April of last year would find, sandwiched between articles entitled “Putting the Service-Profit Chain to Work” and “What Asbestos Taught Me about Managing Risk,” an essay called “Does New Age Business Have a Message For Managers?” The answer, according to the author, is a resounding yes. “Today's company,” she notes, “is a place with the emotional tone of a family or a friendly village, where managers encourage employees to do community work on office time and where everyone creates products that they themselves love. . . . Professionals now fear . . . isolation and loss of self, purpose, and stability. [Thus,] . . . creating meaning for employees may be the true managerial task of the future.”⁸ The two halves of corporate self-making go together: first, a regenerated community of mutual care, and second, personal meaning and fulfillment.

The dream here is that the two halves are one. The dream gathers much of its power from its liberalism: there's nothing reactionary or obviously regressive about it. Conventional wisdom is quite wrong when it assumes that the corporate "middle class" historically favors laissez-faire liberalisms that fully deregulate markets and individuals; American liberalism has always been obsessed with collective management. The dream of corporate individualism builds on a long tradition in the United States of seeking individualist fulfillment through community harmony. But this looks possible to probusiness liberals only within the borders of the firm.

Writing off society is depressing. The antidepressants are the celebrants of the business self, who unmake *homo hierarchicus* with the corporate version of Huey Long's phrase, "every man a king."⁹ The seductive magic of liberal management lies less in its communitarian, Reichian ways than in its libertarian fulfillment ways. Here, first among kings is management consultant Tom Peters. The author of the 1980s bellwethers *In Search of Excellence* and *Thriving on Chaos*, Peters synthesized the contradictory vision of U.S. liberalism in his 1992 work, *Liberation Management*, an encyclopedia of the business moment. Peters has since written two more books that are helter-skelter picture scrapbooks of business pleasure.¹⁰

All the books describe a garden of corporate delights. Peters begins by announcing the market death of tyrannical bureaucracy. He declares the future to be "horizontal" and all successful power to lack hierarchy. He combines a "just do it" individualism with a "relationship revolution" on behalf of flexible collaboration. He ratifies the "shift to softness" while reassuring us that "soft is hard."¹¹ But most importantly, he shows the new economic order offering unending personal liberation and total business fun. Peters would never be caught authoring a *Harvard Business Review* essay like "Staple Yourself to an Order." His motto, to borrow from the comic Kate Clinton, describing her ideal workout, is "no pain . . . no pain." He celebrates intensive and endless effort, but only of the exhilarating creative kind, effort like "Building 'Wow Factories.'"¹² He proclaims a French Revolution for the businessperson—liberty ("just do it" in a "world gone bonkers"), equality ("going 'horizontal'"), and fraternity ("toward projects for all").¹³

Peters's revolution rests on the idea that there is no pleasure like corporate pleasure. Liberty is fulfilled in maximum "businessing." He and his associates, Peters says, "are indeed trying 'to business' everyone: to turn all employees into mom-and-pop enterprises."¹⁴ Once fully businesssed, the new individualist builds and rebuilds the product in a spirit of endless transformation:

I beg you to start a list like mine, to go berserk over floors labeled two that should be labeled one, shampoo containers that a pointy-toothed genius couldn't crack, and watch straps that snag sweaters. Don't be like that company secretary and assume it's your fault. . . . I urge you to become aware. Allow design and usability of everyday objects to worm their way into your consciousness. Allow yourself to become irritated, even furious, at the designer instead of feeling frustrated at yourself. It should convince you of how much can be done better, how big a little difference can be, and how important the whole idea is.

The battle for competitive advantage is increasingly over nonobvious sources of value-added.¹⁵

Peters has piles of quotable stuff like this. Almost all of it claims an emancipation in business much greater than that which his audience could expect to find in its public or private spheres. Tired of government and your friends? The crazy organization is better than all of them. Put down your futile civic labors and follow us.

How are critics of the present corporate economy supposed to respond to this? One's reflex may be to dismiss it as Horatio Alger's Ragged Dick reincarnated in a perpetually adolescent Silicon Valley tycoon, now described as though Nietzsche had been in marketing. It's true that Peters's favorite economics book is the free-market apostle F. A. Hayek's *Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*.¹⁶ But labeling him right-wing ignores how fumingly critical Peters is himself, and I couldn't help but notice that any ten pages of his later work offers more urgent denunciation of bureaucratic death than anything I hear on university campuses. More importantly, he proposes many alternatives.

Peters is a significant force for creating a popular ideology for the professional middle class. This ideology, to repeat, is not a simple conservatism but a liberal mixture. It mixes conformity to with revolt against concentrated, private, and hierarchical corporate power. Peters sounds the rebellion theme far more than does a conventional liberal like Reich, whose corporate individualism overtly subordinates selves to complex systems. Like the transitional epoch from which it springs, Peters's ideology is not simple to place. I started to formulate my reactions through a list of likely objections.

* Peters almost entirely ignores capitalism's current structural crises. He simply doesn't deal with the current contradiction between, say, sustaining profits by lowering wages and sustaining adequate consumption through stable or rising wages. Under neoliberal economic management, U.S. wages have stagnated or declined for over twenty years. The picture is far worse in other parts of the world, where the triumph of world capitalism coincides with appalling decline in West Africa, the former Soviet

Union, and even Mexico, where neoliberal “reforms” have been most carefully controlled. How can these problems be rectified by the same dubious policies implemented by now-empowered employees? Peters side-steps all such issues by acting on the principle that “what’s possible is a function of good management (read leadership) alone.”¹⁷ He works in the “human relations” tradition of management, which generally sees economic problems as secondary to the “powers of the mind.” His ideas are not so far removed from the New Thought movement of 1890–1915, which combined social Darwinism with personal empowerment. In the words of one earlier author, “Anything is yours if you only want it hard enough. Just think of that. *Anything*. Try it. Try it in earnest and you will succeed. It is the operation of a mighty law.”¹⁸ Peters’s attitude adjustments—even on the level of modified organizational cultures—are disassociated from larger sociohistorical changes.

★ Although he would never say so, Peters’s model has room only for the few. It selects for a special type of high-pressure technocrat, and perpetuates the serious social injustices already being produced by the huge resources reserved for such people. He offers little more than ever more energetic fighting for survival in the “skill-eat-skill” economic jungle. The happy speedup cannot conceal the extent to which the increased mobility of successful firms has been paid for with reduced wages: in the last twenty years, “real GDP has doubled while real hourly wages have fallen by nearly a sixth.”¹⁹ The trend continues: in 1994 corporate earnings were up 41 percent over the year before, while manufacturing wages rose 2.3 percent.²⁰ People of color are affected disproportionately and, as Avery Gordon argues in this issue, corporate culture has encouraged racial assimilationism and segmentation at the same time. As one writer notes, “Between 1990 and 1991, black employees represented more than half (54 percent) of lost jobs at Sears, 42 percent at Coca-Cola, 43 percent at Dial, and 36 percent at McDonald’s.” These losses subtract from an already inadequate employment situation: between 1983 and 1993, for example, “blacks’ share of managerial and professional positions rose minutely, from 6 percent to 7 percent.”²¹ Capital flight has brought social decay, violence, and repression in its wake; the remarkable resilience and creativity of the affected populations has been more in spite of, than because of, business management. In general, corporations are supporting profits by dumping their costs on society and expecting the majority of the population to pay for these one way or another—through poverty, lower wages, poor or uncertain health care, bad education, etc. It’s impossible to imagine Peters supporting raised costs to the corporate world for this dumping, but in any case he writes only about the small-group chemistry of individual success.

* The Peters principles mean more personal insecurity, even for the winners. The symptoms are easily accumulated. “A quarter of those employed today are so on a temporary, part-time, or contract basis.”²² “Over the past year, almost 600,000 new job cuts were announced—and this in an economy growing at a buoyant rate of 4 percent annually.”²³ “One key change, already well under way, is the decreasing use of pension plans that promise to pay a set amount at retirement—the so-called defined-benefit plans. Only 56 percent of full-time workers are now covered by defined-benefit plans, down from 84 percent in 1982. Instead, companies are moving to defined-contribution programs . . .”²⁴ Greater insecurity has been accompanied by greater effort. Juliet B. Schor, in *The Overworked American*, reports that “in attempting to maintain their standard of living in the face of declining compensation, workers spent the equivalent of four weeks more a year on the job in 1989 than they had two decades earlier.”²⁵ Working smarter is not obviously different from working harder, and in more constant fear.

* There’s Peters’s illusive democracy. One of our major problems is the almost complete loss of public control over economic decisions and impacts. As I write, the U.S. has once again lost its grip on its currency to anonymous, speculative currency markets. Peters only makes this worse through his conventional mystification of the market as an inexorable force; he never describes “crazy times” as an immense matrix of institutions and private decisions that political bodies should modify or control. He replaces the boss with the despotic customer, who is in turn driven by insatiable need for improvement and novelty, a need that is goaded and whipped by the technological churning of products into instant obsolescence. All of this is worsened by the international flight of money, by the effects of wage competition, by the supposedly unchangeable laws of the global market. Peters omits a vision of employees steering products and markets, for products and markets steer people, who can choose only their own efforts of adaptation. The employee is as tyrannized as before, remaining close to product needs but far from the needs of the general public.

* There’s also his false freedoms. Peters is offering up what I like to call submissive individualism. You should “get turned on” and “follow your bliss,” he says, because in “a knowledge-based economy, you must—to survive—add some special value, be distinctively good at something. And the truth is, we usually only get good at stuff we like.”²⁶ The benefit of pleasure is enhanced performance.²⁷ The people inside the organization are to be as perpetually mobile as commodities outside; their relations are to be as incessantly liquified as those of price and consumer demand; their own identities are to molt and transfigure with each cycle of retooling. This kind of movement is a limited freedom—freedom to end rela-

tionships, streamline structures, start a new project, have better ideas, all in response to external necessity. As Western thought frequently proclaims, always as though for the first time, freedom is the power to adapt to the uncontrollable flux. This definition ignores freedom in the form of power to do what the flux doesn't want.

Peters rolls all these factors—international prosperity, justice, stability, democracy, and freedom—into the obligation of individuals to respond to a world of flow, randomness, unbundling, and fractal effects. He does not attempt to conceptualize feedback that goes all the way to the rules themselves, even though he sees microinfluences continually at work. The flux and its rules are generally out of reach.

These are all pretty good objections, and could be made better with more data and explanation. But they've been around for a long time and have never prevented Peters-like visions of business liberation from keeping the upper hand. Why do these criticisms have such a hard time getting a general hearing? We can line up the usual suspects: the servile media, the political and cultural power of capital, the intellectual timidity of a worried, overworked work force facing seemingly irreversible decline, the increased policing of scapegoat groups, and the solidly right-wing ideology of most upper management. This lineup, however, ignores the attractions of liberation management—the big shake-ups at work, the attacks on higher-ups, the excitement of personal change, the visible payoffs of acting locally. Liberation management offers specific steps for more freedom, creativity, and prosperity in the place where you get paid. It constantly describes your life after the revolution, where oppressive authority is gone and there's even more money coming in. There's of course a large dosage of submission in all of this, but there's also revolt. And we should expect that some disruptions will emerge from surprising political directions, from behind enemy lines.

Developing alternatives to the corporate planet requires ceasing to avoid it. These efforts also will be dogged by, if they do not incorporate, the pleasure principle that circulates in business literature. They will be wasteful if they don't use some of the rebellion that business intellectuals have already located in the very soul of the machine. And they will need to be developed visions of alternative forms of economic activity, of business culture. I offer some starting points:

* Link structural crises to the triumph of managerial power (in the broad sense). This linkage will require much better business literacy. There's never been more mystification about destructive private power than there is right now, a fact which can be conveyed by the two words "insurance industry."²⁸ No business problem will be addressed by the noncorporate people it affects if most of them can't analyze the problem in the first place. Business literacy involves helping people see business

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culture without the coke-bottle lenses provided by normal economics. But what Peters offers is not so much the labor of knowledge as the pleasure of action. His career is built on coaxing people into the righteous thrill of fixing the structure by breaking its rules. Are these disruptions simply the way corporations streamline themselves? Quite often. But noting this pales next to the joys of obliterating meaningless structures through a “constant state of disequilibrium.” Or those of declaring the “five virtues” to be “pedal to the medal, action, embrace failure, no tepid responses, focus amidst mayhem.”²⁹ The big thrill is not just learning about structures, it’s in showing how existing structures can be unscrewed. Contrary to Peters, however, post-corporate culture would need to find ways for noncorporate society to do the same unscrewing to corporate governance of economic life.

* Tie freedom to equality. Conservatives have almost cornered the media market in antiegalitarian definitions of both of these concepts. This is a preposterous situation, but it has not prevailed in recent business literature. Peters avoids today’s dimwitted elitism in a couple of ways. First, he admits the negative impact of inequality. He exclaims, “If you want to figure out why I’ve been successful, start with my being born in 1942, white, male, Protestant, in the United States, of relatively intelligent parents. I would have had to work to screw it up. Whenever I hear a successful white male say, ‘I’m here because I worked hard,’ I think, ‘Bullshit.’”³⁰ Second, Peters claims the liquidation of inequality through the instant power gained by the successful problem solver. Peters explains that “to be ‘businessed’ is to run one’s own show” inside an organization. One gets “a place of one’s own within a delayered, reengineered organization, as well as the authority to make decisions, including committing substantial resources (money, too) without recourse to higher-ups.”³¹ Business equality means having no superiors around particular projects. It means the absence of pecking orders in self-managed teams. It means knowing that value comes from the margins: “So how healthy is your fringe? How loony are its inhabitants?”³² Post-corporate culture would also need to give the fringe represented by *noncorporate* society an equal role in making political decisions that can influence business.

* Demand economic security. What would it be like if one could have freedom without the incessant churn and burn? It would at the very least involve much more equitable sharing of the need to scramble and adapt. It would mean spreading the costs of reinvolving people who were left behind by change. Peters, unlike some other free market gurus, spends less time denouncing government protection of failures and more time celebrating insecurity as the expression of antiessentialist and fully performative notions of freedom.³³ He makes it sound as though stability is a

ploy used by dinosaur managers to oppress you, the potential miracle worker. Regulation doesn't help *you*, but it is salvation for has-been corporate vice presidents. As he describes it, Peters's business fun only half consists of insecurity. The other half is mutual assistance, which flexible teamwork makes possible. Post-corporate culture could concede that, on the national level, "the only security we have is in our ability to fly by the seat of our pants." But the other side would be explicitly rejecting the Darwinist celebration of crashing in flames.³⁴ The real freedom here lies in combining security and change through the collaborative innovation and calculation Peters promotes. But the collaboration needs to be extended to the public at large.

* Reimagine democratic control. This involves reorienting feelings about public institutions. Corporatism has had one hundred and fifty years to shift economic sovereignty from public to private associations. This long march needs to be confronted directly once again. Part of the change back to public from private control is already happening. Pension funds, for example, have increasing financial clout, and some, like the California Public Employees' Retirement System, with assets of \$80 billion, are judging companies in part by their human relations. But another job will be changing the feelings of the people that work in the private sector about who will take care of them. Is business really nicer to them than government? Peters locates business's niceness in its intrinsic democratic responsiveness (though he never uses the term "democracy"). Control he designates a twentieth-century hang-up; its day is done. Now corporations are delivering radical self-management. "But how do I ORGANIZE these crazy, dispersed, far-flung networks?" one frustrated seminar participant almost shouted . . . The answer: They organize themselves!"³⁵ In business, "hierarchies are going, going, gone." Business works on a "shared mental model. I like that. Translation: Talk, talk, talk . . ." Business means "The network is the whole thing . . . It should connect everybody in the organization to everybody outside the organization, and to each other." Business also transforms self-direction into rebellion on demand. For it means overthrowing the regime, "unabashedly championing revolution, and getting the company anarchists to the barricades." Business is "perpetual revolution": "Whatever you've built, the best thing you can do . . . is to burn it down every few years. . . . Don't change it, but b-u-r-n i-t d-o-w-n."³⁶ If radical self-management is so great for business, why shouldn't it be good for popular government?

* Rethink individualism. What would it be like if U.S. society really embraced radical individualism? Rethinking the "individual" would mean granting real sovereignty within the group of which an individual is invariably a part. Liberalism, whether Reich's or Peters's, has been good

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at imagining commercial agency, which means the power to respond quickly and flexibly to new economic conditions. It has always had a very hard time with political agency, by which I mean a mode in which individuals rewrite the basic rules of order in groups *not* ruled by the needs of the product. This individuality, if it existed, would not be corporate. But how do we know that? Peters stayed corporate while repudiating the disciplinary agenda we normally associate with probusiness public policy. For him, people are not screwed up, the systems are. People aren't lazy, they aren't well organized. It's not your fault, it's the fault of management. You were born creative, so be spontaneous. "Try anything," just do it, grope along like Einstein did since there's an Einstein in you. "The average employee can deliver far more than his or her current job demands—and far more than the terms 'employee empowerment,' 'participative management,' and 'multiple job skills' imply." You too can find one of those bosses who are turning America around by being "oblivious to the hurdles, who assume . . . that people can do damn near anything they have the will to do so long as they don't wait for one more analysis before starting." In short, "Do what turns you on, not what the statistics say is best."³⁷ Even in his sober youth, Peters insisted on "productivity through people": "There was hardly a more pervasive theme in the excellent companies than *respect for the individual*."³⁸ He offers the liberal balance of communal production and personal liberation, but with an irrepressible anarchism that poses an equal challenge to the Reichian center and to the left.

These five positive suggestions imagine repoliticizing the corporation—they generally want to return the corporation to a social environment comprised of political agents who try to run the economy for themselves and not vice versa. But this effort is made more difficult by the fact that Peters and others are remodeling the corporation as a social environment. As such, the firm is easier to enjoy than is the public sphere: it works, it changes, it has parties and teams, it makes good things, it shows results, it punishes but also rewards directly. That giant sucking sound you hear is not jobs heading for Mexico. It's political culture, citizenship itself, heading inside the corporate webs of enterprise.

It's crucial to create positive alternative systems for a multiracial corporate populace by addressing its need not just for culture in the sense of arts and media but for work culture, for a positive, alternative, post-corporate business culture. But this transformed business culture will thrive only if it arises from corporate pleasure, pleasure used against current corporate culture. It will arise from ideas of liberation that are more carefully targeted to separate liberation from management for the large numbers of people who now mostly find liberation through management.

To emphasize this need for better forms of post-corporate pleasure, I'll end with a transcribed clip from a Peters seminar, for it is Peters who personifies the business challenge:

Number 8: measure curiosity, measure measure measure, measure. We all love measure. How do you do it? Time for the semi-annual performance review? Consider having each employee front-line to the top submit a one-page essay on, (a) the oddest thing I've done this year off the job, (b) the craziest idea I've tried at work, or (c) my most original screw-up on the job or off. I think it's terrific, a lot of you go through performance reviews on the giving or the receiving right? Honestly, dead serious, if you ask people to answer those three questions at least it will be an interesting discussion. I mean it couldn't be any less valuable than what the hell you do now, we take that for granted.

Number 9: seek out curious work. Number 10: model the way, if the chief isn't curious the troops won't be. Number 11: teach curiosity. Brainstorming is not *the* answer to creativity but it is an answer. Number 12: make it fun. And number 13: change pace. Go to work next Thursday and declare it miniature golf day. Show a training film this afternoon, order popcorn for every participant. Curiosity has a lot to do with looking at the world through slightly cockeyed glasses.

I told you I think words are important. I came across this the other day and I just love this and oh it would make me so happy if you could put this into your language. It's from Guy Kawasaki, who was one of the top software developers for the Macintosh at Apple. And Kawasaki says the objective is simple: turn everyone on your payroll into, quote, a raging inexorable thunderlizard evangelist. I love that. I'm saying look, your boss asked you for MBO's this year. MBO number one for 1993: turn the 11 people in my purchasing organization into raging inexorable thunderlizard evangelists.

There are a lot of messages I hope you take out of this discussion, but none of them is much more important in my mind than what I call learning how to use hot words instead of cold words. Learning to take seriously as a business proposition words like weird, crazy, zany, thrill, delight, wow, renegade, traitor, anarchist, raging inexorable thunderlizard evangelist.

Half the year I live in Silicon Valley and half the year I live in Vermont. In Silicon Valley, I have the thrill of living next to the Apple Computers, in Vermont I have the even bigger thrill of living next to Ben and Jerry's home-made. And you know what the primary test is that a new ice cream flavor has to pass in the formal product development manual at Ben and Jerry's, and, more important, can you find a way to put this in the formal product-development manual of your corporation: the question is, in simple language, is it weird enough?

And that is a question which I suggest should be asked every day at Motorola, at Arthur Anderson, at Wal-Mart, at CNN, at McKinsey and Co., at MCI, at Joe and Harry's Bar and Grill, and the local Chevrolet dealership. Every policy, every product, every service, every procedure, is it weird enough? I think it's the right one.

I'm now 50 instead of 40 and thinking some different thoughts. I think excellence is as good an idea as I thought it was 10 years ago, except I've redefined it. And let me suggest that maybe this is the way that we should be thinking for a marketplace that has come unglued, that does call for curiosity and imagination. And my definition of excellence today is very simple, non-financial, and a one-sentence definition. And that is, would you want your son or daughter to work here? And that to me is the acid test, because the place that could tap the spirit and the courage and the curiosity and the imagination of a young man or a young woman, then the odds are reasonably high that it's a place that can continue to be imaginative in a world that continues to call for more imagination.

Now is a fantastic time. The marketplace is loaded with exciting Japanese products and German products and Swiss products and Swedish products and the Mexicans are coming on strong and the Indians are coming on strong and some people are predicting that China will be the biggest economy in the world by the year 2010 and the nature of products is changing, and it's just fantastic to be in charge of anything.

The beautiful thing about what's going on is nobody in Japan, nobody in Germany, nobody in the United States, nobody in Chicago, nobody in San Jose, nobody in Pittsburgh, nobody in Dallas, has a sweet clue as to what the hell they're doing. And since you don't know what the hell you're doing, that means that the only way to screw up is by not trying something. Really. And it's just a wonderful time to try to test to experiment to fail to get fired to be curious to ask questions to be dumb, and that to me is the ultimate joy. That's why we ended up choosing *liberation* as the first word.

It's going to be a hell of a long and tough and bumpy ride. We're going to have to reinvent our country, reinvent our companies, and reinvent ourselves and our careers. But that's a challenge that sounds to me like fun, frankly.

And so my final advice is (a) be weird and figure out how to tap the raging inexorable thunderlizard evangelist which I think resides in the hearts and minds and souls of the people in this room.³⁹

Notice that there is no "B"; there is only "A"—there is only being weird and unleashing the monster that sleeps within. The power of corporate uplift repeatedly washes critique away, and has long been doing this for a huge part of the U.S. population. Can we do better than Peters about pleasure? It used to be that companies provided jobs but culture offered pleasure and freedom. We still don't provide jobs, but corporate cultural theorists are staking out pleasure and freedom. If we can't do better, we're not going to be put *out* of business, rather we'll be put *in* business in ways we've tried to avoid.

1. Keith H. Hammonds, "The New World of Work," *Business Week*, 17 October 1994, 81.
2. *Ibid.*, 80.
3. *Ibid.*, 80.
4. For part of the long-term genealogy of corporate individualism, see Christopher Newfield, "Emerson's Corporate Individualism," *American Literary History* 3, no. 4 (1991), 657–84; and *The Emerson Effect: Individualism and Submission in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
5. Robert B. Reich, *The Resurgent Liberal (and Other Unfashionable Prophecies)* (New York: Random House, Vintage, 1991), 85.
6. Robert Reich, *The Work of Nations* (New York: Random House, 1991), 87.
7. For a description of an economic region already constructed around enclaves, see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990), esp. chapter 4.
8. Martha Nichols, "Does New Age Business Have a Message for Managers?" Executive Summary, *Harvard Business Review* 72, no. 2 (1994), 187.
9. Mauro F. Guillén uses the term *homo hierarchicus* to describe the individual created by wage dependency and factory bureaucracy. See *Models of Management: Work, Authority, and Organization in a Comparative Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chapter 7.
10. The Peters canon: Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982); Tom Peters and Nancy Austin, *A Passion For Excellence: The Leadership Difference* (New York: Random House, 1985); Tom Peters, *Thriving On Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1987); Tom Peters, *Liberation Management: Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties* (New York: Knopf, 1992); Tom Peters, *The Tom Peters Seminar: Crazy Times Call for Crazy Organizations* (New York: Random House, 1994); Tom Peters, *The Pursuit of Wow! Every Person's Guide to Topsy-Turvy Times* (New York: Random House, 1994).
11. Peters, *Liberation Management*, 448, 66, 69, 5; Peters and Waterman, *Excellence*, 319.
12. Peters, *Liberation Management*, 701.
13. *Ibid.*, 66, 33, 448, 222.
14. *Ibid.*, 235.
15. *Ibid.*, 737.
16. Peters, *Pursuit of Wow!*, 293.
17. Peters and Austin, *Passion For Excellence*, xxiv; emphasis omitted.
18. Cited in Mauro F. Guillén, *Models of Management*, 34; Guillén links New Thought and social Darwinism on p. 33.
19. Doug Henwood, "The Austerity Police," *In These Times*, 12 December 1994, 19.
20. Lori Bongiono, "It Doesn't Get a Lot Better Than This," *Business Week*, 27 February 1995, 43.
21. Mark Lowery, "The War on Equal Opportunity," *Black Enterprise*, February 1995, 150.

22. Michael J. Mandel, "Business Rolls the Dice," *Business Week*, 17 October 1994, 85.
23. Ibid., 88.
24. Ibid., 89.
25. Ibid., 85.
26. Peters, *Liberation Management*, 757.
27. An interesting counterpoint to Peters is Hesh Kestin, *21st Century Management: The Revolutionary Strategies that Have Made Computer Associates a Multi-billion-Dollar Software Giant* (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1992). Kestin much more explicitly links teamwork to working others harder and entrepreneurship to working oneself harder. Corporate need is a visible, financially generous, but utterly Darwinistic taskmaster. This corporate culture is nothing other than a "culture of work" (131). A major outcome is that work is "endless," "endless because the line that divides people from their employment is erased: to the extent it is individually possible, the person *becomes* the work" (157). For another point in this constellation, see the stronger moral emphasis on responsibility and self-discipline in Denis Waitley, *Empires of the Mind: Lessons to Lead Succeed in a Knowledge-Based World* (New York: William Morrow, 1995).
28. Proposition 186, on California's 1994 ballot, would have capped administrative costs at 4 cents on the dollar, a figure already achieved by Medicare. The insurance industry presently averages 29 cents per dollar for administrative costs and marketing.
29. Peters, *Crazy Organizations*, 282.
30. Peters, *Pursuit of Wow!*, 232. The context is a diverse group discussion about corporate diversity: another participant, a director of finance at Federal Express named Rangi Ranganathan, elaborates his belief that nobody wants the white male anymore (231–32).
31. Peters, *Crazy Organizations*, 73.
32. Peters, *Pursuit of Wow!*, 301.
33. Occasionally he will intone something like, "Most government-aid efforts, however well intended, have the practical effect of insulating folks from the inevitable for only a little while longer" (*Crazy Organizations*, 21).
34. Peters, *Pursuit of Wow!*, 8. For one of Peters's moments of happy Darwinism, see "To Lose is to Win," *Crazy Organizations*, 54–56.
35. Peters, *Pursuit of Wow!*, 243.
36. Peters, *Pursuit of Wow!*, 17, 81; *Crazy Organizations*, 167, 275, 285, 291.
37. Peters, *Crazy Organizations*, 71, 277; *Pursuit of Wow!*, 22.
38. Peters and Waterman, *In Search of Excellence*, 238.
39. Tom Peters, *Liberation Management: Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties* (PBS broadcast, 1993), transcription mine.