

## PUBLIC SYMPOSIUM

### *Improvisation, Creativity, Collaboration: Fueling Innovation in the 21st Century*

May 24, 2007

## SPEAKERS & PERFORMERS

**Marty Ashby**, producer of four GRAMMY® Award-winning albums and Executive Producer of MCG Jazz, on guitar, with **Satoshi Takeishi** on drums and **Noriko Ueda** on bass

**Daniel H. Pink**, author of *A Whole New Mind* and *Free Agent Nation* and a Contributing Editor at *Wired* and a Japan Society 2006 U.S.-Japan Media Fellow; via high-speed video link from Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

**Hiroshi Tasaka**, President of Thinktank SophiaBank and Professor at Tama University

## MODERATOR

**Alan Webber**, Founding Editor of *Fast Company* Magazine

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As part of the *U.S.-Japan Innovators Project*, Japan Society organized a public symposium at the Society on the theme *Improvisation, Creativity, Collaboration: Fueling Innovation in the 21st Century*.



[Photo: Aya Akeura]

Journalist and social observer **Dan Pink**, bestselling author of *A Whole New Mind* (2005), appeared by way of high-speed video link courtesy of Keio University in Tokyo.

Moderator **Alan Webber**, Founding Editor of *Fast Company* Magazine, asked Dan about the themes of his new book:

### **Why was left brain enough in the past, but in the future we all need to develop our right brain?**

“The argument begins with a metaphor, as you said, and the metaphor is our brains,” said Dan.

“Our brains are divided in half: The left hemisphere specializes in one set of tasks, tasks that are logical, linear, sequential, analytical; the right hemisphere specializes in tasks that are about processing things all at once, that are about context rather than text, about synthesis rather than analysis.”

Left-brain abilities are becoming necessary but not sufficient, and right-brain abilities are becoming “the ones that matter most,” for essentially three reasons, in Dan’s view: “Asia, automation and abundance.”

For these purposes, Dan said, Asia refers to Asia outside Japan, including China, Malaysia, the Philippines, India and specifically to the phenomenon of offshoring-- which, “in its effect on labor markets in the U.S. and in Japan, is overhyped in the short run, and underhyped in the long run.”

If just 15 percent of India’s one billion people are middle class, educated, ambitious, that’s 150 million people who can take on routine white-collar work that used to be done domestically in the U.S. and Japan, he said. That’s more than the entire population of Japan, and more than the entire workforce of the U.S. Moreover, India is “becoming the largest English-speaking country in the world,” and English, “for better or worse, is the default language of the global economy.”

Automation? Just as machines replaced our backs and muscles in the 19th and 20th centuries, “this century you have software replacing our brains”--not “the artistic, empathic, inventive side, at least not yet, but really the logical, linear, sequential, rule-based, get-the-right-answer side” of the human brain, he continued. Certain professions “are now getting slowly nibbled” by software: law, by services such as CompleteCase.com, where an uncontested divorce in the U.S. can be had for \$250, not \$2,500, and \$14 will buy software that you can use to draft your own will, so attorney review takes one hour, not 10; medical diagnosis, by products like Your Diagnosis; and accounting, by tax preparation software.

In 2006, a million American tax returns were offshored to India, but that’s tiny compared with the number of returns that Americans did on their own using TurboTax, he pointed out: in 2006, “21 million Americans did their taxes on TurboTax.”

Users of TurboTax “have accountant blood on their hands,” said Dan in jest.

And abundance? Per capita income in the Japan of 1950 was \$300, but is now a whopping \$37,000 or \$38,000, he noted. There are more autos in the U.S. than there are licensed drivers. In the U.S. there’s a whole industry, the self-storage industry, which is “devoted to extra stuff” and is, at \$21 billion, “larger than the motion picture business.” And self-storage is not just an American phenomenon: three weeks ago, Dan came across a storefront self-storage business during a walk through Roppongi.

Prosperity has soared, but satisfaction, subjective measures of well being, remain flat, he added. “There’s this thing that I call the abundance gap. We’ve gotten richer, not happier. And I think one of the big movements around advanced economies is this yearning to close that abundance gap, this kind of democratization of the search for meaning.”

*Alan asked:*

**Your current stay in Japan, what are your experiences telling you in terms of the right side of the brain and the innovation explosion?**

“I’ve been here studying manga, Japanese comics, which is this very whole-minded medium, where it combines the word and the image at precisely the right time, to create this little, poof, explosion in the brain,” Dan replied.

“But one of the most staggering things I saw, I spent three days at these things called *Comiket*, comics markets, where amateur comic creators go to Tokyo Big Sight, this huge convention center in Tokyo, and for three days, there were about eight airplane hangars’ worth of people, who had shown up to sell their amateur manga. What was more amazing is that each day, there were 35,000 or 40,000 people who showed up to buy it.”

“It’s the democratization of self expression, because the tools are so much easier, so people can create and produce great manga. There’s a yearning out there in the marketplace for something new and authentic.”

**What are your thoughts on the right-brain skills that will meet these needs?**

“If you want to make it today, you have to do some things that are hard to outsource, hard to automate, and that deliver significance along with utility,” Dan stated, and he listed six abilities “that are the ones that generally pass that test:”

- Design
- Story
- Symphony, meaning big picture, combining things into something new
- Empathy
- Play
- Meaning

A mundane example, Dan said, “but I chose it carefully because it is so mundane,” is a cellphone guard that recently came onto the Japanese market. This is a little shield that you put over your cellphone, and it gives you more privacy so your neighbor on the train can’t look over and see what you’re texting.

The sequence is this: First there’s the technological breakthrough, a plain and generic guard that solves a problem. It sells well, and these devices become commonplace. And then new models come out, and they become aesthetic devices. Buyers can personalize their phones, and include all kinds of images. Dan held up for the audience one of the newer shields: “this is called the Magical Art Block, it’s ¥920, you can have little characters on here.”

Dan added, “This search for meaning is in some ways even deeper, and in some fashion more poignant, here than in the U.S.” But “spend enough time here, all you really realize is what you don’t know.”

*Q&A with the audience followed:*

**Could you comment on the quality of arts education in the U.S.?**

Educational systems in the U.S. and Japan are both good at inculcating routine abilities, but “to me, it’s colossally wrong to put a greater emphasis on standardized testing and less of an emphasis on arts education,” Dan responded.

“In many ways we have to change the conversation, and make the case for arts education in the way that people made the case for math and science, which are still very, very important obviously, the way that people made the case for math and science in the Sputnik era.”

**There are some 1 million NGOs around the world that are filling in for what government and business aren’t doing. What are your thoughts on this?**

Some see this as a new sector, a fourth sector that’s distinct from the government, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors, replied Dan.

“You now have enormous amounts of capital flooding into alternative energy, flooding into green tech, and people are asking, well, are these people capitalists? Are these people environmentalists? And the answer is yes. They’re both. And those kinds of borders don’t necessarily matter as much. And I think the emergence of the so-called fourth sector is a fascinating development and emblematic of this new age.”

Dan concluded:

“I feel almost like an anime character in a way, because I feel like for two months my eyes have been about this big,” he gestured, “because everything is so interesting and so exhilarating.”

“There are some very important lessons here for American business,” in the area of service, in understanding what significance means, and also, finally, “I think there’s a lesson in humility,” a “sweet spot” between a perhaps excessive humility and “the almost delusional overconfidence” of American business.

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[Photo: Aya Akeura]

Jazz guitarist **Marty Ashby**, a Grammy-award-winning record producer and executive producer of MCG Jazz, a social enterprise that supports the programs of arts and education center Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild in Pittsburgh, joined **Alan Webber** on Japan Society’s stage to talk about the role of jazz in nurturing creativity.

Projected on the screen behind them was an emblematic black-and-white photo from 1968, showing Marty at age eight with his guitar, his two brothers, and their mom and dad, playing a gig with the “family band.”

“I grew up on the bandstand,” said Marty. “It was always about play. I didn’t know that you weren’t supposed to always be so happy. As a kid, I never had a summer job. It was always playing with the family band, for openings at malls, and bar mitzvahs, and weddings, and whatever. The music piece—the joy of music—is something that I’ve really just carried with me all my life.”

*Alan asked:*

**What does jazz do when you bring it into the other side of your career, your role as a producer, making budgets and working in boardrooms?**

“It’s all the same, to me,” Marty said. Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild “works with city high school students and welfare moms and ex-steelworkers in jobs training in Pittsburgh, and the jazz music is really the inspirational fuel.” Grant applications need to be filled out every year, grant forms with a very simple structure, “and you can figure out a way to improvise through it”—he played a few notes; “you can actually make them swing.”

“Like two chords, right? But there’s lots of ways to play those.” He played a few more notes. “At the end of the day, if you can keep that sense of clarity, we can get through any business problem there is.”

**Why do you think jazz is such an international language?**

Noriko and Satoshi, the bassist and drummer who were about to play with Marty before the Japan Society audience, had never met each other before the day of the symposium, and neither had ever played with Marty. The three had not even discussed what tunes to play. Yet it all works, and improvisation plays a big role in this, Marty suggested.

“It’s become very clear to me that jazz is the embodiment of the golden rule. Right? Because in the golden rule, you want to treat people the way you want to be treated. It’s

very simple,” Marty said. “It’s a golden rule on the bandstand that we’ll kind of give each other back what we want them to give to us.”

“It’s such a complete sense of democracy. . . . We all have our individual voices, and you’ll see them all shine, individually, yet as an ensemble, we’re so much stronger together.”

**There’s a sense, you’ve said, that in jazz, leadership is a movable attribute.**

That’s right, Marty responded. “The mindset and the philosophy and the practice of a jazz ensemble... on any given night, you can feel that at a certain moment, it’s the third trombone that’s leading the whole band.”

Drummer **Satoshi Takeishi**, a native of Mito, Japan now based in Brooklyn, and bassist **Noriko Ueda**, born in Hyogo, Japan and also now living in Brooklyn, took their places alongside Marty, and a mini-concert began.

A listener who himself plays jazz as an avocation writes:

Small-group jazz can be very formulaic, especially when the players don’t know each other well. They agree on a tune, and a key, and the solo order. They start with the melody (a k a the head); then one player improvises while the others play background figures; they play the melody again.

Here, the guitarist departs from the usual right away, declaring the first tune, “Softly as in the Morning Sunrise,” by playing it. It’s a familiar melody. Rather than strict solo/ background, the relationships are fluid. The guitarist improvises solo lines for a couple of choruses, but then plays shorter, more rhythmic figures to invite the drummer to play off. Again, contrary to expectations: you expect the soloist to play the entire 32-bar melody form, and then perhaps change mode. Instead, the guitar may do a short improvised melody, only to back off and trade with the drummer at an unexpected spot in the middle of the chorus. They’re working without a net here. The result is very creative, very enjoyable to hear. And you can tell that the musicians are having a blast.

On a nod from the guitarist, the bassist leads off with the second tune, “Some Day My Prince Will Come;” the melody is a bit more fragmented, and at one point the drummer puts down the sticks and plays with bare hands.

*Alan asked Marty:*

**What’s next for Japan Society and the Innovators Project in terms of jazz?**

MCG is working with fellow Innovators participant **Rosanne Haggerty**, founder and President of Common Ground, on communications and fundraising for a variety of nonprofits dedicated to support for people who are homeless, Marty noted.

And with Japan Society and the Innovators Project, MCG is working on a new project as part of MCG's *Jazz is Life*.

Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Monterey Jazz Festival, many other venues across the U.S., "they're kind of like these flares going up in the air for jazz; but there's no constellation, right? So what we're working on is creating that constellation," explained Marty. "It's kind of a NASCAR for jazz, if you will--how NASCAR brings the individual tracks together."

Under the umbrella of *Jazz is Life*, MCG Jazz and Japan Society are developing a concert-symposia series to be held at venues across the country, from the Monterey festival, to the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, to MCG in Pittsburgh, and again in New York.

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[Photo: Ken Levinson]

**Hiroshi Tasaka**, President of Thinktank SophiaBank and a professor at the Graduate School of Tama University in Tokyo, transported the Japan Society audience from the jubilation of swing to the koans of Zen.

"Today I'm going to talk about the importance of the joy factor in the post-knowledge society," Hiroshi said.

His first question:

### **What is joy for the mature mind?**

For adults, Hiroshi said, joy is found, paradoxically, in the unexpected, the contradictory, and the never-to-be-repeated--what he called "once-ness."

Joy in the unexpected can be expressed in an awareness of mysterious coincidence, the phenomenon that Carl Jung called synchronicity, he continued. Thus we can interpret a constellation of stars, each light years from the other and in scientific fact unrelated, as depicting a coherent story, the legend of Orion. The Japanese word *enishi* is apt here: it means, "our encounter has deep meaning."

Joy in contradiction is expressed in the philosophical concept of *bosatsu*, Hiroshi said. This word means that "when we encounter a person who gives us painful experiences, that person is in fact a Buddha helping us to grow as a person."

“When did you grow as a person?” he asked. “When you were happy, when lucky things happened? Or at times of sorrow, defeat, very painful experiences?”

Joy in “once-ness,” in something that is never to be repeated, means that life is not a game, precisely because it cannot be repeated. In this perspective, life is an art, an improvisation. “It disappears after a short moment,” like jazz, Hiroshi said. In Japan there’s a phrase, *ichigo-ichie*, which means “behave as if there is only one chance to meet.” Likewise, a Zen Buddhist maxim says, “Existence is only now, lasting forever. Live now. Live now to the fullest.”

**Why is the joy factor important now?** asked Hiroshi.

There are paradigm changes happening right now in societies all over the world, he said. We’re moving away from a knowledge society and towards a post-knowledge society, away from the belief that experts create value and towards the idea that value is created by the wisdom of many, the wisdom of crowds.

With Web 2.0 and the Internet revolution, it’s become easy to gain knowledge, and therefore knowledge is declining in value, reasoned Hiroshi. What’s becoming more important is wisdom; and in his view, the only way to obtain wisdom is through experience. Gaining wisdom is not the same process as gaining knowledge by reading a book--it’s totally different.

In Japanese philosophy, there’s a term, *kantoku*, which means that we can obtain wisdom only when our minds are moved, he explained. A Zen maxim holds that enjoying is the shortest way to wisdom. Linus Torvalds is an example: when asked why he started the Linux open-source software community, he answered, “Because I just like it.” For Torvalds, the joy of a community with a shared purpose is what matters.

“The emergence of knowledge becomes more important than the management of knowledge,” the management of intellectual property, said Hiroshi. “Why? Because complexity science tells us the Internet revolution changes corporations, markets, and societies into complex systems... Then, what will happen? Self organization and the emergence of knowledge and wisdom.”

How do we enhance the emergence of knowledge and wisdom? Hiroshi asked. What’s needed is a coherence, or resonance, within the human community; and this in turn is created by sympathy, he said--not sympathy in the sense of pity, but in the sense of a “joy factor” in human interactions, a deep enjoyment that forgets the ego, forgets the boundary between the self and others.

**How can we increase joy?**

“It increases naturally” with the Web 2.0 revolution, Hiroshi declared, because Web 2.0 is part of the voluntary economy. The voluntary economy, which in his view includes things like housework, childcare, nursing, “mutual-aid,” is motivated not by money but

by “satisfaction of the mind”--by “the joy factor.” Thus the Web 2.0 revolution has brought us open-source software, grassroots book critics on Amazon.com, grassroots movies on YouTube.

However--and again paradoxically--the monetary economy and the voluntary economies are not really opposite principles, Hiroshi declared. They’re merging in two ways: CSR, or corporate social responsibility, which shifts the monetary economy towards a voluntary economy, and SE, or social entrepreneurship, in which the voluntary economy shifts towards the monetary.

This fusion is not really new for Japan, Hiroshi indicated, and he quoted Panasonic founder Kounosuke Matsushita: “‘Companies contribute to society through their main businesses,’ not by donation. Donation is of course a very good thing. But ‘profit is proof of how much companies contribute to society. And the fact that a company made large profits means that people are asking the company to contribute to society more and more.’”

### **How can we foster a new economic principle?**

The visible rewards of working, “payment and income, position and title,” are one side of the coin, but the other side is the invisible rewards in the voluntary economy, “the meaning of work, ability as a professional, growth as a person, and encounters with people.”

These are things that are “never to be lost until the end of life,” emphasized Hiroshi.

Work in Japanese is *hata raku*, which literally means “for your neighbor’s happiness”; and “the flowering of one’s potential itself is a joy.”

What is growth? asked Hiroshi. “I would like to say, to become able to understand other people’s minds, and to become able to cope with other people’s minds.”

### **And finally, how can we increase invisible rewards?**

In answer, Hiroshi told the fable of two stonecutters:

A traveler happened upon a town. In the town, a new church was being built, and two stonecutters were working at the site. The traveler, who was interested in their work, asked one stonecutter, “What are you doing?”

To this question, the stonecutter, with an unpleasant expression on his face, answered bluntly, “I am killing myself with this damnable stone.”

Then the traveler asked the other stonecutter the same question. The other stonecutter answered with a bright expression on his face in a lively voice,

“Well, now, I am building a wonderful church that will be a place where many people will find peace.”

“What does the fable tell us?” Hiroshi asked. “The work we do does not determine the value of our work. The ideal we work towards determines the value of our work.”

“In Japan, word of wisdom is *kotodama*, which means ‘words with spirit and soul.’ The role of leader is to talk *kotodama*, I believe. Because *kotodama* can change the world.”

Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech is an example, Hiroshi concluded: “He did change the world by *kotodama*. Many, many people were encouraged by his *kotodama*. So, this is my last message: We can change the world by *kotodama*.”

Written by Katherine Hyde