Metamorphoses in entrepreneurship studies: towards an affirmative politics of entrepreneuring

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> I name you three metamorphoses of the spirit: how the spirit shall become a camel, and the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child. (Nietzsche [1886] 1969, p. 54)

NIETZSCHE'S THREE METAMORPHOSES

Can a parable as an aesthetic genre help us to write an analysis, critique and fabulation of a politics of entrepreneurship studies? This is what we try in this reflection. We draw upon Nietzsche's aesthetic style of philoso- phizing (as he used to write in poems, fables, aphorisms, metaphors and less usual textual forms) to say something about the concepts, stances and forms of policy-making that might 'metamorphose' or trans-form the field of entrepreneurship in new versions, shapes and images.[38] In the story of Zarathustra and the three metamorphoses, Nietzsche starts rather at the end, as human and educational development is not seen so much as a matter of a *tabula rasa* or a fresh beginning but rather as a condi- tion of being loaded by (scientific and worldly) tradition, as an exercise in getting familiar with (the history of) ways of thinking. He creates the image of the camel or of all those who move around with heavy loads of conventions and values that might help them to take part or function in a certain context but that also retain them in thinking and doing anew. The metamorphosis from camel to lion creates the possibility of questioning the many things one has dressed oneself with and to problematize the many assumptions one is working from. The third metamorphosis from lion to child brings along the possibility of new affirmations and the active affirma- tion of power as reactive values are transformed (Spinks, 2003, p. 121). In this transformation, the conceptual persona of the child forms a potential space of (ongoing) metamorphosis.

Using Nietzsche's parable, we might reflect upon the images the field of entrepreneurship studies has produced of itself and of its own object of study. With this parable and its images of culture, critique and creation, we want also to provide a different series of images of the movements of the field of entrepreneurship studies than the usual picture of progression and increasing maturity the field likes to produce of itself (Steyaert, 2005). By using these images, we want to fabulate an image of an entrepreneurship (studies) to come, that might be associated with the metamorphosis of entrepreneurship becoming child and the becoming-child of entrepreneurship studies. Through fabulation, we aim to create a minor or foreign language in the language of entrepreneurship (Lohmann and Steyaert, 2006). Furthermore, we would believe that these images of thought not only indicate certain meanings of entrepreneurship and its study but can also be connected to and used to alter the current frameworks and proposals for policy-making in which entrepreneurship is implied: we will indeed move from the optimistic and hegemonic allure given to entrepreneurship as it is inscribed in all kind of economic growth programmes and political agendas along a more critical and reserved consideration of the concept of entrepreneurship to an affirmative politics of entrepreneuring.

To fabulate such an affirmative politics with Nietzsche's parable of the three metamorphoses is perhaps not even that 'artificial'. This parable immediately follows the prologue of the book *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spoke Zarathustra) ([1886] 1964), consisting for the most part of a series of speeches held by the fictional character Zarathustra. Nietzsche considered *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* a privileged book, which can be thought of as a true middle book as it seems to end and overcome a series of books written in an excessive style (Hollingdale, 1969) and as it precedes his widely acknowledged twin masterpieces *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Loeb, 2005), which were seen by Nietzsche as a commentary on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Tanner, 1994). While the latter books were for Nietzsche 'No-saying' books, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* formed for Nietzsche 'a Yes-saying, constructive book focused on the future' (Loeb, 2005, p. 70). The parable of the three metamorphoses can thus guide us in questioning the optimistic politics as well as in questioning this questioning by moving towards a different, affirmative politics of entrepreneurship. Within the space of this chapter, we will not (be able to) provide a systematic analysis of entrepreneurship studies along these three metamorphoses, but rather sketch out the broader movements around which different images of a politics of entrepreneurship (studies) can be thought and practised.

THE CAMEL: THE HEAVY WEIGHT OF TRADITION

There are many heavy things for the spirit, for the strong, weight-bearing spirit in which dwell respect and awe, its strength longs for the heavy, for the heaviest. What is heavy? Thus asks the weight-bearing spirit, thus it kneels down like the camel and wants to be well laden. (Nietzsche [1886] 1969, p. 54)

It is probably not so difficult to argue that positivism has become the dominant scientific spirit of entrepreneurship studies. Positivism in the double sense of the word: both as a scientific tradition of enacting research in neo-positivistic formats and as a spirit of optimism that propagates entrepreneurship and the strong figure of the entrepreneur as playing a central role in the rescue and success of economies, organizations and societies. Taken together, the figure of the entrepreneur, neo-positivism and the policy-formula of success form together a holy trinity that obviously breathes out strength and self-confidence. However, this strong coalition might also be in danger of crushing under the heavy burden and weight that has been loaded onto entrepreneurship studies by following scientific traditions that it initially had set out to change or to stay away from.

The Strong Figure of the Entrepreneur and the Entrepreneurial Self

The figure of the entrepreneur has traditionally formed the focus of research in entrepreneurship. Since Schumpeter (1934) has pointed at the entrepreneur as the central economic actor, this actor has usually been painted as a great individual – usually a 'great man' – with exceptional qualities. The image of the entrepreneur as the strong autonomous individual endowed with certain qualities has been reproduced over and over again. *He* is constructed as a heroic figure who holds the promise (and *bears the load*) of revitalizing society/economy/organizations and leading us into the promised land of economic growth and prosperity.

Increasingly, entrepreneurial qualities are not only demanded from 'proper entrepreneurs' but also from organizational members (and non-members) who are expected to behave *as if* they were entrepreneurs or *as if* they would be owners of the company they work for (see Peters and Waterman, 1982; Kanter, 1990). The traditional 'employee', who has been constructed in various ways over the last century (see Rose, 1990; Jacques, 1996) seems to be on the way to being re-imagined as an entrepreneur of a special kind: as a strange hybrid, a mixture between 'employee' and 'entre-preneur' – an 'entreployee', as this monstrosity has been called by the sociologists Voss and Pongratz (2003). Entrepreneurs 'who form an extremely important group of people in the workforce' (Kets de Vries, 1996, p. 856) are seen as 'major creators of employment and catalysts of change' (ibid.).

Personality traits like the need for achievement (Johnson, 1990), internal locus of control (Duchesneau and Gartner, 1990), self-reliance and extroversion (Lee and Tsang, 2001) are attributed to this 'extremely important group of people' (Kets de Vries, 1996, p. 856). The development of entrepreneurial skills is prescribed as a panacea that seemingly cures anything. This mode of thinking has thus infiltrated managerial practice, consulting and popular press: 'Entrepreneurial organizations need employees who regularly demonstrate entrepreneurial characteristics' (Hadzima and Pilla, 2006, p. 1) it is frequently argued in this context. And consequently the prescription is that 'management of entrepreneurial companies must work diligently to recognize, identify and attract this type of employee' (ibid.).

The spreading emphasis on the entrepreneur as a strong figure goes hand in hand with a celebration of individualism (Steyaert, 2007a). Entrepreneurship has spread as a societal norm that governs how every individual needs to deal with all kinds of problems from child care in the privatized kindergarten to one's own investment in pension-systems. With the emergence of the discourse of Enterprise (du Gay, 1996; 2004), a field of forces has been constituted and a new social subject has been invented, namely that of the entrepreneurial self. Every individual is called to act upon one's self and others in a specific, calculative and maximizing way. The 'Ich-AG' or the Me-PLC (public limited company) emerges as a subjectifying normative model (Bröckling, 2007).

Neo-positivistic Research

The 'search for the entrepreneur' forms the code to break that will reveal to scholars the secret of economic success. This is the dominant principle that guides a plethora of neo-positivistic studies that are all conducted with the aim of *uncovering* the secret of 'successful' entrepreneurship. The greatest part of these studies were (and still are) guided by the assumption that this secret is hidden and that the truth about entrepreneurship can be found and discovered with the help of the appropriate scientific methods. This truth finally can and will be represented in the neutral and objective language of science. Studies that are conducted in this spirit not only celebrate the (autonomous) individual but also create those expectations and demands that return to the individual in the form of a 'thou shalt': 'It is you, the strong individual who is responsible for getting on!' (Sørensen, 2008).

Initially, entrepreneurship studies were torn between a stance of being distinct and different from other fields and the urge to become a proper scientific discipline. Very quickly, however, entrepreneurship scholars leaned towards the idea of streamlining their scientific discipline (see Steyaert,

2005). The call for coherence in definition and for predictive models of research became a well-rehearsed refrain in numerous review articles of entrepreneurship studies. Even if entrepreneurship liked to see itself as rooted in many disciplines (Landström, 1999), this multidisciplinarity did not lead to a scientific and methodological variation and differentiation. On the contrary, Grant and Perren (2002) observed a dominance of the functionalist paradigm that pervaded the elite discourse of research in leading journals. Thus, a diversity of disciplinary foundations does not necessarily result in a diversity of meta-theoretical assumptions; on the contrary, such a reliance on a dominant paradigm might form a barrier to other perspectives.

Optimistic Policy-making

The belief in the existence of the strong entrepreneur and in the scientific methods that allow uncovering the secrets of their success, prepares the ground for an optimistic policy trajectory that faithfully confirms the role of the entrepreneur in economic success. Policy studies of entrepreneurship form an important pillar of the discipline as they contribute both to the legitimacy and to the funding of its research. Policy-makers as well as research oriented at a policy audience promote entrepreneurship and the figure of the entrepreneur as the shortest road to success. Entrepreneurship and start-ups are again and again suggested as the 'engine' for economic growth, competitiveness and employment (Audretsch, Keilbach and Lehmann, 2006; Miles, Miles and Snow, 2005). Policy research is the area that systematically seeks to understand how governments on all levels can create enabling conditions for entrepreneurial initiatives. Research, at least if it is able to address the relevant issues and if it is conducted in an adequate – read in a neo-positivistic – fashion, can contribute positively and even make 'all the difference in the world' for policy-making (Davidsson, 2002). Policy and research thus form a strong and successful partnership. Entrepreneurship research as it seems to be eager to prioritize high-growth entrepreneurship and so-called gazelles, thus clearly supports and reinforces a growth-paradigm but takes little notice of the political, environmental and gender critiques of the growth-concept. On the contrary, the application of this entrepreneurial mantra has by now become pervasive and has superseded the business and/or economic arena. Entrepreneurship is embraced as it holds the promise of resolving problems, whether these are problems of educational, governmental, cultural, environmental, urban, or social character (Steyaert and Katz, 2004). Whether we speak of social entrepreneurship (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006), urban entrepreneurship (Harvey, 1989) or entrepreneurship in education

(Clark, 1998), entrepreneurship figures as the favourite way to tackle the problems at hand.

THE LION: THE 'NO' OF CRITIQUE

> But in the loneliest desert the second metamorphosis occurs: the spirit here becomes a lion; it wants to capture freedom and be lord in its own desert. It seeks here its ultimate lord: it will be an enemy to him and to its ultimate God, it will struggle for victory with the great dragon. (Nietzsche [1886] 1969, pp. 54–5)

A second metamorphosis brings along the camel-becoming-lion. The current tendency to question and criticize more and more the central foundations of the holy trinity upon which entrepreneurship studies is based reveals the precarious status upon which its truth-claims are based. The statue might eventually fall from its self-erected pillar. In this metamorphosis, a whole different group of researchers emerges on the horizon, a group that has not been socialized with the methodological individualism and the Robinson Crusoe economics that has traditionally reigned in the disciplines of economics and (individualistic) psychology that dominated the scientific spirit in entrepreneurship (Berger, 1991). With the suddenness and intensity of a metamorphosis, the concept of entrepreneurship loses much of its glory. It finds itself a bit lonely and dazed in the 'wilderness' of sociology, ideology critique, discourse theory, post-structuralism and so on, where a cool if not cold wind of critique blows and pulls the concept in various directions. Instead of being celebrated as the epitome of the autonomous individual, the entrepreneur becomes a target of critique. The 'ideology of the entrepreneur' (Armstrong, 2001) and entrepreneurship as ideology now appear as the masks that hide the structural conditions that are responsible for the exploitation, domination and effective constraining of the individual. The focus on the entrepreneur effectively limits and restricts our understanding of the forces that shape our social realities and thus contributes to the perpetuation and legitimization of particular versions of reality (see Garrick and Usher, 2000; Ogbor, 2000; Armstrong, 2005).

A big struggle is set up with the 'great dragon' that appears in many forms, preferably formulated as an '-ism': essentialism, individualism, empiricism, managerialism, neo-liberalism, and so on. All of them have to be unmasked (if the field wants to emancipate and find its own freedom). Here we find the struggle of a critical theory that like a 'David' intimidates and surprises the 'Goliath' of the mainstream. Drawing on Nietzsche's parable, it becomes clear that a critical studies of entrepreneurship are needed to 'destroy' the *false promises*, the ideological distortions and the

monolithic studies that dominate the field. It is, however, also a struggle *against* 'the great dragon' that drives the critical efforts, the big 'NO' of critique that might in itself reproduce equally rather absolute truths and leave little space for new ideas, alternative conceptions or inventions of the possible. Some of these critical scholars indeed 'grow' and define their own identity in opposition against the 'great dragon' (Clegg et al., 2006). We will, as way of examples, discuss three kinds of 'against' with regard to the central object of entrepreneurship studies (against essentialism), its approach of research (against representationalism) and its major political effects (against managerial governmentality).

Against Essentialism

Entrepreneurship research is criticized for founding its research on several, essentialist notions: entrepreneurial personality, entrepreneur, entrepreneurship, opportunity. For instance, the 'entrepreneurial personality' that psychologists seek to *discover* has been 'deconstructed' as a new hegemonic figure that is actually created by a specific discourse. It emerges in the neo-liberal regime of truth, in which we all have to be 'enterprising selves' (Rose, 1990; Bröckling, 2007). In contemporary discourse of enterprise, a positive cultural value is ascribed to the 'entrepreneur'. The genealogy of value of the entrepreneur fundamentally questions the essentialism of value. It shows that the ascription of value to the figure of the 'entrepreneur' is a historical achievement, which is only acceptable and accepted within a specific regime of truth (Jones and Spicer, 2005a). A critical perspective thus points out that this essentialism goes hand in hand with a form of possessive individualism where all kind of features are seen to stick to and are explained by its connection to an individual or any other entity. Others have pointed to the essentialism implied in entrepreneurship studies that not only see individuals (entrepreneurs) but also '(emerging) organizations' as pre-existing entities (Steyaert, 2007b). For example, Rehn and Taalas (2004) have argued that the understanding of entrepreneurship as creation of 'organizations' or even the concept of 'emerging organizations' (Gartner, 1988) is insufficient to deal with the dynamic processes in the social world, and in particular with phenomena of organizing: 'a network of friends helping each other out is no organization, not even an emerging one, but a case of organizing, fluid and tentative' (Rehn and Taalas, 2004, p. 146). By questioning the assumption that 'the entrepreneur' or 'the organization' are given entities with specific characteristics, a critical perspective denaturalizes and demystifies these entities and draws attention to the historically specific conditions that make them possible in the first place. A critical perspective thus insists that such (quasi) entities need to be

explained as a historical product that has been created, and thus remains open for re-creation.

Against Representationalism and the 'Ideology of Representation'

Representationalism, which is the assumption that (social) science is essentially an attempt to represent truthfully a pre-existing 'world out there', has informed studies in entrepreneurship. In this understanding, the methods employed in the search for some entity out there, are essentially seen as neutral attempts to 'capture' this reality. The 'ideology of representation', which 'consists in an ideological expansion of this basic idea into a prescriptive form which links truth to representation' (Chia, 1996, p. 37) effectively leads to the image of the researcher/scientist as a neutral expert, who simply reports what is out there. It allows the scientist to understand his or her activity as an attempt to get closer and closer to reality.

Representationalism can be linked to a strong form of empiricism where it is assumed that the features of entrepreneurial success can be *identified* once the appropriate methods have been developed and applied correctly. Even though strong claims are frequently made on the basis of these assumptions (for example, Stadler, 2007), the attempt to capture and nail down these features is frequently misguided. For instance, Armstrong (2001, p. 535) has argued against the empiricism of psychometrics, because 'mysterious forces are not pinned down by such methods and it is a misplaced literalism – and possibly a mild form of sacrilege – which seduces the researcher into a futile search of some empirical manifestation of the underlying unity behind the various manifestations of business activity'. This empiricist logic of psychometrics has informed much of the earlier studies of entrepreneurship (see, for example, Brockhaus, 1980) and continues to be strongly represented in the methodological repertoire of entrepreneurship research.

A similar line of reasoning can be formulated towards and against the strong belief in the empirical and the ideological effects that are associated with this orientation. Effectively, the ideology of representationalism hides the participation of science in the process of 'world-making'; it effectively denies our role and responsibility in the enactment of the social world, that is our role in 'ontological politics' (Law and Urry, 2004).

Against Managerial (Neo-liberal) Governmentality

Rather than the new freedom, promised by the prophets of the 'entrepreneurial revolution' who dream of the 'free agent nation' (Peters, 1999), studies of 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1991c) have analysed the discourse

of enterprise as a new form of governmental rationality, which creates new objects and territories to be governed and constitutes new subjectivities. The discourse of enterprise, which has taken on a new hegemony in the neo-liberal context, has produced new identities (Miller and Rose, 1995; Bröckling 2007)). In comparison to the critique of entrepreneurial ideology, these studies are not concerned with 'entrepreneurship as an ideological distortion' (Armstrong, 2001, p. 547) or with the falsity of representations and claims of the discourse of enterprise. Rather, these studies are concerned with the politics of truth itself and with the effects of the 'truth' that is constituted by the discourse of enterprise.

For researchers who work in the governmentality tradition, the way people are presently 'made up' (Hacking, 1986) as entrepreneurs or enterprising selves is a specific construction that emerges in a specific historical context. The discourse of enterprise establishes a specific regime of truth that creates new identities and determines both the way human beings are seen and how they see themselves (for example, Rose, 1990; 1998; du Gay, 1996; 2004). In particular, these studies have argued that the discourse of enterprise is not a simple description of the world out there, but rather that the discourse effectively works to reconstitute individuals as 'entrepreneurial selves', that as 'autonomous', rationally calculating selves, who internalize the 'ethics of enterprise – competitiveness, strength, vigour, boldness, outwardness, and the urge to succeed' (Rose, 1998, p. 157), think of their lives as 'projects' to be to be optimized. These critical studies have radically questioned the liberating effects and have argued that individuals are effectively constrained and limited by this discourse. 'At the very moment when they aspire freedom and try to realize autonomy, people are bound not only to expert knowledge but to the project of their own identities' (du Gay, 1996, p. 64). Furthermore, these critical studies of the discourse of enterprise have questioned *the specific concept* of enterprise that informs attempts to re-form and restructure public organizations through 'administratively imposed enterprise' (du Gay, 2004, p. 45).

Towards Critical Studies and Politics of Entrepreneurship

Where in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars from all kinds of disciplines invaded the emerging field of entrepreneurship and imported their frameworks to give the concept of entrepreneurship a quasi-multidisciplinary treatment, more recently a new generation of scholars started to relate to the concept of entrepreneurship in a more critical way (Armstrong, 2005; Jones and Spicer, 2005a; Ogbor, 2000, and so on). While many of these scholars have rehearsed critical thinking within

the so-called Critical Management Studies and formulated several critiques with regard to and 'against' management (Parker, 2002c), their emerging orientation and focus upon entrepreneurship brings a much needed corrective that can hardly be underestimated in how it can question current research conceptions and can begin to transform the field of entrepreneurship studies. First of all, critique can counter the often over-optimistic and one-sided attributions to the positive dimension of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is itself an ambiguous if not dangerous phenomenon that can bring along both positive and/or problematic consequences (Czarniawska-Joerges and Wolff, 1991; Dey and Steyaert, 2006) and thus requires a political and ethical inquiry of its consequences (Dey, 2007). Second, critique is not a goal by itself, actually:

[a] critical theory of the entrepreneur would therefore seek to call into question the regimes of domination that are constructed and perpetuated associated with the entrepreneur. The aim of this questioning would be to unsettle these forms of domination in order to create space for configuring more emancipatory social relationships. (Jones and Spicer, 2006)

Whether a critical perspective of entrepreneurship can counterbalance and/or unsettle the field, will depend on whether this critique will become visible. So far, this critique has hardly been noticed in the mainstream of entrepreneurship. As such, to be ignored forms a likely scenario, as we can learn from experiences of the critical perspective in management studies (Grey, 2007). It should thus not come as a surprise that 'the' mainstream (a simplification) and 'the' critical (another simplification) perspective will be talking alongside each other for quite some time (Hjorth, Jones and Gartner, 2008). It will thus be important that this growing critique does not fade away or is just a fashionable activity of scholars passing by on their way to nail another publication but that it can gain in intensity, explore various ways to relate to the mainstream and not in the least experiment with bringing forward alternative ways of thinking about entrepreneurship. Relating to Nietzsche's parable, this would imply a move towards a third metamorphosis.

THE CHILD: THE SACRED 'YES' OF BECOMING

But tell me, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion cannot? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes. Yes, a sacred Yes is needed, my brothers, for the game of creation: the spirit now wills its own will, the spirit sundered from the world now wins its own world. (Nietzsche [1886] 1969, p. 55)

While a critical approach to entrepreneurship is forming its front of opposition, the parable of Zarathustra does not end there, but suggests there is an opening that goes beyond the no-saying mode and that seems to be able to become active and creative in a different spirit; a spirit that is neither accepting nor judging but rather inventive. The question is how this third metamorphosis can be folded in a different image of entrepreneurship and another kind of political 'destination'. The questions are, however, manifold: how can we initiate a conceptual movement that allows us to incorporate 'a new beginning, a game, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes' that Nietzsche attributed to the child and that we might attribute to entrepreneurship (studies)? How can we escape the spirit of resentment and the *Geist der Schwere* (spirit of gravity) that is still very present in much of critical studies (of entrepreneurship) and become instead productive, active and creative by incorporating the spirit of the Nietzschean child into studies of entrepreneurship? How can we use, for instance, 'the tactical polyvalence of discourse [of Enterprise]' (Foucault, 1990a, p. 100) and orient us towards the fundamental ambiguity in the discourse of Enterprise, which might bring along new versions of what entrepreneurship can do in society?

These questions – and questions form an integral part of an affirmative stance – point at the kind of radical tasks that lie ahead of entrepreneurship studies when we take Nietzsche's third metamorphosis to heart and start to reflect on the crucial parameters that might shape this metamorphosis. This metamorphosis would require that we shift attention and perceive of entrepreneurship as a *creative process* of folding and refolding material (without falling into the trap of a metaphysics of the creative individual). This implies that we study entrepreneurship as an ongoing process, that 'follow(s) the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch(es) out for openings' (Foucault, 1984a, p. 105). Entrepreneurship is then seen as a process that trans-forms (cultural) materials/practices and (re)connects, disassembles and reassembles them. The task is to think entrepreneurship as an ongoing becoming, shifting from a *being* to a becoming ontology. The focus is not on the issue of becoming an entrepreneur but on entrepreneurial *becoming*. Entrepreneurial becoming is constituted by connected, heterogeneous practices, a form of social creativity that changes our daily practices and our ways and styles of living. This allows us to study entrepreneurship as an ethico-aesthetic practice (Weiskopf, 2007) that affirms a *historically* given without, however, accepting it as invariable and experimentally searches for possibilities of transgressing these historically specific limits. By trying to understand entrepreneurship as a critical engagement in the world, as a process of world-making, entrepreneurship emerges as 'a practical critique that takes the form of possible crossing over

[franchisement]' (Foucault, 1997c, p. 315). This implies that we understand and re-create (re-form) our own studies in entrepreneurship as (participation in) creative processes of world-making, as acts of creation rather than as attempts of discovering the truth about entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneuring and (Entrepreneurial) Becoming

Entrepreneurship has recently been re-connected to the realm of creating, as it has been called a science of the imagination (Gartner, 2007). The focus is no longer on the *discovery* of opportunities but on the creative process, which can be delineated through the verb 'entrepreneuring' (Steyaert, 2007b). The ontology of becoming and movement (as introduced in the Movements series, see Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003a; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006) requires that entrepreneurship studies re-connects to a long tradition of theorizing of process-philosophy (Steyaert, 1997), which has not in the least been instigated by Nietzsche, who conceived both the world and the self as becoming, not related to being or any presence of stability: 'Becoming must be explained without recourse to final intentions. Becoming does not aim at a final state, does not flow into being' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 708). This view has strongly influenced Foucault and Deleuze. For Foucault, the subject is 'not a substance. It is a form, and this form is not primarily or always identical to itself' (Foucault, 1994, p. 290). It thus can not be 'discovered', rather, it has to be created. The technologies that promise to 'discover' the self, are actually better understood as technologies of power that create or invent objects that can be governed. Since there is no essential self, Foucault insists that we should 'refuse who we are' (Foucault, 1983, p. 216) rather than continue the futile search for the true self lying hidden beneath the surface. However, for Foucault, this critical 'refusal' is also to be supplemented by a work of transformation and creation, by a work of art, which is an ongoing and unfinished work (*travail*) rather than a finished product (*oeuvre*).

Foucault's project, which he calls a 'critical ontology of ourselves', attempts both to reflect on the limits that are imposed on subjects and that define 'who we are' and it is at the same time an attempt to transgress these limitations:

The critical ontology of ourselves must be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at the one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them [*de leur franchissement possible*]. (Foucault, 1997c, p. 319)

The critique of technologies and practices that 'fix' and 'bind' us is at the same time an opening to a new becoming.

Entrepreneurial becoming could be characterized as a specific attitude towards process and movement, which Foucault finds exemplified by the figure of Charles Baudelaire (rather than in Kant). Modernity is – as is entrepreneurship – often characterized 'in terms of the consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, a vertigo in the face of the passing moment' (ibid., p. 310). For Baudelaire, 'being modern does not lie in recognizing and accepting this perpetual movement; on the contrary, it lies in adopting a certain attitude with respect to this movement; and this deliberate, difficult attitude consists in recapturing something eternal that is not beyond the present instant, not behind it, but within it' (ibid.).

The attitude of modernity, in the sense of Baudelaire, is associated with a 'heroization' of the present. This heroization of the present is, of course ironic. It 'does not treat the passing moment as sacred in order to maintain or perpetuate it' (ibid.). Rather, it relates to a present – to an actuality – that it simultaneously accepts and seeks to change and transform. Baudelaire brings the artist Constantin Guys as an example for this attitude of modernity:

what makes him a modern painter par excellence in Baudelaire's eyes is that, *just when the whole world is falling asleep, he begins to work, and he transfigures the world. His transfiguration entails not an annulling of reality but a difficult interplay between truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom . . . Baudelairian modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it.* (Ibid., p. 311, emphasis added)

Furthermore, the concept of 'becoming' is particularly prominent in the work of Deleuze and of Deleuze and Guattari (2000a). For Deleuze, the world is a continuous becoming, never a being. Being in this view, can only be an abstraction. The world is in a continuous flux and transformation. Becoming in this sense has no beginning and no end. It is always in the middle. Thinking in terms of becoming reminds us that anything that is solid is only so because of a slowing down. In becoming there is no object and no subject. There is no one who can be said to be the sole author of becoming. Rather, creating (and its 'authorship') can be understood as a form of connectivity. That is, creativity is rather an outcome of a series of interconnected events and undertakings.

In this sense, entrepreneurship could be understood as the ability to make connections between heterogeneous materials (Örge, 2007). Entrepreneurship as connective creativity is – in this sense – not

transcendental but immanent. It is produced within the series of connections rather than influencing the connections (Styhre and Sundgren, 2005, pp. 41–64). Entrepreneurship is an activity that is embedded in a specific social (historical, economic) context. This means that entrepreneurship is not to be located beyond or outside of this context. However, it is also not fully determined by this context. Rather, it is a specific response to the context-specific limitations; it is a specific way of dealing with, and of *problematizing* and *transforming* them. Entrepreneurship can be translated as an activity that takes advantage of the *Zwischenraum*, that is of the in-between space (*entre* = between; *prendre* = to take in French). This means that entrepreneurship is an activity that searches and actively creates the distance to what is seen as normal and habitual; it enters and actively creates the between-space as an intensive space and can thus reveal the becomingness of the world. It is further a creative activity in the sense that it connects and reconnects – assembles, dis-assembles and re-assembles – materials, ideas, and so on in a new way. Given rules, plans, norms, models and so on are *transformed* in the process of 'application'. Application, however, has to be understood in a new way. It is not a technical process or the execution of a programme that is fully determined. Rather, 'it would be a concept of application which generates something unpredictable in a totally different context, in contexts which no one can master in advance' (Derrida, 2000, p. 28). *Application* may be rethought as the *space between* rules, regulations, and so on and the concreteness of the situation. As the very word 'application' reminds us, application includes the 'pli', which can be translated as 'fold'. *Application* then is a (process of) folding (see also Weiskopf, 2002). It is a process of 'bending back' (Deleuze, 1988) the forces on the material that is being connected. Entrepreneurship then can be seen – as any creative work – as 'a new way of folding adapted to new materials' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 158). Since there is always a multiplicity of ways of folding there can be no 'one best way'. The innovative force of entrepreneurship then is no longer reached by 'creative destruction' (Schumpeter, 1934) but rather by a folding that is infused with an attitude in which 'the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is; and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is' (Foucault, 1997c, p. 311).

The focus is no longer on the entrepreneur as someone who is surveying the world from above, sees people (workforce), material, and so on from a detached point of view, and applies a reductive analysis, so that they become information, values or commodities. He or she is no longer the one who rationally combines these factors in order to produce an output and to achieve something (Spinosa et al., 1997, pp. 57–8). In contrast, we can see the entrepreneur as 'someone' (or somebody) who is in-between,

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or more precisely: we can focus on *entrepreneuring* as the in-betweenness itself (Steyaert, 2005). In this way we realize that it is not the individual (entrepreneur's) intentions that account for the process of entrepreneurship. To put it another way: it is not the intentions in the individual's mind but rather it is the 'tensional traction of a field of incompatible and heterogeneous events' (Cooper and Law, 1995, p. 246) that constitutes entrepreneurship as an intensive space and entrepreneuring as the entering of an intensive space of creation and transformation.

This may finally open an idea of entrepreneurial organizing as an 'art of transforming the desire to create, of channelling or creating passages for this flow of life into a specified future' (Hjorth, 2004, p. 228). Entrepreneurship then can be understood as a process that is 'powered by connecting with other desires to increase the productive capacity' (ibid.). It is a process that is embedded in a specific historical context but moves us away from existing definitions, by building relations and connections that cannot be contained within existing strata. This line of thinking certainly does not lead us to any programme or prescriptive theory that explains or prescribes how to proceed. Rather, what is implied is something like a pragmatic that encourages us to experiment, to try out, to open to new connections, to follow the paths of desire.

Entrepreneurship as Ethico-aesthetic Practice

Entrepreneurship as an ethico-aesthetic practice implies a 'straying afield of oneself',[39] a detaching oneself from what is given and defined as 'necessary', 'normal' or 'natural' *and* simultaneously a practice of *creating* and organizing relations to self and others in a different way. To put it another way we can say: entrepreneurship is an *ethico-aesthetic* practice that 'result(s) in the creation of new styles (of living), that is, of new bases for everyday practices' (Hjorth, Johannisson and Steyaert, 2003; Hjorth, 2004, p. 223). It is – in this sense – not restricted to profit-making or even to economic activities in the narrower sense. It is also not restricted to any specific group of people. Rather, we can say with Hjorth et al. (2003, p. 102, emphasis added) 'ordinary people perform "real" entrepreneurship in their creations and initiatives *as they pass beyond the habitual, the passive and the docile*, in which consumerism, work life, and education attempts to slot them'.

The *subject of entrepreneurship* is a (historical) form rather than a timeless substance. It has both a history and a future and is open to *trans-formation*. The (entrepreneurial) self is better understood 'as a form-giving practice that operates with and upon heterogeneous parts and forms available at a given point in history' (Rabinow, 1997, p. xxxviii). Re-orienting studies

of entrepreneurship in this sense implies that we follow Foucault who says that the 'target nowadays is not to *discover* what we are, but to *refuse* what we are' (Foucault, 1983, p. 216, emphasis added). This does not mean that we should take a self-denying attitude. Rather what we should refuse is the representation of entrepreneurship as the domain of the 'enterprising self' and those technologies of managerial government that bind us to these predefined identities and which, by way of administrative inquisitions, seek to define 'who we are'. What we should refuse are the forms of individuality and subjectivity that delimit the space of our possibilities. This refusal is – paradoxically – a 'non-positive affirmation' (Foucault, 1998, p. 74).

This is exactly what critique in the forms of *problematization* and '*eventalization*' [évènementialisation] aims at (O'Leary, 2002): to 'refuse who we are' by creating a *distance* to established ways of seeing and doing things. This very distance is a necessary precondition that allows a variety of answers and it assures that 'to one single set of difficulties, several responses can be made' (Foucault, 1997a, p. 118). Problematization is a 'critical analysis in which one tries to see how different solutions to a problem have been constructed; but also how these different solutions result from a specific form of problematization' (ibid., pp. 118–19). Eventalization on the other hand 'means rediscovering the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies and so on which at a given moment establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal, and necessary' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 76).

Both problematization and eventualization are procedures of analysis that introduce *thought*. Thought, it is important to note, is not calculation, it is not limitation or restriction, rather it is 'freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem' (Foucault, 1997a, p. 117). Thought opens a crack in all what we routinely accept as necessary or natural. Thought is a widening and a deepening of that crack and an increase in potential responses. It creates the in-between space of *entrepreneurship*, an 'opening between what exists and what could become' (Engelschmidt and Steyaert, 1999; Hjorth et al., 2003, p. 91).

What then are the consequences of refusing the idea of an essential or timeless subject? Foucault spelled them out: 'I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art' (1983, p. 237). The idea to *create* oneself as a 'work of art' is fundamental to a Foucauldian ethics, which is at the same time aesthetic. *Ethics* in the Foucauldian sense is not a system of rules and regulations or a prescriptive apparatus that defines what is morally right or wrong. It is not restricted to moral codes, nor is ethics concerned with the foundation of what constitutes good or bad behaviour. Rather, ethics concerns self-relations and

a specific attitude that one takes towards self and others. For Foucault, freedom is the 'ontological condition of ethics' and ethics is 'the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection' (Foucault, 1997b, p. 284). Ethics in this sense is precisely a 'practice of freedom'.

Ethics is at the same time 'aesthetics' in a special sense. It is neither an objectivist aesthetics in the sense of being a property of some object (and thus external to the individual subject) nor is it subjectivist in the sense of referring to the emotional response experienced by an individual in relation to some (external) object. Rather it is *practical*. It focuses on *practices* of (self-)formation and (self-)creation. More specifically, it focuses on practices of stylization, that is, on practices of *giving form* to one's life.

The subject of entrepreneurship is always a subject of *experience*. It does not simply exist, or at any point of time in history it can only be said to exist in the 'embryonic form of its future becoming' (O'Leary, 2002, p. 120). This experience is constituted in the space *between* historically specific discourses and practices of governing that delimit and circumscribe to the field of possible action and the space of freedom, which lies always within and in-between them. The subject of experience is also the subject of the line of flight, which is a *becoming* rather than a being. As Ron Day (1998, p. 102) explained:

the becoming agency of the subject along lines of flight is not due to the will of the subject, but rather to the transversal engagement of heterogeneously located bodies, assemblages and lines of production. Subjective agency is not an essential property of the subject, but appears at certain moments for the organism, empowering it to disengage from standard production machines and to re-engage and make active and real transversal trajectories running through various levels of production. Such flight engages and re-encodes productive bodies through their cuts and furrows which open them to the world of materials and which form their genealogical tracings from the past and into the future. Nomadic flight is precisely possible because of the historical graftings, limitations and openings of productive bodies to one another in a negative space.

'The line of flight is a deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, p. 36). It is a line of creation, a line of change, variation and transformation. It is a line of experience (which comprises both experience in the (more or less) ordinary sense *and* experiment). It is a practice – an experience/experiment – of/in organizing differently.

Towards an Affirmative Politics of Entrepreneuring

An affirmative politics of entrepreneuring is a politics of creation and of inventiveness. The Yes-saying politics of entrepreneuring is quite different from the affirmation that passively accepts the given state of affairs or

simply does not know how to say no. An affirmative politics of entrepreneurship says 'no' to what negates life and limits the possibilities of life. It refuses the arresting of life in its inherited and well-guarded bastions of institutionalization. It says 'Yes' to the life-enhancing effects of specific discourses and practices. As Deleuze put it: 'To affirm is to create, not to bear, put up with or accept' (Deleuze, 1983, p. 186). The affirmative mode does not exclude critique but rather presupposes a radical critique as a 'ground clearing' (Hardt, 2002). It is less concerned with judgement, condemnation and silencing and more with 'bringing an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life' (Foucault, 1997d, p. 323). It is concerned with 'multiply(ing) not judgements but signs of existence' (ibid.). This does not mean that it shies away from evaluating, however, it does not confuse the evaluation of specific situations or practices with a normative judgement based on general principles or yardsticks. It does not rely on any transcendental standpoint that might be external to the field of forces in which it is implied:

> To affirm is still to evaluate, but to evaluate from the perspective of a will which enjoys its own difference in life instead of suffering the pains of the opposition to this life that it has itself inspired. *To affirm is not to take responsibility for, to take on the burden of what is, but to release, to set free what lives. To affirm is to unburden:* not to load life with the weight of higher values, but to create new values which are those of life, which make life light and active. There is creation, properly speaking, only insofar as we make use of excess in order to invent new forms of life rather than separating life from what it can do. (Deleuze, 1983, p. 185)

An affirmative politics of entrepreneuring is a form of resisting entrepreneurship as it is currently construed in the discourse of Enterprise. It favours an inventiveness that increases the possibilities of life that are not yet known. It thus affirms the 'undefined work of freedom' (Foucault). The content of such work and of such creative activities can never be defined in advance, but remains to be invented through and in the practices of entrepreneuring. An affirmative politics of entrepreneurship resists programmes and programming by affirming the power of thought as a means to interrupt automatic stimulus-response reactions. As such it resists the mobilizing and activating imperatives implied in contemporary discourses of Enterprise (like 'Become enterprising!', 'Be creative!') and favours the 'the nonaction of suspending established stimulus-response circuits to create a zone where chance and change may intervene' (Massumi, 1992, p. 99).

What it thus affirms is becoming itself and what it resists are the confining forces that limit and restrict this inventiveness. It does not lay down a

programme nor does it rely on a set of principles and rules that may guide it. It has no foundation other than practice itself – the repeated practice/ attempt of increasing possibilities of life. The affirmative politics of entrepreneurship is an ongoing movement of inventing; it is not an 'acceptance of being' but rather the 'creation of being' (Hardt, 2002, p. 117). It is an engagement in world-making considered as a generically social process of what Nietzsche called 'inventing new possibilities of life' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 118). It is clear that such a politics that is scoped according to these ideas and practices of entrepreneuring brings along a whole new set of ethical and aesthetical questions for entrepreneurship studies and the different, critical yet affirmative role it can take up in how all kinds of societal issues are problematized and re-invented. It would require that entrepreneurship studies become again dangerous and inventive.

Haiku

Unburdened book bags
At field's edge. Sentinels watch
New games being made.

William B. Gartner