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Entrepreneurship at the limits

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Lena Olaison

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# Entrepreneurship at the limits

**Lena Olaison**

PhD dissertation for examination

Submitted December 2013 by Lena Olaison

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Doctoral School of Organisation and Management Studies

Copenhagen Business School

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# Preface

This book is the result of a research process that for nine years has constantly been interrupted. The first interviews were conducted in February 2005, during my Masters class, and the end has now come through the public PhD defense in May 2014. To write is an individual endeavour, to accomplish writing is a collective one and many are the friends and colleagues (luckily these are not exclusive categories) who have been involved in the process.

My gratitude towards my supervisors Daniel Hjorth and Bent Meier Sørensen, whom I nowadays can call colleagues and friends, cannot be overstated. You share a passion for the academic trade and a compassion for all of us that are around you. You also share a leadership style that is characterised by freedom, which leads to individual development for those you lead as well as endless amounts of work for yourselves. Thank you.

Before I became a PhD fellow at CBS I taught at Växjö University (today Linnaeus University). From these years I would like to thank Bent Johannisson in particular, who is to blame for my career choice altogether and with whom I wrote the first paper of this dissertation. I would like to thank Joakim Vitell and Johan Löfgren, who are the fellow students that I conducted the study with, as well as Karin Jonnergård, who did not want to go to Kosovo/a, and thus made me go instead, and Emma Andersson, with whom I shared many experiences in Kosovo/a. In Växjö I became part of a PhD group, which became known under the self-proclaimed name 'the Cosy Trap' (mysfällan). Here, among other things, I found a co-writer, Frederic Bill, with whom I wrote the last two papers in this dissertation with, and with whom I expect to write many, many more. I want to thank the Swedish Entrepreneurship Forum (Forum för småföretagsforskning), from where we received funding for many projects during these years. I would also like to thank Saara Taalas, who taught me how to forgive myself, which made finishing this project possible.

In 2007 I became a PhD fellow at CBS. I would like to thank my colleagues at MPP, and also the Department, in terms of collegial and administrative support as well as for the funding that I have received when traveling and organizing events. Of all my fantastic colleagues I especially would like to mention Birgitte Gorm Hansen who I shared office and, more importantly, life mysteries with, and Thomas Basbøll, who has

struggled with my writing and who has also become a friend. I would also like to thank Maja Horst and Rob Austin for early comments on my project. My PhD scholarship was an international scholarship funded by FI (Styrelsen for Forskning og Innovation, Denmark). This scholarship has provided me with many opportunities. One of them was to spend the greater part of my first year as a PhD fellow at University of Essex. Here I was schooled in Critical Management Studies, which became the second leg of my research strategy, alongside the interpretive and creative process view that Bengt and Daniel inspired. I would like to thank Birke Otto, Heather Höpfl and Monika Kostera, who have been role models as well as discussion partners over the years. My UK-based network also includes Steffen Böhm and Campbell Jones, who never refrains from challenging my positions nor from encouraging me to move forward. I would also like to thank the assessment committee, Bill Gartner, Robin Holt and Karen Verduijn, for the careful reading and evaluation of my PhD dissertation.

Two of the most important experiences I have had over the PhD years are *ephemera* and SCOS. In 2008 I was invited to join *ephemera*. This experience is probably what has formed me most as a scholar, mostly due to the incredible crowd that *ephemera* houses. Here I have learned both how careful scholarship is crafted and what collegial support can feel like, and it is here that I get energized and motivated to continue no matter what. I especially would like to thank Nick Butler, with whom I have worked closely in the *ephemera* project for almost 2 years, and we are somehow still friends, even more so now than before. I was part of the SCOS board from 2009-2013 and I would like to thank the board members from this time, in particular David Sköld and Thomas Lennerfors, for both collegial operations and the friendship we have found.

This book has been written alongside the precious project Family. I met my husband early into both Ulf's and my PhD process (thank you Mysfällan) and during this process we have found the time not only to write two PhD's but also to get married and to produce what will in August become 2 children, Holger and his yet-to-be-named sibling. Well-spent interruptions. We would not succeed with anything, however, if it weren't for our parents, who somehow always find the time to be there for us when we need it the most. We are lucky to be so loved.

Lena Olaison  
May 2014

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- FI (Styrelsen for Forskning og Innovation, Denmark).
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This is an article-based dissertation, based on four previously published manuscripts. Some of the studies have generated more than one paper. The choice of which version to include in the dissertation has been motivated by thematic considerations and the fit of the content of each article into the larger whole.

## **Chapter 4: Emergency entrepreneurship: creative organizing in the eye of the storm:**

Johannisson, B. and Olaison, L. (2008): “Emergency entrepreneurship: creative organizing in the eye of the storm”, pp. 243-266, in Landström, H., Crijns, H., Laveren, E. and Smallbone, D. (eds.): *Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Growth and Performance: Frontiers in European Entrepreneurship Research*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.

*This study has also been published in:*

Johannisson, B. and Olaison, L. (2008): “The moment of truth: reconstructing entrepreneurship and social capital in the eye of the storm”, pp. 55-78, in Knorringa, P. and van Staveren, I. (eds.): *Beyond Social Capital: A critical approach*, Routledge, New York.

Johannisson, B. and Olaison, L. (2007): “The moment of truth: reconstructing entrepreneurship and social capital in the eye of the storm”. *Review of Social Economy*, vol LXY, no. 1, pp. 55-78.

## **Chapter 5: An emerging legend of a Kosovar heroine: narrating female entrepreneurs:**

Olaison, L. (2008): “An emerging legend of a Kosovar heroine: narrating female entrepreneurs”, pp. 92-101, in Kostera, M. (ed.): *Organizational Olympians: Heroes, Heroines and Villains of Organizational Myths*, Palgrave, London.

## **Chapter 6: The indirect approach of semi-focused groups:**

Bill, F. and Olaison, L. (2009): “The indirect approach of semi-focused groups: expanding focus group research through role-playing”. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, vol., 4, no. 1, pp. 7-26.

*This study has also been published in:*

Bill, F. and Olaison, L. (2012): “The indirect approach of semi-focused groups: expanding focus group research through role-playing”, in Walden, G.R. (ed.): *Focus Group Research*, Sage, London.

Bill, F., Johannisson, B. and Olaison, L. (2012): “The Incubus Paradox: attempts at foundational rethinking of the ‘SME support genre’”, pp. 30-47, in Lindholm-Dahlstrand, Å. and Johannisson, B. (eds.): *Enacting Regional Dynamics and Entrepreneurship*, Routledge, Oxfordshire.

Bill, F., Johannisson, B. and Olaison, L. (2009): “The Incubus Paradox: attempts at foundational rethinking of the ‘SME support genre’”: *European Planning Studies*, vol. 17, no. 8, pp. 1135-1152.

Bill, F., Johannisson, B. and Olaison, L. (2008): “The Incubus paradox: attempts at foundational rethinking of the ‘SME support genre’”, pp. 99-117, in Johannisson, B. and Lindholm-Dahlstrand, Å. (eds.): *Bridging the Functional and Territorial Views on Regional Entrepreneurship and development*, FSF 2008:6, Göteborg.

## **Chapter 7: Limits of the gift: exploring interaction in antiquarian bookshops:**

Bill, F. and Olaison, L. (2011): “Limits of the gift: exploring interaction in antiquarian bookshops”. *Tamara: Journal for Critical Organization Inquiry*, vol. 9, no. 3-4, pp. 11-21.

# English summary

This PhD dissertation is based on four published articles. It operates within the processual view of entrepreneurship studies (Steyaert, 1997), which draws on process philosophy to develop research strategies (Sørensen, 2005). The research has been guided by two strategies for understanding entrepreneurship: ‘moving’ (e.g. Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003) and ‘unveiling’ (e.g. Jones and Spicer, 2009). These strategies have so far been pursued largely in the conceptual domain, and this doctoral dissertation is an effort to take them a step further by combining empirical investigation and philosophical reflection. The aim is to investigate how a processual study of entrepreneurship ‘should be worked out’ in practice (Kristensen, Lopdrup-Hjorth and Sørensen, 2014).

The first two studies contribute an empirically informed conceptualisation of entrepreneurship, the first focused on how organisations are created, the second providing stories of emerging practices of female entrepreneurs. Though they aim to provide alternative conceptualisations, they remain firmly rooted in ‘traditional’ social science, offering alternative approaches to the dominant understandings of entrepreneurship, and utilizing accepted and traditional methodologies and theories. The last two papers are more experimental in their design. The aim is still to problematize discursive or practical aspects of entrepreneurship and processes around entrepreneurship, but also to investigate alternative methods for creating knowledge. The third study explores the somewhat paradoxical results of SME support schemes and develops a role-play-enhanced focus group technique. The fourth study is based on an organisational ethnography in antiquarian bookshops and experiments with fictional accounts and literary techniques as methods to generate knowledge.

The contribution of this dissertation to processual studies in entrepreneurship research is twofold. The first two papers are illustrations of an *application* of process concepts, while the last two papers illustrate the attempt to *create* process concepts. Taken together, the studies demonstrate how a processual study of entrepreneurship might be worked out in practice.



# Swedish summary

Den här sammanläggningsavhandlingen består av fyra tidigare publicerade artiklar. Avhandlingen bygger på en gren inom entreprenörskapsforskning som använder sig av processfilosofi för att utveckla nya forskarstrategier (Steyaert, 1997 och Sørensen, 2005). Studien har främst använt sig av två sådana strategier för att förstå och analysera entreprenörskap: en strategi som fokuserar på rörelse och att beröra ('moving') i entreprenörskapsfältet (e.g. Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003) och en som utvecklar kritik genom att avslöja ('unveiling') entreprenörskapsfältet (e.g. Jones and Spicer, 2009). Avhandlingen bidrar till forskningsfältet med teoriutveckling genom empiriska studier inom en europeisk forskningstradition vid studier av entreprenöriella processer. Syftet med en sådan ansats är att undersöka hur en studie baserad på processfilosofi av entreprenörskap skulle kunna ta form i praktiken (Kristensen, Lopdrup-Hjorth and Sørensen, 2014).

De två första studierna bygger på en idé om att entreprenörskapsbegreppet bör breddas för att bli ett begrepp kontextualiserat av samhället. Studierna bidrar med empiriskt baserade conceptualiseringar av entreprenörskap; den första studien fokuserar på organisationsskapande efter en naturkatastrof i Sverige, och den andra studien bidrar med en beskrivning av nya praktiker av kvinnligt företagande i Kosovo/a. Studierna använder sig av kvalitativ metodologi och narrativ metod. De två sista studierna är mer experimentella i ansats och metod. Syftet med dessa två studier är dels att problematisera den dominerade entreprenörskapsdiskursen och dels att bidra med nya metoder för hur vi kan studera entreprenörskap. Den tredje studien undersöker den delvis paradoxala diskursen kring stödprogram för småföretagare. Studien utvecklar en ny form av metod genom att kombinera fokusgruppsmetod med rollspelsmetodik. Den fjärde studien är baserad på en etnografisk studie av bokantikvariat. Studien experimenterar med olika former av fiktion som metod för att skapa kunskap om organisationsprocesser.

Avhandlingens bidrag till entreprenörskapsforskningen kan därmed delas i två. De två första studierna är exempel på hur begrepp baserade på processfilosofi kan användas inom entreprenörskapsforskningen. De två senare studierna illustrerar försök att skapa begrepp baserade på processfilosofi inom ramen för entreprenörskapsforskning. Tillsammans utgör de exempel på hur processuella entreprenörskapsstudier kan ta form i praktiken.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

In recent years, a small but growing community of scholars has been attempting to understand entrepreneurship from a processual perspective (as conceptualised by Steyaert, 1997, 2007; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Hjorth, Jones and Gartner, 2008; and Jones and Spicer, 2009). These researchers, at times grouped under the rather broad label of the ‘European School of entrepreneurship studies’, emphasise context and creativity in entrepreneurship research (Steyaert, 1997; Hjorth et al, 2008). While this research remains largely in the conceptual domain, this doctoral dissertation comprises an effort to take this research strategy a step further. It does this by combining empirical investigation and philosophical reflection. The dissertation is based on four published manuscripts, each of which contributes in its own way to a processual approach to entrepreneurship. In this introduction, I situate the dissertation within existing entrepreneurship research, outline my point of departure and describe the main contributions of this dissertation.

## **Entrepreneurship in context**

Entrepreneurship is believed to be a crucial factor in achieving economic growth. This has been the case at least since the 1970s, when it was demonstrated that SMEs comprised a larger proportion of economic growth and new employment than previously believed (e.g. Birch, 1979). The ostensible connection between SMEs/entrepreneurship and economic growth is further reinforced by Low and MacMillan, who propose that ‘entrepreneurship [should] be defined as the “creation of new enterprise” and ... that entrepreneurship research [should] seek to *explain and facilitate the role of new enterprise in furthering economic progress*’ (1988: 141, italics as in original). Whereas researchers in the 1970s tended to view entrepreneurship as taking place in small, newly established firms, this assumed relationship was subject to critique in the 1990’s. The focus shifted to the process of doing entrepreneurship, such that an SME was only one possible platform for entrepreneurial practice, along with within established firms (Sandberg, 1992). This development made way for concepts such as ‘corporate entrepreneurship’ (Burgelman, 1983), ‘intrapreneurship’ (Antoncic and Hisrich, 2003), and ‘organisational entrepreneurship’ (Hjorth, 2003). Further, entrepreneurship was adopted by actors

outside the market, such as ‘community entrepreneurship’ (Johannisson and Nilsson, 1989; Johnstone and Lionais, 2004), ‘social entrepreneurship’ (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006) and ‘public entrepreneurship’ (Hjorth and Bjerke, 2006). On the political agenda as well, entrepreneurship is a topic of great attention (Lambrecht and Pirnay, 2005), and entrepreneurship training is now part of the educational system outside the business school environment (Hjorth and Johannisson, 2007).

Although there seems to be no limit to how much entrepreneurship is needed, not everyone is perceived as a potential entrepreneur. The most significant and enduring trait in the field has been the idea that entrepreneurship is executed by certain specially gifted individuals (Verduijn, 2007), and the entrepreneur, in both research texts and in the public mind, is associated with a white Anglo-Saxon male (Ahl, 2002). This quest for the specific, assertive individual has been motivated by the general belief that we need more successful entrepreneurs, since entrepreneurship leads to economic growth. This is further complicated by the disheartening statistics of failure in entrepreneurial ventures (Steven and Burley, 1997) and by the fact that it has proven extremely difficult to predict what kind of entrepreneurial ventures will succeed. Regardless of this shortcoming, entrepreneurship has been associated with something positive (Perren and Jennings, 2005) and is almost exclusively researched as something successful. This preference for studying success thus tends to overlook, if not downgrade, the everyday and mundane aspects of the entrepreneurial process (Bill, Jansson and Olaison, 2010), as well as the ‘darker’ sides of entrepreneurship (Kets de Vries, 1985; Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009; Tedmanson, Verdyn, Essers and Gartner 2012). The entrepreneur, it has been argued, is publicly depicted as a heroic figure (e.g. Hatch, Kostera and Kozminski, 2005), even a saviour in the economy (Sørensen, 2008).

The governmental discourse on entrepreneurship is paradoxical: on the one hand, it emphasizes the positive contribution of entrepreneurship to society, celebrating those who take on this challenge as courageous, gifted heroes. On the other hand, heroes aside, there is a prevailing view that these ‘heroes’ need to be nurtured and supported in their efforts to build successful enterprises (Perren and Jennings, 2005). However, despite two decades of rather mixed experiences of implementing SME support measures and despite innumerable evaluations of programs, projects and schemes, it has been difficult to identify any specific support measures and initiatives that could effectively increase the amount or rate of entrepreneurship (cf. Bill, Johannisson and Olaison, 2009). In fact, research studies have failed to find any positive correlation

between support measures and development programmes, on the one hand, and firm growth and development, on the other (Lambrecht and Pirnay, 2005; Faoite, Henry, Johnston, and Sijde, 2004). Some studies go so far as to conclude that participants' positive attitude towards support programmes actually decreases the likelihood of their being involved in entrepreneurial activities (Greene and Storey, 2004). The practical limits of entrepreneurship contrast with the prevailing fascination with entrepreneurship: it is unequivocally good, and we need more of it. But we don't know exactly what this 'it' is nor do we know how to get more of it. In this sense, entrepreneurship has almost a magical or even divine quality: it is a powerful force that comes from another realm; hence the oft-cited identification between the entrepreneur and the superhero – courageous, adventurous, outrageous, eccentric, nerdy.

The problem of how entrepreneurship should perceive itself, thus resides at the heart of entrepreneurship research. From being part of management and organisation studies, a specialty within the fields of strategic management and change management (Hjorth, 2001), entrepreneurship has become a field of research in its own right. Having evolved over the past three decades, entrepreneurship studies has been concerned with defining the limits of entrepreneurship (e.g. Low and McMillan, 1988; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Steyaert, 2007): the limits of the field of research as such; limits of theoretical development; limits of methodology; limits of empirical objects; limits of policy development. This interest in defining limits reflects the ongoing efforts of entrepreneurship researchers from a variety of disciplines, as the attempt to forge themselves into a distinct research area. This development of a field of specialty has been seen as extremely important by entrepreneurship researchers and the debate has been lively; while all seem to agree that entrepreneurship should be separated from economics, management studies or sociology, it is constantly debated how this should be done and what it would mean. As Steyaert and Hjorth (2003) note, entrepreneurship researchers, at least since the 1980s (Low and MacMillan, 1988) have taken to reflecting on the state of entrepreneurship research (see Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003: 4-5 for an overview). What they have in common is the desire to define or diagnose entrepreneurship as a field of research. Key themes in this effort are 1) the need to define the field of entrepreneurship as a field of research, distinguishing it from other fields (such as economics, strategic management, sociology, etc.); 2) the need to re-focus the study of entrepreneurship from the individual actor's characteristics to a processual view of entrepreneurship; 3) the effects and consequences of addressing these questions. These reflective accounts have led to the formation of several approaches and communities in entrepreneurship research. For this dissertation, three

approaches are especially relevant: a functionalist view, an interpretivist view, and a critical view. These three perspectives will be dealt with in turn.

The dominant approach to the study of entrepreneurship is the functionalist programme. It concerns itself with objective truth and with verifying or falsifying various hypotheses, mainly through historical data and statistical analysis. These researchers, theoretically as well as methodologically, draw on 'big data', primarily from economics. While statistical analysis can provide useful information for understanding the role and function of entrepreneurship in society, it has also been subject to ongoing critique. A defining text that represents this approach, and one of the most well-cited texts in entrepreneurship studies, is Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) 'The Promise of Entrepreneurship as a Field of Research'. A key project in the functional approach is to define the scope of the field, distinguish it from other fields and then derive propositions to test. The functional approach is concerned with delimiting the field of entrepreneurship in order to achieve some kind of conceptual unity in the field.

The other two approaches, both of which meet under the umbrella of processual perspectives (Steyaert, 2007) or the European School of entrepreneurship studies (Hjorth et al., 2008), comprises a smaller community of entrepreneurship scholars and have emerged from a critique of the functionalist approach. The first origin of such school or perspective is interpretivist studies, with Chris Steyaert's 1997 article on qualitative methodologies as a key text. Steyaert introduces concepts such as 'becoming' and 'creative process' as a means of contextualizing entrepreneurship. As a direct response to Shane and Venkataraman's proposal is Bill Gartner's 2001 article 'Is there an elephant in entrepreneurship research' where the language-oriented approaches to entrepreneurship studies are elaborated. A second origin of the European School is a more 'critical' stance to entrepreneurship studies, developed by scholars from Critical Management Studies, based on philosophy and ideology critique. The key texts here include Jones and Spicer (2005) and their book (2009) 'Unmasking Entrepreneurship' as well as Helene Ahl's (2002) doctoral dissertation, where she deconstructs the imagery of entrepreneurship in research texts, showing their ideological and gendered bias.

This dissertation is informed by these three approaches. In various ways, they delimit how entrepreneurship may be studied. This study relates to these approaches in its investigation of entrepreneurship, as will be developed, 'at the limits'. The word 'limit' comes from the Latin word *limes* and means fortified border or frontier, a boundary

mark of some other kind. This also means that there is an inside and an outside of the field, which in this case is a research field. The dominant view of entrepreneurship research argues that the field must be defined and its scope limited, adding that the problem with entrepreneurship studies is that it lacks a coherent framework (Shane and Venkataraman, 2001). As this dominant research strategy focuses on demarcating the ‘frontier’ of entrepreneurship, we shall refer to this strategy as ‘frontiering’.

For a processual approach the notion of limit is more ambiguous and open for problematization. Here the community that originates from interpretivist studies argue that the convergence idea promoted by the ‘frontiering’ view has prevented entrepreneurship studies from developing new ideas. This is because researchers will determine a priori what to study and what results to expect. As a response to the convergence idea, Steyaert and Hjorth (2003) propose ‘movement’ as a metaphor, replacing the term ‘progress’. That is, this second research strategy is concerned with ‘moving’ the field and with the ‘movements’ of entrepreneurship itself, which is why I term this second strategy ‘moving’. The third, critical approach to entrepreneurship studies analyzes and critiques entrepreneurship through a research strategy of ‘unveiling’ and is inspired by the work of philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze. This approach questions taken for granted assumptions of entrepreneurship and emphasizes underlying structures and hidden agendas. This approach will be referred to as the ‘unveiling’ strategy.

### **Aim and contribution**

On this backdrop, the aim of this study is to further develop, while criticizing, the emerging European School in entrepreneurship research (Hjorth, et al., 2008). While this community of researchers has emphasized its diversity rather than similarities (Steyaert, 2004; Gartner, 2001, 2008, 2013), most scholars agree that there exists a need to further develop and even innovate within the field of entrepreneurship research (Steyaert 1997, 2011; Hjorth, et al., 2008; Hjorth, 2012). Another goal of the European School is that the research should aim not only to represent entrepreneurship but to transform it as well (Steyaert, 1997, 2007, 2011; Hjorth, et al. 2008; Jones and Spicer, 2009), which makes research a political act. While research within the frame of the European School to a large extent remains in the conceptual domain, this doctoral dissertation comprises an effort to take this research strategy a step further, by a combined approach of empirical investigation and philosophical reflection. The



purpose of the study is to investigate how a processual study of entrepreneurship 'should be worked out' in practice (Kristensen, Lopdrup-Hjorth and Sørensen, 2014).

The core of this dissertation consists of four previously published manuscripts which, taken together, help to develop entrepreneurship research through a combination of empirical investigation and philosophical reflection. The first two studies can be read as empirical illustrations of conceptual work and themes within the European School of entrepreneurship research. The first paper discusses entrepreneurship in terms of its social creativity, while the second offers a narration of female entrepreneurs. Both these papers illustrate lived experience in the form of narrated knowledge. The two remaining articles are more experimental, both in regards to method and construction of the empirical data. Both studies attempt to deal with lived experience as reflected in people's concrete practices.

In entrepreneurship studies today, there is general agreement about the importance of a processual understanding of entrepreneurship. More than 25 years ago, Low and MacMillan (1988) had emphasized process and context as keys to entrepreneurship research; Shane and Venkataraman's (2001) individual-opportunity nexus is an attempt at a process theory; Aldrich and Martinez (2001) apply an evolutionary perspective; and as Steyaert (2007) shows in his review of processual approaches from a 'creative process view', a great variety of theoretical perspectives has now emerged, with Sarasvathy (2001) being one of the most cited and applied. Steyaert (2007) argues for the concept of 'entrepreneurship' under which various process theories can gather, but this applies only to those within the so-called 'creative process view'. In Steyaert's view, other scholars, such as Shane and Venkataraman and Aldrich, 'speak of process in an entitative and equilibrium-based way' (Steyaert, 2007: 454). Following Steyaert, this study takes as its point of departure a view of entrepreneurship as a creative process, a process of organisational creation. This process is viewed as collective rather than individual, social rather than economical and local rather than universal (Steyaert, 1997). Hence, the goal here is not to determine whether entrepreneurship can be understood as a process or as a social phenomenon. Rather we assume that it can indeed be studied as such.

A recurring contribution within the creative process view has been to demonstrate that entrepreneurship cannot be understood from a single perspective or theory (cf. Steyaert, 1997; Gartner, 2001, 2008, 2013; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Steyaert, 2007). Steyaert, for example, claims that one aim of conducting a review of process theories is to 'debunk the idea that only "one comprehensive" processual theory is possible'

(Steyaert, 2007: 454). Verduijn, in the introduction to her doctoral dissertation, based on a creative process perspective, wrote that her thesis was ‘about variety’ (2007: 33). From this pluralist perspective, entrepreneurship must allow for perspectives that may also contradict each other. This is the consequence when we assume that entrepreneurship will vary with context: entrepreneurship will be formed by context as well as also forming the context (Steyaert, 1997; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2003; Hjorth, et al., 2008). Another way of understanding this need for variety is Jones and Spicer’s (2009) method of unmasking where they endeavour to draw on eclectic sources in order to identify diverse aspects of a phenomenon. However, Jones and Spicer warn us that ‘unmasking will require that we as authors put on several masks ourselves, and that we are willing and able to take these off so as to approach our object from a different angle later’ (2009: 6). Hence, a common research strategy in this community that attempts to both critique and transform conceptions of entrepreneurship is to problematise the dominant stories by producing alternative images and conceptualisations of entrepreneurship. This has also been the research strategy of the current study and the point of departure for each of the four studies. Each study attempts to explicate a theme or discourse in entrepreneurship research, experimenting with it in order to determine how this theme ‘should be worked out’ in practice (Kristensen et al., 2014); a minor science (Sørensen, 2006). The aim of such experiments, beyond critique, is to provide an alternative story, or to allow a silenced story to speak. To do so, this dissertation operates with three basic assumptions: 1) the world is the outcome of a creatively constructed activity and not something existing independent of the researcher’s gaze; 2) that multiple perspectives are more productive than a ‘one truth’ approach; 3) that locally valid theories are to be preferred to overarching theories (adopted from Steyaert, 1997). The research strategy pursued in this dissertation thus emphasizes proximity to the field of study, and focuses on the ‘little narrative’ and stories ‘as forms of knowledge’ (ibid.), describing cases from a group of people who have been overlooked in the standard entrepreneurship discourse (Hjorth et al, 2008), recounting unusual stories/places (Rehn and Taalas, 2004), or ‘other’ stories (Hjorth, 2007). The four studies reflect such a view on knowledge, and are also based on insights from organisational ethnography as described by Kostera (2007).

Through an understanding of research as both transforming and critiquing this dissertation thus attempts to bridge interpretive studies of entrepreneurship with critical studies of entrepreneurship; to move the field forward and to unveil its hidden assumptions. The starting point for both the moving strategy and the unveiling strategy

is to study entrepreneurship through a critique of the functionalist and/or economically-based views on entrepreneurship. Where the moving strategy problematizes the limits of entrepreneurship by moving beyond these limits and finding new ways of understanding entrepreneurship, the unveiling project aims at making limits transparent via critique. While the aim of deploying a moving strategy is critique, the moving strategy also produces alternative images. These are often based on empirical studies which in some cases may come at the cost of analytical precision. Critical scholars have, for example, debunked interpretative scholars for overlooking the political aspects of entrepreneurial activities. Thus, Jones and Spicer argue that by ‘focusing on the interpretative dimensions of entrepreneurship, researchers working in this tradition have largely ignored the fact that entrepreneurship significantly involves political and economic questions’ (2009: 14). The current study finds such precision in an unveiling strategy, where the goal is not to produce alternative images of entrepreneurship, but to scrutinize the dominant conceptions. However, interpretive scholars, on their side, warn against critique for the sake of critique. Thus, Weiskopf and Steyaert stress the importance of going beyond the ‘no saying mode’ and henceforth being ‘able to become active and creative in a different spirit’ (2009: 193). This dissertation proposes that by combining these two strategies, we can achieve an empirical investigation of the field, experimentation with its conceptual base and a broader philosophical reflection. This can occur by both investigating and analysing (unveiling) the taken for granted assumptions behind entrepreneurship research and by proposing alternative ways of understanding and researching processes of entrepreneurship (moving).

### **Organisation of the dissertation**

This doctoral thesis is structured as follows. Chapters 2 and 3 provide the context for the four individual studies in chapters 4 through 7. Chapter 2 reviews entrepreneurship research, focusing on the three research communities described above and their respective strategies (of frontiering, moving and unveiling). The chapter places the individual papers within the historical development of entrepreneurship studies. Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach of the PhD dissertation and the methodological context for the four core studies. The results of the four studies are then dealt with in more detail in Chapter 8.

Each chapter should be read as the document of a research process at a particular point in time. As Kivinen (2006) has pointed out in her discussion of the article-based dissertation, the chapters were not originally written with the aim of being part of a

collection, but with the aim of being published in a particular context. This means that each study has its own logic and strategy, its own problematization, aim, method, data and framework, analysis and conclusion. In some cases, the same material has also been published in other forms, with other audiences in mind. Chapter 4, for example, has been published as a book chapter in the international anthology *Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Growth and Performance: Frontiers in European Entrepreneurship Research*, but an article was also published in *Review of Social Economy* and with a focus on entrepreneurship as social capital. The same article was later republished as a book chapter in *Beyond Social Capital: A Critical Approach*. Chapter 5 has been published as a chapter in the international anthology *Organizational Olympians: Heroes, Heroines and Villains of Organizational Myths*. Chapter 6 has been previously published in *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, focusing on the methodological innovation of the study, and appears here in the same form. A version has also been included in an international handbook on focus groups, however, and an article based on the empirical data of this study has been published in *European Planning Studies*, and has since been republished in two anthologies, one by a Swedish publisher and one by an international publisher. Chapter 7, finally, was previously published in *Tamara: Journal for Critical Organization Inquiry*. In all cases, the choice of which version to include in the dissertation has been motivated by thematic considerations and the fit of the content of each article into the larger whole.

The first study, Chapter 4, is an attempt at producing an empirical account of entrepreneurship as social creativity (Hjorth, Johannisson and Steyaert, 2003; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Steyaert, 2004). The study problematizes and contributes to the European School's argument for the need to refocus the dominant view of entrepreneurship as primarily an individual and economic, generalizable activity. This paper attempts to transform the dominant view of entrepreneurship, the opportunity-individual nexus, into an understanding based on entrepreneurship as enactment and the everyday routines of entrepreneurship. The study works this out in the aftermath of a hurricane in Sweden (a rare event). As the infrastructure in the seemingly well-organised state of Sweden broke down, the research idea was that this would provide a possibility to study creative organising outside of its regular form, as people were forced to re-organise their everyday life. A storytelling and narrative approach was used to create space for lived experience.

Chapter 5 is an empirical illustration of narrative knowledge in entrepreneurship studies (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004). In this case, the study focuses on female entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2002; Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio, 2005), as performed and narrated in Kosovo/a, a post-war, post-communist context. It is also a response to the mainstream view of entrepreneurship discussed in the previous chapter. Here entrepreneurship is performed in practice, where these women did not count as 'real entrepreneurs' and were therefore not given a voice. The aim of the study was initially to increase the understanding of women's possibilities for starting and running small firms in Kosovo/a. This study quickly became a struggle to show that there actually were women who were managing firms, but they were silenced and subjected to pressure by the national culture and by the assumptions and operations of various aid organisations. The study ended up narrating these women and their stories, rather than being a detailed description of the conditions for running a business in this context. It became a struggle for representation, both in practice and in research.

These first two papers, despite their aim to provide alternative conceptualisations, still remain within 'traditional' social science, offering alternative approaches to the dominant understandings of entrepreneurship, and utilizing accepted and traditional methodologies and theories. The last two papers are more experimental in their design. The aim is still to problematize discursive or practical aspects of entrepreneurship and processes around entrepreneurship, but also to investigate alternative methods for creating knowledge. Where the first two papers can be seen as empirical illustrations that offer conceptualisations of entrepreneurship through narrated knowledge, the last two papers can be seen as empirical experiments with a focus more directly placed on knowledge creation, in practice as well as in research. The papers attempt to offer knowledge as developed in practice, where action and reflection are intertwined.

The third study, Chapter 6, is an empirical experiment that attempts to construct a fictional setting where one may study knowledge on how to deal with a topic, rather than knowledge on how one talks about a topic. It problematizes data collection techniques such as interviews or surveys, where action and reflection are separated and stories always told in retrospect. The study begins with the observation that it seems to be difficult to produce nuanced accounts based on stories from entrepreneurs where they are asked to talk about entrepreneurship. This is because they seem to tell us a rehearsed or standardised story. In short, if you ask about entrepreneurship, you get entrepreneurship (Smith and Anderson, 2004). The context is a project for SME support, and we experiment with a method where we can investigate ideas of SME

support and entrepreneurship without asking (directly) about it, introducing role-play to focus group research. The study contributes with a methodological innovation. Further, it contributes with knowledge about SME support, one of the central themes in entrepreneurship research and practice.

The fourth paper, Chapter 7, based on organisational ethnography (Kostera, 2007), makes use of narratives, but at the same time problematizes this very methodology. The study is based on the same assumptions as the third study, experimenting with representation, making use of fictive stories. The context is the antiquarian bookshop. The study started as an investigation into the rationale of running a business, i.e. if there are motives other than rational economic, and if so, what they might be (Hjorth, Johannisson and Steyaert, 2003). It ended up as a study of interactions in the antiquarian bookshops, sales, and relations between the booksellers, buyers and books. It thus provides a detailed and practical description of how economic transactions are culturally embedded, thus providing a cultural nuance to the rationale of running a business.

Following these four individual papers, Chapter 8 offers reflections on the practice and process of doing research. The aim of this reflective chapter is to re-read the papers with a focus on what has been learned during the process. As mentioned, the four papers can be divided into two groups; the first two papers are applications or illustrations of conceptual work, and through this process, the first two studies are themselves conceptualizations (or re-conceptualizations) of entrepreneurship. The last two papers problematise the experiences of conducting the first two studies.

The concluding chapter thus attempts to reflect on the very process of the research strategy of this study, how it evolved, what was learned, and what kind of entrepreneurship studies might develop in the future. To perform this reflection, the study includes not only the four individual studies and the research which has formed them but also recent development in entrepreneurship studies, such as Steyaert (2011) and in process studies in organisational theory (Kristensen et al., 2014). In particular, Deleuze and Guattari's (1987/2004) concept of rhizomatic thinking and Deleuze and Foucault's (Bouchard, 1977) discussion of theoretical and practical action become particularly useful as an attempt to conceptualise the research processes and practices of the study.

# Chapter 2: Entrepreneurship studies: frontiering, moving, unveiling

This chapter reviews entrepreneurship research with the aim of providing a descriptive reading of texts that have played a crucial role in the formation of communities in entrepreneurship research. These texts have also played crucial role in this study. This review does not attempt to address entrepreneurial studies in its entirety, and should be seen as qualitative description rather than a large-scale overview. More specifically, the purpose of this review is to lay the groundwork for my approach to the study of entrepreneurship, to be outlined in Chapter 3, and to provide a broader context for, the articles in chapters 4 through 7.

This literature review presents the work of three research strategies: The first is concerned with defining the frontiers of entrepreneurship research; the second is interested in movements rather than progress; and the third applies a critical analysis to the underlying assumptions of entrepreneurship. This particular reading of the field and these three research approaches thus form the context for this dissertation. This division of entrepreneurship research resembles Jones and Spicer's (2009) review, in which they highlight three approaches which they call functionalist, interpretive and critical. Although this review revolves around the same problematic, that is a question of methodology, the research strategies described here are articulated by the communities themselves compared to Jones and Spicer's three categories, which are general terms in science.

## **Defining the frontiers of entrepreneurship research**

The main concern for this research strategy is the description of how entrepreneurship should become a research field proper. The solution to this problem, according to this perspective, is to *limit the scope of the field*. This is thought to be accomplished by agreeing on *one* definition of entrepreneurship that may generate testable hypotheses and propositions. Hence, the idea of how to create a research community is driven by the idea of a convergence of the field. The leading proponents in this strategy are Shane and Venkataraman, who are concerned by the fact that after more than 20 years of research, entrepreneurship scholars have not generated 'a theory of

entrepreneurship’. Instead, research is suffering some kind of plague of pluralism: ‘rather than explaining and predicting a unique set of empirical phenomena, entrepreneurship has become a broad label under which a hodgepodge of research is housed’ (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000: 217). According to these researchers, the lack of a coherent and unique conceptual framework means that entrepreneurship does not exist as a genuine field of research or at best, is useless: ‘For a field of social science to have usefulness, it must have a conceptual framework that explains and predicts a set of empirical phenomena not explained or predicted by conceptual frameworks already in existence in other fields’ (ibid.). The greatest risk inherent in this fear of the lack of unity in the field is that that entrepreneurship will eventually become a mere empirical setting (i.e. small and/or new firms) and a teaching application (the nuts and bolts of starting ventures) rather than a ‘unique conceptual domain’ (ibid.: 217-18). Therefore, entrepreneurship must be *separated and guarded* from other disciplines. The main competitor to entrepreneurship’s research domain is understood to be the field of strategic management, but economists and sociologists are also occupied with research problems similar to those studied by entrepreneurship scholars. The safeguarding of entrepreneurship is carried out by the strategy of refining the frontier of entrepreneurship research.

On this backdrop, Shane and Venkataraman set out to offer a framework that they believe can make entrepreneurship research scientifically valuable. The ‘largest obstacle’ (ibid.: 218) in establishing a definition of entrepreneurship, in their view, is the focus on the individual entrepreneur. Research has spent too much effort, they lament, attempting to define who this entrepreneur is, what s/he does (as outlined in Venkataraman, 1997). The single-minded focus on the individual has overlooked the presence of ‘lucrative opportunities’, which Shane and Venkataraman see as the other side of entrepreneurship:

In contrast to previous research, we define the field of entrepreneurship as the scholarly examination of how, by whom, and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and exploited (Venkataraman, 1997). Consequently, the field involves the study of *sources* of opportunities; the *processes* of discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities; and the set of *individuals* who discover, evaluate, and exploit them. (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000: 218-219, italics as in original)

In the quote above, Shane and Venkataraman state that their definition differs from previous research. According to their own premises, this is one of the requirements for the formation of entrepreneurship as a field of research: it must be unique and distinct



from previous attempts and other fields. They highlight two unique traits of their definition. The first unique trait is a process perspective. Hence, an approach that takes both the individual and the opportunity into account, what they call an opportunity-individual nexus, offers a process perspective for understanding and conceptualizing entrepreneurship. This nexus is offered as a solution to the problem of the entrepreneur in entrepreneurship research. Shane and Venkataraman return several times to this problem. They argue that it has now been proven that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate individual characteristics from the ‘population’ of entrepreneurs and the rest of the population. Entrepreneurs and ‘other’ human beings share as many individual characteristics as do two entrepreneurs. With their opportunity-individual nexus, Shane and Venkataraman aim to reduce the focus on the individual entrepreneur: ‘the answer appears to be a function of the joint characteristics of the opportunity and the nature of the individual’ (ibid.: 222). The individual still plays a crucial role in their framework, as it remains the individual’s ‘ability to discover opportunities’ that is under scrutiny. This ‘ability’ is further specified as a combination of the fact that the individual 1) has access to information; 2) is assumed to have the cognitive abilities to act on that information (ibid.).

The second unique trait is that the definition does not constrain entrepreneurship to organisation creation and SMEs. An SME may be an appropriate setting in which to study entrepreneurship, but it is not a necessary characteristic of entrepreneurship. Some SMEs are entrepreneurial and others not. Entrepreneurship can also be found in other, for-profit contexts. Likewise, some entrepreneurship includes the creation of organisation, but this is not a necessary outcome of entrepreneurial activity.

Based on their proposed definition, Shane and Venkataraman propose that entrepreneurship research focus on three research questions:

- (1) why, when, and how opportunities for the creation of goods and services come into existence;
- (2) why, when, and how some people and not others discover and exploit these opportunities;
- and (3) why, when, and how different modes of action are used to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities. (ibid.: 218)

This definition of entrepreneurship (and of how to study entrepreneurship) is one of the most well-cited passages in the entrepreneurship literature, and effectively *the* definition of entrepreneurship. The definition is taken from Venkataraman’s (1997) book chapter on ‘frontiers’ of entrepreneurship research. The original text offers a further explanation of the proposed definition that is missing in their text from 2000.

Implicit in their definition is a particular view of the nature of opportunities and individuals:

It is an underlying assumption that change is a fact of life. And the result of this natural process is both a continuous supply of lucrative opportunities to enhance personal wealth, and a continuous supply of enterprising individuals seeking such opportunities. (Venkataraman, 1997: 121)

As is clear, this idea of a ‘natural process’ that supplies opportunities and individuals resonates with natural laws where various entities exist and will continue to exist ad infinitum.

‘The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research’ (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000) is published in *Academy of Management Review*. Three responses followed their proposal, followed by a rejoinder from Shane and Venkataraman. The three responses all agree with Shane and Venkataraman’s call for ‘convergence’ of the field; that the scope of the field must be delimited by a single comprehensive framework. Singh, for example, states that:

entrepreneurship research has been criticized in the past as having breadth but little depth. In much of the extant research, scholars have drawn from theories and frameworks from other fields, such as economics, psychology, marketing, and strategy; however, without clear boundaries and/or unique variables, entrepreneurship cannot develop into a *separate* field. (2000: 10, italics as in original)

However, all three respondents disagree with the particular limits that Shane and Venkataraman propose; instead, they suggest their own set of limits, thus reproducing the ‘limitation discourse’ that characterizes the frontiering approach to entrepreneurial studies. The dialogue is concerned with what aspects should be included and excluded, and that this delimitation process can enhance the project of entrepreneurship research.

Zahra and Dess (2001) put forward three components to consider in the definition of entrepreneurship: (1) the need for an integrative framework; 2) a better understanding of opportunity explorations; 3) to better account for outcomes of opportunity exploitation. Their first point, the integrative framework thus rejects Shane and Venkataraman proposal that entrepreneurship must be separated from other fields in order to become a field proper. ‘An integrative framework’ is key in their response, as they believe that entrepreneurship studies would be better served by maintaining its relations to other disciplines, allowing for borrowing and re-vitalizing the field:

Integration, not separation, is the key to more fruitful research into entrepreneurship. Thus, while we agree with the call for delineating the domain of entrepreneurship as a field, we are concerned about attempts to separate it from other business disciplines, such as strategic management. (Zahra and Dess, 2001: 9)

Their second proposal, developing a framework that includes the outcomes of opportunity exploitation, will also help to achieve a better understanding and subsequently a better definition of 'entrepreneurial opportunities'. Their main concern here is the bias towards success in Shane and Venkataraman's framework. They fear that only those opportunities that were *successfully* exploited are counted as 'real' entrepreneurial opportunities:

Many entrepreneurial efforts succeed and lead, in turn, to the formation of new ventures and wealth creation for both the entrepreneurs and investors. More typically, of course, ventures fail. (ibid.: 8)

Likewise, they fear that a framework that counts only successful entrepreneurial outcomes might miss out on all of those opportunities that have been an impediment to success, such as when resources from a failed venture are used in a new venture, or where learning experiences pay off in the future:

Entrepreneurs (or firms) can invest in developing their human, social, and intellectual capital without having a tangible payoff in the near term. Thus, a definition of entrepreneurship as a field of scholarly inquiry should recognize the outcomes of this process, whether these outcomes are positive or negative, immediate or long term, or tangible or intangible. (ibid.: 9)

Having raised these concerns regarding outcomes, Zahra and Dess (2001) also miss the overall positive effect on human and intellectual capital as outcome of entrepreneurship: 'It is not a coincidence that countries and companies that promote entrepreneurial activities are also among the most proactive in developing and nurturing their human capital' (ibid.).

In the second response, Singh (2000) raises concerns about defining and answering the question of what constitutes an entrepreneurial opportunity. Singh finds it difficult to separate 'entrepreneurial opportunities' from 'opportunities'. His purpose here 'is not to criticize Shane and Venkataraman but to bring attention to the serious definitional issues that remain with respect to entrepreneurial opportunities' (Singh, 2000: 11). One of the problems Singh identifies is that Shane and Venkataraman seems to be drawing on Casson in their definition of entrepreneurial opportunities, implying that entrepreneurial opportunities generate profit. Singh argues that such a point of

departure means that we can only evaluate opportunities, and thus entrepreneurship, after the fact, and that the very language proposed, in Shane and Venkataraman's framework is premised on entrepreneurial success. Hence:

The very use of the terms attractive, durable, *timely*, and window of opportunity can only be applied post hoc, after the first movers (1) have developed a market and there is some data to support future opportunities or (2) have become successful. (ibid.)

Singh remarks on the difficulties in separating entrepreneurial opportunities from 'other variables' in the entrepreneurial process:

For opportunity to exist and be a construct capable of examination, it must be identifiable before the venture is founded and success gained. For any type of predictive theoretical model or longitudinal study, entrepreneurship researchers cannot rely on 20/20 hindsight to discuss entrepreneurial opportunities post hoc. The use of retrospective case studies or archival data for empirical studies of entrepreneurship over time is problematic, because bias can result when outcomes are known. (ibid.)

More than these definitional concerns, Sing is concerned about the difficulty of evaluating opportunities in practice: 'Researchers should not limit study to what they perceive to be "good" opportunities, because the entrepreneur's perceived reality of what constitutes an opportunity may be difficult to assess' (ibid.).

In the third response, Erikson (2001) seems to have misunderstood Shane and Venkataraman's definition as being applied only to entrepreneurial opportunities and not entrepreneurs as actors. Erikson (2001) therefore proposes to refine the concept of entrepreneur and entrepreneurial skills.

The definitional difficulties that Zahra and Dess and Singh, and to some extent Erikson experience with entrepreneurial opportunities clearly follows the same pattern as discussed in entrepreneurship research. There are definitional difficulties in specifying what constitutes an 'entrepreneur' and 'entrepreneurship'. While it is difficult, in their view, to distinguish entrepreneurship from other concepts such as strategic management, it is also difficult to distinguish entrepreneurial opportunities from opportunities in general. They further experience the same difficulty in practice, of separating an opportunity from a mere opportunity; entrepreneurship from other processes that could be mistaken for entrepreneurship; and an entrepreneur from a human being that is not an entrepreneur. And they share a fear that the only way of knowing that we are in fact studying an entrepreneur is by studying them in retrospect, which, in turn, might lead to a bias (i.e., that we study only successful entrepreneurs).

However, there is no debate about methods or research strategies for how to deal with these problems.

In their rejoinder to these comments in the *Academy of Management Review*, Shane and Venkataraman (2001) emphasize the need for entrepreneurship studies to differentiate itself from strategic management, while Zahra and Dess were concerned about this disciplinary fence-building. Shane and Venkataraman reiterate the need for separation: ‘We wonder why the field of entrepreneurship should exist if the field of strategy already explores this question’ (Shane and Venkataraman, 2001: 13).

Regarding Singh’s concerns over the positive bias in the proposed definition and the difficulty defining what constitutes an entrepreneurial opportunity, Shane and Venkataraman explain that ‘[s]ince most entrepreneurs fail, increasing the likelihood of exploitation means that many people exploit opportunities that are unlikely to be successful’ (ibid.: 15). In the final analysis, opportunities are *entrepreneurial* opportunities only when they turn out to be successful; hence if they are not successful, they were only opportunities. Moreover: ‘we do not argue that entrepreneurs who identify the right opportunities will always succeed. A valuable opportunity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success’ (ibid.). However, they refrain from discussing the relation between success and failure, and the difficulty of relying on these after-the-fact evaluations.

The only critique that Shane and Venkataraman find valuable is the suggestion of Zahra and Dess that outcomes should be added to the definition of entrepreneurship. Shane and Venkataraman suggest that: ‘not only should outcomes for entrepreneurs or firms be included as they [Zahra and Dess] suggest but that outcomes for industries and societies should be considered as well’ (ibid.: 14). Accordingly, they propose a refined definition:

The field of entrepreneurship should also be concerned with why, when, and in what form opportunities come into existence; when and how some people and not others discover these opportunities; when people exploit opportunities; how the nature of opportunities themselves influences the decision to exploit; why, when, and how different modes of action are used to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities; and the effect of the entrepreneurial process on society at large. (ibid.: 16)

This quote further exemplifies how the process of defining the frontier of entrepreneurship operates as a form of research practice. The end result of the debate is that Shane and Venkataraman propose a refined definition of entrepreneurship that

now takes into account that aspect they believe best sets off entrepreneurship research from neighbouring subfields. Their hope is that this new definition will unite the field. According to the logic of this research strategy, the earlier definition should herewith have been rejected (falsified). However, the definition that circulates in research today is the original definition. We will return to this in Chapter 8.

### **Research concerned with moving the field of entrepreneurship**

This section reviews the research that has been concerned with developing a processual understanding of entrepreneurship, but of a different kind than that proposed by Shane and Venkataraman. In this perspective, entrepreneurship is understood as creative organising or organisation creation, and this research, often referred to as the ‘creative process view’, encompasses a variety of perspectives (Steyaert, 2007). The creative process perspective has emerged from a critique of the functionalist approach to entrepreneurship studies, with the aim of ‘re-writing entrepreneurship’ (Hjorth, 2001). The goal is to understand entrepreneurship as something ordinary rather than extraordinary (Verduijn, 2007). This approach focuses on how we can move limits, rather than limiting, and as a response to the idea of progress through ‘convergence’, the notion of ‘movement’ is proposed as a metaphor instead (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003: 4). This approach also argues that a community of researchers should promote their differences and variation rather than pursuing some kind of unilateral project (Gartner, 2001, 2008, 2013).

#### *On assumptions in entrepreneurship research: discovery and creation*

Gartner (2001) has proposed an alternative understanding of the notion of ‘limit’ as a means of facilitating dialogue and inclusion rather than exclusion. Gartner’s text is a direct response to Shane and Venkataraman (2001), in particular their call for convergence in the field. Gartner chooses to understand Shane and Venkataraman’s appeal as a call for dialogue between different approaches and assumptions in entrepreneurship research. Based on Low and MacMillan’s (1988) six research design specifications, Gartner reviews the assumptions in Shane and Venkataraman’s proposal while also laying bare his own research agenda and understanding of entrepreneurship (research). Hence, Gartner propose that:

scholars need to recognize the very significant differences in the beliefs we hold about entrepreneurship. Recognizing that there are differences in beliefs might be a way for

entrepreneurship scholars to begin to see how these differences might be aspects of the same whole. Alternatively, there may be irreconcilable differences among our views of entrepreneurship that might result in the entrepreneurship field splintering into more parsimonious and coherent research foci. There may not be a theory of entrepreneurship that can reflect all entrepreneurship scholarship, as currently practiced. (Gartner, 2001: 28)

Gartner then provides a negative answer to his own question of whether there can be ‘a theory of entrepreneurship’. He proposes that theory can be viewed as communities (in plural) rather than unity: ‘I believe that the development of theory includes creation of a community of scholars in dialogue about a specific set of problems and issues, and who hold similar beliefs about the relevance of certain methods for solving these problems’ (ibid.: 34). Gartner argues that Shane and Venkataraman’s proposed framework should not be seen as *the* theory of entrepreneurship, but as *a* theory of entrepreneurship. And that this particular view has a potential to form the kind of vibrant research community where a fruitful understanding of entrepreneurship can be developed.

The ‘nature’ of opportunity is discussed in a 2003 book chapter that Gartner co-authored with Carter and Hills. The authors argue that opportunity has become an integral part of entrepreneurship. They further claim that ‘opportunity’ is foremost a theoretical construct, i.e., not generated from empirical facts. They even question whether entrepreneurs talk about opportunities in any way other than the way in which researchers have taught them to.

It is our fear that current theoretical speculations about the nature of opportunity may direct us towards beliefs about this phenomenon that have little basis in fact (since little evidence, at this point, exists to support any one viewpoint), and such beliefs may make it more difficult to pursue other lines of reasoning or undertake empirical explorations that may lead toward more fruitful insights. (Gartner et al., 2003: 104)

Gartner and his colleagues are thus seeking to problematize the language constraints and limits in research. To do so, they use themselves as an example of how a preconceived view can place constraints on what we see in practice. At a seminar outside Stockholm, a seminar which was the starting point for the ‘new movements in entrepreneurship’ book project (edited by Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003), when they presented their contribution, it was evident that they themselves had a North American bias: the journals they cited were primarily North American; the scholars they cited in those journals were primarily North American; the empirical examples were primarily North American; and so on. Gartner et al. make use of these insights to suggest ‘that

our ideas about opportunity are likely to limit the discourse on opportunity' (ibid.: 104), and that opening up for other perspectives (here meant European perspectives) would likely expand our understanding and knowledge of opportunities. Gartner and his colleagues then return to the theoretical construct of opportunity as proposed by Shane and Venkataraman (2001). They propose that questions based on a pre-defined theoretical construct might limit what we can study, in a similar way that Gartner et al.'s view of opportunity was limited by their North American bias:

For example, if scholars believe that opportunities are discovered, and therefore, ask the question: 'How did you discover your opportunity?' won't the responses from nascent entrepreneurs be a self-fulfilling prophecy? We believe that the language we use to explore and understand the events we observe will shape what we actually can find and know. (2003: 122)

That is, instead of learning about what entrepreneurs talk about when they talk about opportunity (if they talk about opportunity at all), researchers are better served by listening to how entrepreneurs talk about their particular theory when asked about it.

In an attempt to contrast this dominant, North American, perspective of 'opportunity discovery', they propose the term 'opportunity enactment'. This alternative perspective takes issue with Shane and Venkataraman's view of opportunities and individuals as given by nature. Gartner et al. (2003) thus propose a subjective rather than an objective view of knowledge and the world, and from this position, they can question the assumptions made in the opportunity discovery view. One such assumption is whether 'information just "is"' (ibid.: 106), that is, whether information exists irrespective of the individuals who might have access to this information. Gartner et al. propose that individuals 'act based on what they know', and that opportunities are created rather than just discovered: 'opportunities are seen to emerge out of the imagination of individuals and their interaction with others' (ibid.: 105).

To make their claims Gartner et al. draw especially on developments in organisation theory around social constructionism in general and Weick's (1979) sense-making approach in particular. As they themselves noticed, they remain within a frame of North American scholars and insights, but they open themselves up to new perspectives from this new, mostly Europe-based community they have encountered.



### *Creative process view as 'becoming'*

Two main features are introduced by Steyaert (1997). First, entrepreneurship is understood as 'a creative process' taking place in 'particular settings'. Steyaert (1997) claims that entrepreneurship studies has taken a qualitative turn, especially doctoral research. Reviewing these studies, he emphasizes both the unique qualities as well as the commonalities in this emerging approach:

What all of these examples and stories have in common is that they attempt to approach the complexity of a particular entrepreneurial setting as an ongoing process, as a process of becoming. Every entrepreneurial attempt is written on a daily basis, with many actors on multiple scenes simultaneously searching to move existing realities through creative actions into new worlds. Entrepreneurship is a creative process enacted through everyday practices: It is never done, and always going on, a journey more with surprises than with predictable patterns. As such, every entrepreneurial endeavour follows and writes its own story. (ibid.: 15)

Clearly, Steyaert understands entrepreneurship as process. This was not something new in itself, the process perspective had long been advanced as a way out of the focus on the individual that haunted entrepreneurship studies (compare Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) proposition a few years later). However, according to Steyaert (1997), up to this point, researchers have responded to this call by primarily 'using a process language, focusing on dilemmas and framing events' that is, attempts to 'address "a process"' (ibid.: 19). Steyaert does not deny the importance of language, but his argument is that a processual approach must be theorized:

it requires a theory of language that explains the discursive impact in the construction of reality (Steyaert, 1995). From such a language theory, it can be claimed that 'words are deeds' and that through the ways we talk about entrepreneurship we also shape it. (ibid.: 18)

Steyaert shares several assumptions with Gartner et al.'s (2003) proposal for social constructionism mentioned above (and from the quote, Steyaert [1995] makes use of social constructionism as a theoretical lens). The language theory that Steyaert (1997) proposes here is a radicalised view, in that Steyaert departs 'from a discussion of entrepreneurship as a process and seeks to embed this concept within a paradigm of "becoming"' (ibid.: 15). Steyaert's proposal is broader than social constructionism, and has ontological and epistemological consequences. Social constructionism could be seen as one possible approach under this umbrella of process studies (e.g. Steyaert, 2007). Steyaert does not argue for a particular theoretical perspective (such as

discourse theory, social constructionism, pragmatism, and so on). He is open to process studies as ‘creative becoming’ (and social constructionism is one perspective here).

The notion of ‘becoming’ is developed through an engagement with process philosophy. Steyaert uses Heraclitus’ flux metaphor ‘*panta rhei*’, as the starting point in Western philosophy to ‘postulate a process of becoming as the basic reality of the world’ (Steyaert, 1997: 19). Steyaert then draws on Whitehead, who, according to Steyaert, ‘linked a dynamic approach to reality with creativity’ (ibid.: 20). For Steyaert, process philosophy provides a foundation for understanding entrepreneurship as a creative activity. Further, Whitehead and process philosophy in general, focus on the event: ‘Whitehead takes reality’s quality of becoming as his main philosophical point of departure. Reality is always in movement and changing, it is an adventure’ (ibid.).

Steyaert argues that entrepreneurship studies faces a challenge of representation in its research accounts:

Reality is not only to be understood as that which must be represented, or as something of which one becomes conscious, but it assumes a series of possibilities. Every reality is active creation, and bears creativity in it, minimal as this may seem. (ibid.: 21)

For Steyaert, this means that a researcher creates reality regardless of whether he or she is attempting to accurately represent reality. A further challenge to entrepreneurship studies is to organize studies that can manage such ‘local complexities’ and ‘processes-in-context’:

The field requires here a kind of entrepreneurial imagination with regard to ‘methods’ where scholars are eager to be their own methodologists and to invent research practices helpful in documenting the specific entrepreneurial activities they are involved with through specific ways of generating, analyzing, interpreting and reporting. (ibid.: 27)

Stories and narratives are proposed as a means of enabling the researcher to present locally valid accounts of creative becoming: ‘The general thesis of this paper is that entrepreneurship has an interest in conceiving the core of its research as developing local knowledge through “writing narratives”’ (ibid.: 1) and ‘[t]he story is thus a suitable form of writing for the local and contextualized knowledge entrepreneurship research can aim for’ (ibid.: 30).

Apart from a radicalised qualitative approach, Steyaert has also argued for an understanding of entrepreneurship as a societal phenomenon, whereas for Shane and

Venkataraman (2000), entrepreneurship is strictly for-profit. Steyaert and Katz problematize this notion, proposing that entrepreneurship should be approached ‘as a societal phenomenon rather than as a purely economic reality’ (2004: 181). They see a need for explorations into ‘how entrepreneurship is part of how our societies, communities, and worlds are created, taking into account, besides economic criteria, social, cultural, political, and ecological realities’ (ibid.: 179). Steyaert and Katz put forward three propositions that could be explored:

- 1) bringing entrepreneurship into its social context says that entrepreneurship takes place in multiple sites and spaces (many more than the ones currently considered).
- 2) these spaces are political spaces that can be constituted through a variety of discourses overcoming the sole economic definition of the societal contexts that impact and are impacted by entrepreneurship.
- 3) entrepreneurship is a matter of everyday activities rather than actions of elitist groups of entrepreneurs. (ibid.: 180)

These propositions all reveal an understanding of entrepreneurship as contextually sensitive. Such approaches, the argument goes, will lead us to new and perhaps unusual places and spaces.

### *Movement instead of progress*

Steyaert and Hjorth (2003) propose that ‘movement’ replace ‘progress’ as the metaphor to use when reflecting about entrepreneurship as a field of research. The author’s note that there is a long tradition of reflecting upon the progress and state of the field, and the ‘*Movements in Entrepreneurship Series*’, a series of four volumes, is meant to provide such space for reflection and review. The book series should thus be seen as an attempt to provide space for reflection of ‘movements from the past’ but also to ‘move the past’: ‘when a field wants to survive in the long run, it needs to invest in innovative ideas and approaches *while* one is learning to harvest efforts from the past’ (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003: 6, italics as in original). They further claim that entrepreneurship is no longer an emerging field. It *is* a field. This is an important statement, as they contrast this with the view that while being an emerging field, explorative studies are encouraged, but to become a field proper, we must gradually leave such approaches and do ‘real’ science (e.g. Low and MacMillan, 1988; Shane, 2000). They thus propose the metaphor of ‘movement’ instead of ‘progress’ as a new guiding principle for entrepreneurship studies to

alter its explorative mode into a mode of experimenting and radicalizing. Not a matter of testing the water but rather of swimming along with the flow – consequently – wherever that can bring us in our research. A matter of changing its boundaries rather than exploiting them. (ibid.: 4)

For Hjorth and Steyaert, ‘movement’ has several connotations:

1) movement as in moving obstacles, getting things out of the way and pointing into new directions; 2) movement as becoming moved through passion and play; 3) movement as the organizing collective that is changing practices; and 4) movement as the process that keeps us moving on. (ibid.: 7)

Steyaert and Hjorth argue that the task of a field of research is to experiment and radicalise:

The ‘field’ (a rather curious metaphor) is an often-used way of referring to an unstable community of thought created by questions/problems approached as belonging to – in this case – entrepreneurship. This includes belonging to the practices of entrepreneurship, such as they are identified, and belonging to the conceptual frame through which practices of entrepreneurship are described. What is identified as entrepreneurship depends on what is described as entrepreneurship, which, in turn, depends on what people do as they perform entrepreneurship, or the other way around. (ibid.: 11)

Instead of a call for unifying or limiting the field, the editors call for the ‘multiplying of entrepreneurship’. Multiplying of entrepreneurship should be understood as a starting point, an opening, ‘which requires that we not only accept and recognize different (paradigmatic) positions but also systematically develop them’ (ibid.: 5). This stands in contrast to ‘unified science’ ideal of Comte, or idea of convergence that is advocated for example by Shane and Venkataraman (2000):

this book acknowledges that entrepreneurship is not, will not, and should not be a unified field; rather we try to think how to live with the consequences of the idea that there is not one entrepreneurship but that there are many entrepreneurships. (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003: 4)

Steyaert and Hjorth here relate to Gartner’s (2001) idea of creating communities in entrepreneurship studies, and the method they suggest is ‘to make a difference through repetition and concentration’ (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003: 6). The frequent use of enactment indicates that this is a political project for the editors, and they are seeking a transformation: ‘We try to enact the idea that what entrepreneurship needs is an intensification of its thinking and researchers by connecting projects, approaches, concepts and practical insights into specific and dialogical communities’ (ibid.: 4).

The dominance of North America in entrepreneurship research is articulated several times throughout the book. Not only is the field dominated by individuals residing in North America, but they rely almost exclusively from U.S. data, theories from the U.S., they publish in U.S.-based journals, referencing other scholars from the U.S., and so on. Part of the movements project, according to Steyaert and Hjorth, is to bring in other perspectives, connecting relations globally. In the preface, Jerome Katz describes two perspectives dominating the first movements book:

One model is rooted in economics and institutional theory, and looks at issues of opportunity and resources. The other is rooted in critical studies and comparative methodology, and looks for the play of countervailing forces, and the dialectic discourses. (Katz, 2003: xiv)

The first volume in the movements project thus concerns itself with moving the field of entrepreneurship. The second set of articles, from 2004, presents narrative and discursive approaches. Here they further develop this idea of movements: ‘The idea is that a simultaneous combination of a stringent focus and new simulation can create an intensification in how we study entrepreneurship, resulting in new movements’ (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004: 1). In this second volume, the editors elaborate on their view of entrepreneurship and how it could be researched:

we prefer to refer to entrepreneurship as forms of social creativity, taking place primarily in societal rather than in business contexts. Entrepreneurship is a societal force: it changes our daily practices and the way we live; it invents futures in populating histories of the present, here and now. In such processes, entrepreneurial processes, the present and the future is organized in stories and conversations, the primary form of knowledge used in everyday practices. (ibid.: 3-4)

Where the first movements book discussed practices for ‘moving the field’ (what should we research and how), the second book discusses practices of conceptualisation or ‘moving concepts’ (alternate meaning and describing changes in meaning).

### **Research as a critical unveiling of entrepreneurship**

The third approach to the study of entrepreneurship that is important for this study, is ‘a critical approach towards entrepreneurship research’ (c.f. Hjorth, et al., 2008; Tedmanson et al., 2012). This research includes early critiques of taken for granted assumptions in entrepreneurship research and practice by deploying discourse analyses, such as Ogbor (2000), Ahl (2002), Perren and Jennings (2005), Sørensen (2008); as well as researchers who have migrated from Critical Management Studies (CMS) such as du Gay (2001), Armstrong (2005), Jones and Spicer (2005; 2009); plus

attempts to analyse the 'darker sides' of entrepreneurship, such as a special issue in *Organization* (Tedmanson, et al., 2012), and Sørensen (2006).

Although there are critiques that predate that of Jones and Spicer (2005), their article can be said to have set the tone and open up a space where philosophically oriented research could be carried out and get published. Their paper remains one of the most cited in critical entrepreneurship studies. This and other critical papers emanated from an ideology critique (Ogbor, 2000 and Armstrong, 2005). This dissertation's entry to this strategy goes through deconstruction, as performed by Derrida, where deconstruction is viewed as an umbrella for a kind of analysis fit for engaging in processes of unmasking or, in the terminology here, unveiling. The unveiling process focuses on hidden agendas, exposing taken for granted assumptions and criticizing ideology.

### *Research as unmasking entrepreneurship*

Concern over the difficulty to define the entrepreneur is the theme of Jones and Spicer's (2005) seminal paper. Supported by Ogbor (2000) and Armstrong (2001), they argue that the entrepreneurship research discourse as a whole has failed to provide an answer to the question, 'Who is the entrepreneur?' They maintain that '*the* defining feature of entrepreneurship discourse is the consistent and congenital failure to identify the entrepreneur positively' (Jones and Spicer, 2005: 235, italics as in original). Yet this is seen not as a failure, but as a paradoxical (and eventually impossible) insight that inadvertently underlies entrepreneurship research:

But what if research into the entrepreneur has, in its very failure, identified something critically important about the operation of the category of the entrepreneur, that is, that it is essentially indefinable, vacuous, empty? What if entrepreneurship research has not failed at all, but has uncovered something significant about the underlying structure of entrepreneurship discourse, that is, that 'the entrepreneur' is an empty signifier, an open space or 'lack' whose operative function is not to 'exist' in the usual sense but to structure phantasmic attachment? (ibid.)

With this, Jones and Spicer succeed in establishing a fundamental critique of entrepreneurship research. The core concept of this research – the entrepreneur – is a fantasy figure around which the research community builds its work. This fantasy figure – the entrepreneurial super hero – becomes the protagonist in the stories that we tell. Otherwise we will discover, Jones and Spicer argue, that far from the hero that we have elevated him to be, Bill Gates is just a normal human being. Hence, 'it is

precisely the paradoxical and apparently mysterious nature of entrepreneurship discourse that allows it to be so effective in enlisting budding entrepreneurs and reproducing the current relations of economic domination' (ibid.: 237). This perspective is further developed in their book *Unmasking the Entrepreneur* (2009) where they investigate several characteristics of entrepreneurship (entrepreneurship's values, moral and ethical assumptions as well as legal assumptions). Here we will examine their approach to critical analysis, which is characteristic for the unveiling approach to entrepreneurship. Jones and Spicer's interest in entrepreneurship is part of a larger investigation of 'the function of ideology in reproducing capitalist social formations' (ibid.: 223). They are not interested in achieving a 'better understanding' of the entrepreneur. This is the aim for much of the 'unveiling entrepreneurship' research, although it is possible to embark on a critical analysis without sharing this aim. Jones and Spicer outline their critical approach thusly:

This critical approach broadly seeks to question the category of the entrepreneur. It does so by focusing on the politics associated with the category of entrepreneurship, and asks who can and cannot count as an entrepreneur, and what is involved representing someone as such. It involves asking what is at stake when we call someone an entrepreneur, and the way that entrepreneurship is further used to embed power relations. (ibid.: 6)

Jones and Spicer applies a method of unmasking, what they term – engaging Heidegger (2002) – a 'forgotten' concept of truth. Regarding Heidegger's (2002) two concepts of truth, the first is the idea of 'truth as "correctness"' (Jones and Spicer, 2009: 4) the second

is the idea of truth as 'unconcealing'. Following this idea, the task of thinking is not to find a pre-existing truth, but rather a matter of struggling to move away from the particular ways in which we happen to be blinded at a particular moment. Truth as unconcealing is not a matter of accuracy but rather a matter of invention. It is not a matter of discovery but a matter of production. (ibid.)

Unmasking 'can be thought of in a similar way' (ibid.). There is an embedded critique of the interpretivist paradigm in general and more specifically, social constructionism in Jones and Spicer's work. They agree with the social constructionist that truth 'is not so much a matter of revelation as of negotiation. Truth is socially constructed and contested, and cannot simply be read off from the nature of the world' (ibid.: 3). As they maintain a need for 'unmasking', they do not believe that:

any way of reading the world is as good as any other, nor that the consequences of different readings are morally equivalent. But more so, we think that many otherwise well-meaning

liberal academics have retreated from taking responsibility for the claims that continue to circulate in public life. (ibid.: 4)

And even if we cannot get to the truth by our critical inquiries, '[f]rom where we stand, such radical extension would recognise that the task ahead of us is no longer to interpret entrepreneurship, but rather to change it' (ibid.: 26).

### *Ideology critique via discourse analysis and deconstruction*

The frontiering strategy in entrepreneurship discourse, as argued, has received its share of critique for its focus on alert individuals who find opportunities. This has led to a search for certain traits and specific types of individuals to fill the role of the entrepreneur through analyzing historical, quantitative data. Unsurprisingly, an entrepreneur often turns out to be a white Anglo-Saxon middle-aged man. This view of entrepreneurship has had great influence on policy development, in both the United States and in the European Union, and has continued to dominate the policy view on entrepreneurship.

An early example of unveiling, aiming at a critique of the fixation on the individual in the public and research discourse, is Perren and Jennings' (2005) analysis of government web sites. Through their discourse analysis, they highlight a 'do-good' aspect of entrepreneurship. Further, they analyse the paradoxical relation of the discourse which simultaneously sees entrepreneurs as heroes, but also as 'dependents that must be helped because they cannot, or cannot be trusted to help themselves' (Perren and Jennings, 2005: 181). That is, entrepreneurship is seen as something good, hence we need more of it, but we cannot rely on the entrepreneurs for this important feature of the economy (and economic growth). Hence, we must support (and control) them. Rehn and Taalas (2004) attempt a similar unveiling of taken for granted aspects of entrepreneurship discourse, namely, that we accept at face value that entrepreneurship is entirely part of the formal and legal economy. They further argue, in line with both the moving and the unveiling programs, that research should look at 'unusual' places, in their case the *blat* system in Russia and crack cocaine trade in suburban areas.

Bill (2006) builds on and expands Jones and Spicer's conception of the empty signifier, showing through structural myth analysis as well as a Deleuzian analysis that the entrepreneurial tales follow a certain script. Entrepreneurs are evaluated after the fact, and only the successful become elevated as objects of analysis. Bill's study



further tries to demonstrate that the individualism of the entrepreneur is enforced in the entrepreneurial tale; when someone is elevated to status an entrepreneur, there also has to be a counter image, a non-entrepreneur and moreover, it seems to be arbitrary who gets inscribed as entrepreneur. These subject positions can change.

The concerns regarding individualism in entrepreneurship studies have so far been put forward mainly as a critique of the promotion of a heroic imagery of entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2002; Pettersson 2002; Gabriel, 2004; Bruni et al., 2005; Hatch et al., 2005; Verduijn, 2007; Sørensen, 2008). As such imagery excludes and silences any number of aspects of the entrepreneurial process pivotal to a socially productive entrepreneurship, a post-heroic approach becomes fitting. This research then draws on either narrative theory to analyse these images of the entrepreneur, and/or feminist theory and gender studies. A forerunner here is Ahl's dissertation, published as *The Making of the Female Entrepreneur* (2002). Ahl applies the method of deconstruction, a quite common form of analysis within the frame of unveiling. Analyzing research texts, she has demonstrated the differences in how men and women are described, but also how entrepreneurs were described in research texts; always with positive connotations. Through various forms of deconstruction analysis, it is argued that women are primarily described as 'the other'; this is the deconstruction of the hero in entrepreneurship research (Gherardi, 1995; Ahl, 2002; Pettersson, 2002; Bruni et al., 2005). This research is closely related to the moving strategy, where gender critique remains an important aspect. In this review, gender critique is described as an unveiling strategy, since feminist critique has the aim of unveiling the taken for granted and hidden structures rather than proposing alternative understandings. In the moving project, discourse analysis is used as a means of elucidating and increasing the understanding of the entrepreneurial process, while in the unveiling project, it is used as ideological critique. As said earlier, however, many of these researchers, if faced with these divisions, would argue that they could belong to both camps, and often both at once.

The post-heroic approach has been further developed by Sørensen in his work on entrepreneurial subjectivity (2006, 2008 and 2014 together with Garmann Johnsen). Bringing in theological perspectives to entrepreneurship discourse, Sørensen (2008) demonstrates that this tendency to see creativity/entrepreneurship/innovation as the driving forces for economic development has even overt, religious connotations, where the character of the entrepreneur becomes a 'saviour'. Taken together, such a metaphysical view of entrepreneurship discourse has quite naturally led to rather

normative conclusions: If we only try harder and better, we will have better entrepreneurship, more entrepreneurship, and this will ultimately lead to economic growth and a better life for everyone (Perren and Jennings, 2005).

### *'A European School' of entrepreneurship studies*

The idea of a European School of entrepreneurship stems from a series of papers in a special issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, edited by Hjorth, Jones and Gartner in 2008. Publishing the collection of papers in the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* and explicitly stating that these were examples of a 'European School' of entrepreneurship was, as the editors also claim themselves, a political act, meant to form and perform this as a 'tradition' under which researchers could gather and do research. Naming it 'European', of course, was meant to emphasize the dominance of American research in entrepreneurship studies, creating space for the myriad of studies that could be said to be forming an 'alternative' or 'other' to the dominant functionalist programme. This strategy resembles the call from Gartner (2001), to form research communities that was later picked up by Steyaert and Hjorth (2003).

The critique towards the dominant approaches is explicit and quite harsh. The editors draw on process philosophy in their language, when they speak of this 'European School' as a 'minor' literature that 'can call the major to account' (Hjorth et al., 2008: 81). The major can no longer ignore the minor, the editors claim, not without this being 'a sign of distorted attention, poor scholarship or ideological prejudgment' (ibid.). The editors claim that this research is uncreative and decontextualised:

First, the currently dominant approaches in entrepreneurship scholarship are uncreative. Indeed, the dominant approach appears to actively discourage creativity. It does this by the imposition of rigidifying norms and ossifying expectations that, although justified in various ways, are not the result of a respect for rigor, for science, or for the various representations of truth. On the contrary, the stabilisations and 'normalisations' of entrepreneurship research are more the result of a prejudice, referred to by majority-voices as 'normal', in favour of the safe, and an often unvoiced concern that if entrepreneurship research were creative then it might also be transformative, radical, questioning and inventive.

The second claim we advance here is that although entrepreneurship always emerges from a particular context, entrepreneurship research has been remarkably unable to speak about context. Instead, the dominant approach has sought 'general laws' of entrepreneurship which might transcend context, and in doing so has been tempted by accounts of entrepreneurship that are removed from context and are thus decontextualized. (ibid.: 82)

These two claims are what distinguish this ‘minor literature’ of a ‘European School of entrepreneurship’ studies from its major counterpart: ‘a distinct value on creativity and context’ (ibid.: 81). The editors give three examples of what ‘creative’ and ‘contextual’ might mean for entrepreneurship studies. Firstly, the European approach:

pays explicit attention to social and cultural context. Not in the sense that these might be variables that account for modifications of the same general tendency, but rather that these are potent and important forces in their own right. When the dominant approach presents itself as universal, it is, in fact, universalising a set of particular social and cultural assumptions and values. That is, no text of literary or scientific value can avoid being fiction in the sense of being made out of both imagination and available resources of narration and description. Creative and contextualised research is then better at avoiding the loss of realism – being in touch with the real – that results from pressing an elevated form of representation upon the material at the same time as the imaginative faculty of the analyst/writer is officially covered. (ibid.: 82)

The second and third points that follow from this is that a European School makes use of, and aims at contributing to, the social and human sciences. It thus provides new opportunities for knowledge, as it alternates the language and models produced by entrepreneurship research which draw on economics, mathematics and natural science. Such approaches, moreover, ‘create new concepts of what entrepreneurship means, and thus allow entrepreneurship to generate new contexts’ (ibid.).

Clearly, the ‘European School’ bears traces from Steyaert’s (1997) early work on creative process as ‘becoming’ and locally valid accounts, which was further developed in Steyaert and Hjorth (2003). It also bears traces from Jones and Spicer (2009) and their emphasis on changing entrepreneurship and its practices. Under the ‘European School’, the unveiling, moving and enacting strategies are thus coming together to critique the functionalist programme and propose alternatives. Hjorth et al., (2008) also argue for studies that allow researchers to apply both empirically grounded work and critical thinking; contextualisation and creativity. They further emphasise that they are not proposing a ‘paradigm’, but rather a multiplicity of studies, a space for debate, an openness to the other; a ‘process of achieving “belonging”, based upon an ethics of caring for this becoming of a new entrepreneurship research’ (ibid.: 83). A ‘European school’ is a broad label, with many debates, but it is precisely its breadth that is also its strength. It allows for researchers to approach and interrogate entrepreneurship from different angles through processes of agreement and disagreement. The continued debate will ensure its future if the debate allows scholars to come together rather than keeping them out or apart.

# Chapter 3: Methodological reflections

This chapter presents the methodological approach of the PhD dissertation and the methodological context for the four core articles. Since each individual article has its own research question, method, empirical context and data analysis, this chapter does not include a presentation of the individual studies.

Obilic, Central Kosovo/a, November 2005. On the porch of a house, a small café has been set up. Two small plastic tables have been chunked together with eight chairs around them. The café is actually a private house that also sells coffee. I have been placed in the middle. There's the nervous shop owner running in and out with macchiato coffees. As I am the international guest, I am served first. Sitting in the other chairs are: two Swedish soldiers from the NATO Kosovo/a Protection Force (KFOR), their interpreter, my interpreter (a student who speaks some English because I cannot afford a professional interpreter), a 'friend' sitting on one chair (perhaps a local police or local representative of some kind? Perhaps a spy? I'm not sure). There is also a husband present, another interpreter from the municipality, who seems to be there in support of my interviewee. The interviewee is a woman who owns a plastic bag company in Obilic. No tape recorder is allowed for the interview. Everything this woman tells me gets translated three times, all while my interpreter and the municipality's interpreter are arguing (one is Albanian, the other Serb).

Växjö, Sweden, May 2007. A conference room, comfortable chairs around a large conference table in the municipality building. Three researchers and five small business owners. Coffee and laughter. After a few minutes, the senior researcher announces to the group:

We told you that we were going to talk about the conditions for SME owners, but we are not. OK, we have chosen a perhaps unusual set-up for today's session. You represent a board at a firm. There is a stressful situation at hand, and the board needs to act immediately. The background to the board meeting today can be found in the hand-out in front of you. I suggest that you read this before we continue.

What kind of research approach can allow for these two accounts to produce knowledge together? What assumptions are made? These are the questions raised in this chapter.

## **Creating and representing through language**

As the two episodes described above indicate, this talk about local complexities and locally valid accounts (Steyaert, 1997) is not just something to be mentioned in a methodological section. These are research practices, complex and messy. The discussion has emerged from experience in the field. It is what a researcher is faced with when conducting empirical investigations. Not to take this into account, to find a number of generalizable traits and strip the cases from their unique qualities calls into question the very rationale for doing empirical research. That is the reason why a research report based on qualitative studies, often ventures into methodological reflection. Just like we often turn to theory to help us make sense of our results, we turn to theory of knowledge to help organize our studies. Hence, in this chapter we review a number of assumptions and choices made in the studies so as to clarify the position of the study and to reflect upon the consequences.

This study is placed within a constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology. Moreover, it engages with process philosophy and, thus, metaphysics. Based on Steyaert (1997), three assumptions are made: 1) the world is the outcome of a creatively constructed activity and not something existing independent of the researcher's gaze; 2) that multiple perspectives are more productive than a 'one truth' approach; 3) that locally valid theories are to be preferred to overarching theories (adapted from Steyaert, 1997).

The processual approach that Steyaert (1997) proposes not only challenges the idea of representation. Qualitative research such as ethnography always challenges representation. It is a basic assumption in ethnographic fieldwork that the researcher is part of the field that is being studied. Still, there are traces of a desire to represent that remain in ethnography, where the argument goes that proximity will present a better view than distance, even if the aim is not accuracy. A processual approach turns this around, and claims that we not only present our objects of study, we create them.

This notion of creation places focus on language in research, as this is the medium we use to create our knowledge. In traditional science, such as the strategy of fronting as described in Chapter 2, language is seen as given to us, with terms such as 'opportunities' and 'enterprising individuals'. Language is unproblematic; it is a medium to carry; through language, the world can be described. Colebrook (2002) compares this view with structural analysis, where language is a closed system of signifier-signified-sign. An object or subject can thus be traced back to its origin, to its

core; this is the work of structural analysis. Such a view is sometimes called ‘hard ontology’ and following such an approach, a researcher is the objective observer whose task is to present the world, the truth as it is. In a processual approach of the moving and unveiling strategies, language plays a different role in generating knowledge compared with fronting. Language is here a ‘differential force that produces speaking positions’ (Colebrook, 2002: 76). What does this mean? According to Colebrook, it means that the researcher’s task is not to portray the world as it is, nor to discover facts or uncover evidence to confirm one hypothesis or the other. Rather, the processual researcher performs and enacts research. The processual researcher is thus a part of the object studied. The processual researcher is a co-creator of the world being described (Steyaert, 2011). Such a position entails a degree of responsibility, and we need to create concepts and tools that allow us to assume this methodological responsibility. Theory is both relational and performative: its function is to relate, and by relating it is enacting.

In this study, the starting point, as stated above has always been these radical ideas of Steyaert (1997), but the insight generated by its radicalness and its consequences has emerged and developed with time and experience. As an example, the first study was inspired by ideas of entrepreneurship from the perspective of social and creative organising. Further the study was inspired by organizational theory, particularly Sahlin-Andersson and Sevón’s (2003) account of ostensive and performative definitions. As a researcher, this was my first encounter with ideas of the performative, and I did not reflect upon it further, noting only that 1) a concept or phenomenon should be locally defined rather than a definition being applied to all contexts; 2) to achieve this, the researcher must construct her study, for example ask open questions, in such a way that it allows for these definitions or local views to emerge.

Another concern in defining entrepreneurship (locally) was Gartner et al.’s (2003) issue of ‘how we talk about entrepreneurship’. If we ask how an ‘opportunity’ was discovered, we have constricted the informant to tell a story related to this particular discovery. Viewing language as performative has been utilised in discursive and narrative approaches in entrepreneurship research (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004). Such approaches place emphasis on how ‘entrepreneurial language’, the way we speak of entrepreneurship, forms entrepreneurship (Hjorth, 2001; 2003). These insights are relevant for our own research practices, for public discourse as well as in our everyday lives. From these ideas, I developed an interest in following how discourse is performed in different arenas. Hence, the study sought to collect stories and narratives

from local contexts in order to show how (entrepreneurial) language was articulated and performed.

Already in the second study, with female entrepreneurs in Kosovo/a, this view was challenged. The premises were still valid, that entrepreneurship should be locally defined and that ‘how we talk about entrepreneurship’ was important. But I quickly concluded that ‘how they were talking’ was, well, wrong (‘there are no female entrepreneurs in Kosovo’) and that the task of the research project become that of trying to change the view of female entrepreneurs as non-existent, to make them visible. As might be clear from the anecdote in Obilic, the approach of performative definition in terms of asking open questions and allowing for the interviewee’s stories to define my concept would not work. The responsibility for constructing these stories was mine as a researcher rather than my informants’. These experiences guided me to the two last studies, where I experiment with the notions of representing and performing. Hence, the dissertation was focused on language, but my understanding of the role of language has been transformed through the individual studies.

### **Narratives as forms of local knowledge**

Narratives as a local form of knowledge, are emphasised in Steyaert’s 1997 article and the view of entrepreneurship as social creativity, the sociality of entrepreneurship and the little narrative as form of knowledge is further developed in Hjorth and Steyaert:

we prefer to refer to entrepreneurship as forms of social creativity, taking place primarily in societal rather than in business contexts. Entrepreneurship is a societal force: it changes our daily practices and the way we live; it invents futures in populating histories of the present, here and now. In such entrepreneurial processes, the present and the future are organized in stories and conversations, the primary form of knowledge used in everyday practices. (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004: 3-4)

All four of the core studies in this dissertation use a qualitative methodology, and in particular organisational ethnography as described by Kostera (2007). Czarniawska (2004) argues that narratives provide modes of knowing; communication; and guidance as to how we live our lives. This view thus proposes that narratives can provide knowledge of lived experiences, of everyday practices of our lives:

If we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experiences, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experiences of people, if we wish for a union between poetics and science, or of we wish to use our privileges and skills to empower the people we

study, then we should value the narrative. (Richardsson, 1990: 133-134, in Steyaert, 2004: 15)

Above it was claimed that a creative world view implies that language is active rather than passive, prompting us to a focus on discourse, as well as narratives. At the beginning of my research, discursive approaches meant a general interest in language, as described in the previous section, rather than as a tool for ideological critique. Hjorth and Steyaert (2004) propose that an interest in language (discourse) and stories (narratives) represent a combined approach and are difficult to keep separated: 'All chapters in this book, whether they start with a narrative emphasis or a discursive persuasion, have sooner or later to address the connection between narration and discourse' (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004: 1). Steyaert further specifies that 'language-based approaches to entrepreneurial processes are all conversational research practices that allow us to address the everydayness – the prosaics – of entrepreneurship' (Steyaert, 2004: 8). Steyaert's (2004) book chapter on the 'prosaics of entrepreneurship' has served as a great source of inspiration for my own work, both from a methodological and theoretical perspective. Here, entrepreneurship research took a new direction in the re-focus in the everyday and routine instead of the spectacular and successful character that had often served as focus (e.g. Bill et al., 2009). Boutiba (2004) is another example of this emerging prosaic turn as is Verduijn (2007). Steyaert argued here that the strength of the language-oriented approaches are the conversations between them, not the single application, and he outlines 'a conversation, an informal exchange of views that can connect the various linguistically inspired frameworks in entrepreneurship studies and refocus them as "conversational studies" of entrepreneurial life' (Steyaert, 2004: 8). Steyaert's view of conversational studies is in line with the quote above on the relation between narrative and discursive approaches, and to Steyaert's (1997) early ideas of qualitative research, becoming and the locally valid account. Steyaert's version of a conversational approach, which I understand as an approach open to a variety of perspectives, 'stresses that entrepreneurship is a form a co-authorship in the form of collective stories, dramatic scripts, generative metaphors and concurring discourses' (Steyaert, 2004: 9). Entrepreneurship is

enacted through daily activities and interaction. It is a social process that requires study in such a way that the approach does not kill what it tries to study, and respects the eventness of the event through which it proceeds. By approaching entrepreneurship as a prosaics, we can situate its formation there where it happens and where it can happen: as lived experience, as story, as drama, as conversation, as performance, in all its everydayness. (ibid.: 19)



Here, too, the critique of the functionalist programme is evident, with the focus on the routine character of entrepreneurship, its prosaics, forms an alternative to model-building or general concepts. Prosaics foregrounds the importance of ‘the everyday and the ordinary, the familiar and the frequent, the customary and the accustomed, the mediocre and the inferior’ (ibid.: 9). It is a way of using the little narrative, even the individual account, to tell stories, ‘not in the first place as characteristic of the author but as a part of the genre’ (ibid.).

An important aspect of the moving strategy is that it does not suggest *one* new singular approach. It advocates multiplicity (as seen in Chapter 2). We are not proposing an alternative understanding of entrepreneurship, but rather one that is complementary to others. The aim of the narrative interest is to be able to include ‘the playful, moving, creative, and dramatic characteristics of entrepreneurial processes so often lost in representation dominated by economism and managerialism’ (Hjorth, 2007: 715).

Hjorth proposes such complementary understanding of entrepreneurship to the mainstream definition of entrepreneurship ‘opportunity recognition’ (that Shane and Venkataraman are promoting, for example). He argues for ‘opportunity creative’, with emphasis on time and the event, thus placing focus on the process instead of result. A narrative approach is developed that ‘open up previously marginalised sides of the process’ (Hjorth, 2007: 714). For Hjorth, it is both a methodological question and a theoretical one: how to study and understand? How do we tell stories of entrepreneurship? And how do entrepreneurs tell stories of entrepreneurship?

New sides of the entrepreneurship story, as it is written in Western business schools, are hereby disclosed, and we are invited to write a transformative literature on entrepreneurship. A literature occupied with the lives of passion, affect, wit, sensitivities and not only economy, calculation, scientific rationality and strategic decision making. I believe such literature on entrepreneurship, centering on opportunity creation, is a crucial complement to the still dominant story of opportunity discovery/evaluation/exploitation. A narrative-genealogic approach takes us there. (ibid.: 714)

Entrepreneurship, or opportunity creation, is further reinforced as ‘everyday practices’, different from the strategic approach to opportunity, as put forth by, for example, Shane and Venkataraman (2000). Hjorth provides two main explanations for why an opportunity recognition approach might be inadequate: ‘One reason is that strategic processes of opportunity utilisation will always lose themselves to a rationalism that fuels the dominant strategic management or organisational decision making theories’ (2007: 716). The second explanation is that these theories, also in their reworked

forms, such as new institutionalism and resource-based view focus on means-ends relations, and thus ‘theorise order’ (ibid.). Hence,

when approaching organisations with an interest in entrepreneurial processes, we would benefit from an awareness of this modernist characteristics of organised work, understanding it previously as a limited conceptualisation setting the stage for managerial knowledge and the subject position as manager. (ibid.: 717)

To discuss what entrepreneurship is, can be and how it should be studied is as important for Steyaert and Hjorth as it is for those whom they criticize. Since Steyaert (1997), considerable effort has been spent to show the inadequacies of strategic, economic and managerial approaches to entrepreneurship, with an appeal for ‘an alternative and potentially complementing approach [...] that will allow us to tell hitherto silenced stories of entrepreneurship’ (Hjorth, 2007: 718).

All four articles in this dissertation seek to highlight the relation between the grand narrative and petit story of entrepreneurship, as described by Steyaert (2004) and Hjorth (2007), respectively. This interest in not only describing but also transforming the grand narratives of entrepreneurship and places this PhD dissertation in a ‘post-heroic’ approach to entrepreneurship, where the ordinary and everyday is emphasised (Verdujin, 2007). Seminal studies, such as that of Ahl (2002), have shown how the dominant view of entrepreneurship describes entrepreneurship as an individual endeavour; that the stories follow the heroic tale (Hatch et al., 2005). This has also been described as a grand narrative, a narrative of economic growth, individual achievements, ‘economic man’ (e.g. Hjorth, 2001).

### **Reflexivity and responsibility**

As Hjorth (2007) proposes, the narrative as a form of knowledge can be seen as an alternative or complement to other kinds of data, such as quantitative data. In this last section of this chapter, I will discuss one such alternative data source, the case study.

Quantitative oriented researchers such as Shane and Venkataraman and others who have operated under the banner of what I call ‘frontiering’ also work with qualitative data. Typically, they present case studies, as outlined by Yin (1984). Yin’s case study is one of the views that are acceptable within this research strategy, and the method, if followed, is believed to assure that validity and reliability can be ensured (and objectivity, generalizable results and so forth, see Donaldsson, 1996: 1-3). Shane,

commenting on Yin's methodology, also spends quite some time in his article making this argument (Shane, 2000: 453-454).

Making use of the case study in this way is not as unproblematic as it may seem. The argument is that the case study is a way of capturing that which is otherwise not captured by surveys and statistical analyses (Shane, 2000). Here the discussion indeed resembles that promoting the value of qualitative studies over quantitative. However, this was not the goal of Yin's case study. Yin's case study was in fact a pre-study to a quantitative analysis and it is applied when a researcher wants to test a proposition or theory prior to undertaking a larger, statistical or survey-based study. Yin's case study method is thus not supposed to produce any other type of knowledge than that produced by a quantitative study. Shane also points this out. In the most explicit terms, Shane outlines how he has been working with the case study and emphasises the special techniques used to secure the validity and reliability of his study. Shane (2000) concludes that the result of the study should lead to the re-direction of entrepreneurship research and refinement of theory, providing examples of regression analysis and longitudinal studies that could be conducted to further verify or falsify the results of his case study.

Although Shane, in the example above, wants to convince us that he is following the rules of scientific verification, he is still somewhat anxious about the difficulties of being objective. He thus ensures his research community with the caveat that in the 'real-world environment in which decisions actually take place [...] all of the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated through experimental design' (ibid.: 453). Hence, he cannot unequivocally assure us that his findings actually support his theory or whether they are the result of some other factors.

This of course begs the question: if we cannot aim for validity or reliability why do we keep trying? If we cannot accurately represent that which we study, if we cannot manipulate our 'data' to produce properly testable hypotheses, what can we do? Shane would never ask these questions. When engaged in the strategy of frontiering, these questions are not relevant. The task is to fulfil these criteria in a credible way; this is the only valid way to present knowledge. This is also what Gartner (2001) emphasised in his reflective piece. In short: the key drivers for organizing these studies are validity, reliability, objectivity, finding a gap, positioning in the field, and so on. What this shopping list entails is to set up hypotheses from the existing literature and to operationalize these into testable propositions that will either be verified or falsified.

Coming to these questions from the perspective of organisational ethnography and discursive approaches, during the early phase of my research, I was drawn to discussions around reflexivity in discourse theory. In contrast to positivism, then, discursive approaches makes no objectivistic truth claims (hence, they break with the Cartesian subject (i.e., Descartes belief that human beings are rational, autonomous individuals, Colebrook, [2002]), and the researcher's role, which, in positivism is 'to separate their views on *what happens* from their views on *what they would like to happen*' (Lipsey, 1963: 4, emphasis as in original). This separation is impossible within a discursive approach. Discursive approaches are political and critical, often taking a stand for social groups, aiming at social change: 'all knowledge is discursively produced and therefore contingent, and there is no possibility of achieving absolute or universal knowledge since there is no context-free, neutral base for truth-claims' (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 196). Narrative and poststructuralist descriptions also produce 'truths' but it is not The Truth. It is a local form that will be contextually bound rather than universal and total.

Further research is subject to judgement and choice, and power will operate when these choices are made. The task is to describe what other choices could have been made. This means that it is impossible to be objective, impossible to step outside the context, and that the categories used by positivist approaches are always determined by someone. Truth is thus a question of judgement, and a judgment is always made by choice, and choices are always subjective. The role of the researcher, therefore, is 'not to get "behind" the discourse, to find out what people *really* mean when they say this or that, or to discover reality behind the discourse' (ibid.: 21, italics as in original). The role of research is instead to bring forth a discussion of the taken-for-granted assumption; to problematize what has not been problematized.

The critique of the subjectivist claim to knowledge can be summarised as follows: discursive approaches are unusable, since it is impossible to separate wrong from right or good from bad; the explication of the discourse lies wholly within researcher's view; it is the researcher's ability to observe, describe, re-tell what is going on and so forth (e.g. Jorgensen, and Phillips 2002: 175-176). This critique is usually rebutted with a philosophical discussion. And the proposed solution is reflexivity and responsibility instead of validity and reliability. What does it mean to be reflexive and responsible? According to Steyaert (1997), it demands that researchers take responsibility for generating their own methods. Steyaert further argues that methods are performative, which places method in the realm of ontology rather than epistemology:

I thus approach the politics of academic scholarship by discussing and breaking open the conceptual understanding of ‘method’ in entrepreneurship studies and by giving method an ontological stance in how we act and intervene as scholars. By speaking of the politics of scholarship, I am concerned with how we imagine that academic scholarship can and must be conducted and how our scholarly practices are reflexive about how we assemble and relate such classical distinctions as theory, method, practice, education and intervention. (2011: 78)

For process thinkers within entrepreneurship studies, such as Steyaert, but also more broadly in social science (Law, 2004; Law and Urry, 2004 and McCormack, 2008), a politics of method means reconsidering method from an ontological perspective rather than an epistemological one. We must reflect on not just how our methods can ensure that we collect data in a valid and reliable way, but that we engage in a reflection of how our methods are enactive and performative, that is, they create certain knowledge and hence certain realities:

social inquiry and its methods are productive: they (help to) *make* social realities and social worlds. They do not simply describe the world as it is, but also enact it. (Law and Urry, 2004: 390-391)

An ontological perspective also means that the distinctions between theory, method, practice, the empirical and so on are blurred and the traditional hierarchies challenged. Once again, scientific knowledge is *a truth that can be discussed rather than reality as it is*.

Further, with such politics of method comes a moral responsibility, in that our studies are performing certain worlds and others not: ‘If social investigation makes worlds, then it can, in some measure, think about the worlds it *wants* to help to make’ (Law and Urry, 2004: 391, italics as in original, in Steyaert 2011: 81). Naturally, ‘performativity of methods does not mean that we can enact the world as we want it’ (ibid.) but:

Alternating between different methods is not just a matter of changing perspectives but also of enacting different worlds. Methods can be imagined and developed so that they strengthen particular realities while they erode others. (ibid.: 81-82)

This PhD dissertation is an exercise in performativity, as concept and as practice. From a method where concepts are defined in practice, it proceeds towards a position where researchers acknowledge their role and responsibility when researching. Since it cannot be avoided that we affect what we study, and the other way around, we should be open about this relationship with our research object and take responsibility for it. Such

responsibility is required regardless of what kind of research we do, but most approaches ignore or reject this idea.

Finally, this study claims to be experimental. What does that mean? It is a consequence of accepting the fact that studies are performative. It is a particular form of ‘to go look for oneself’, that originates in organisational ethnography (Kostera, 2007) but that is also experimental in the sense that the study opens up to what one cannot control with methodological tools. This is quite the opposite of what Shane (2000) wishes to achieve in his qualitative study. In a quantitative method realm, an experiment is the most controlled and restrictive of all scientific acts. It tries something out, but under strictly controlled forms. In this study, to go and look for yourself means to develop a contextually-locally sensible method that can discern how knowledge of this particular situation is best created, including the researcher’s own contribution to the world in study.

My contribution is presented in the four individual studies that follow. The results of each study will then be discussed in Chapter 8.

# Chapter 4: Emergency entrepreneurship: creative organizing in the eye of the storm

Bengt Johannisson and Lena Olaison

## Introduction

Entrepreneurship is an elusive phenomenon that does not just appear as new business venturing in the market. Within the public sector there is a call for more entrepreneurial bureaucrats (du Gay, 2001) and entrepreneurship is entering the business schools as well as the educational system at large from the university to the compulsory school (Hjorth and Johannisson, 2007) with the political ambition to make all of Europe more entrepreneurial (Lambrecht and Pirnay, 2005). Accordingly, studies on different entrepreneurial endeavours tend to end up with prefixes, such as team entrepreneurship (Stewart, 1989), collective entrepreneurship (Johannisson, 2003), community entrepreneurship (Johannisson and Nilsson, 1989; Johnstone and Lionais, 2004), social entrepreneurship (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006) and public entrepreneurship (Hjorth and Bjerke, 2006). This suggests that it is not possible to conclusively generate models and/or conceptualize entrepreneurship once and for all. Nonetheless, two perspectives on entrepreneurship are frequently used in the literature, namely entrepreneurship as a special kind of management – from Mintzberg (1973) to Shane (2003), and entrepreneurship as forms of social creativity (Hjorth et al., 2003; Gartner et al., 2003). In this chapter entrepreneurship is approached as a societal phenomenon practising creative organizing<sup>1</sup>. We especially associate entrepreneurship with imaginative ways of dealing with ruptures in the everyday life context. The ‘prosaic view’ of entrepreneurship as suggested by Steyaert (2004) is then interesting to relate to.

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<sup>1</sup> In previous work we have enquired into the interface between entrepreneurship and social capital as reflecting/reflected in reputation/mutual trust and a rationality based on care (see Johannisson and Olaison, 2007).

With this brief review of optional images of entrepreneurship in mind, we want to invite the reader to the drama that the Hurricane Gudrun enacted in Sweden in 2005. Late on the evening of 8 January a heavy storm struck Kronoberg County and its neighbouring region in the south of Sweden, causing blocked roads, tearing power lines into pieces, destroying property and incapacitating institutions responsible for the infrastructure. Hitting 5 per cent of the forestry area of Sweden, Gudrun tore down 80 million cubic metres, equal to one year's lumbering for the entire Swedish forestry industry. In total 253 000 households and organizations were left without power because of Gudrun, the majority also without any telephone connection. Gudrun caused by far the greatest damage ever to the elaborate Swedish infrastructure. The public institutions and other formal market organizations did not have the resources, capabilities or power to cope with the crisis, especially in the rural areas. Instead, a number of initiatives were taken by civic organizations, communities and individuals that were tied to the place.

It is here, in the in between of different organizational settings, that our story takes place. We propose that ruptures such as the one caused by Gudrun may initiate processes that uncover and (re)produce entrepreneurship which remain invisible when 'business as usual' rules in society. The purpose of this chapter is thus to enquire into localized creative organizing in the face of (natural) catastrophes and to conceptualize 'emergence entrepreneurship' accordingly. Next we elaborate upon our understanding(s) of entrepreneurship and how this relates to organization/organizing. In the following section we present the methodology that is practised in the field studies and then the empirical accounts are described. Revisiting the images of entrepreneurship and other understandings of organizing in dramatic settings, we close our discourse in the last section with a tentative conceptualization of 'emergency entrepreneurship'.

### **Alternative images of entrepreneurship**

Mainstream research, here addressed as 'opportunity-driven', presents entrepreneurship as a proactive rational economic activity, a strategy aiming to systematically identify and evaluate existing opportunities, preferably radical innovations, on the market and allocate the resources needed in such a way that the opportunities chosen are efficiently exploited. This strictly instrumental view of entrepreneurship suggests that boundaries in social space are intentionally crossed by, for example, the proactive introduction of new products or processes or by the opening



up of new product or factor markets (for example, Schumpeter 1911/1934). Bounded rationality due to lack of information concerning available opportunities and resources, though, means that entrepreneurial venturing is associated with risk. Reputation/trustworthiness and legitimacy are in this perspective considered as means of accessing resources that would otherwise not be available, a rationale that Starr and MacMillan (1990) address as ‘social contracting’. This concern for systematic renewal and change, organized in a new means-end framework (Shane, 2003), is what makes entrepreneurship stand out and yet remain in the management family. Table 4.1 summarizes the generic aspects of entrepreneurship that we have illustrated with the opportunity-driven view.

Table 4.1: Three modes of entrepreneurship – generic features.

<i>Aspect</i>	<b>Opportunity-driven Entrepreneurship</b>	<b>Enactive entrepreneurship</b>	<b>Prosaic entrepreneurship</b>
<i>Origin of initiative</i>	Existing opportunities in the market	Coincidences and enacted environments	Challenges in everyday life
<i>Process characteristics</i>	‘Boundedly rational’ exploitation	Playful experimentation	Casual coping with problems/opportunities
<i>Generic coping</i>	Pro-action taking risk	Interaction in order to exploit ambiguity	Interaction in order to keep uncertainty at bay
<i>Role and sources of social capital</i>	Resourcing relying on calculated trust	Relating through mutual commitment to dialogue	Reproducing by way of collective identity and blind trust
<i>Organising rationale</i>	New means-ends framework	Social creativity	Daily activity and interaction

A contrasting image of entrepreneurship, here labelled ‘enactive entrepreneurship’, associates entrepreneurship with social creativity on other arenas besides the market. Whatever the setting, new opportunities are in this perspective interactively enacted, instigated by coincidences and chance, yet ultimately shaping new worlds for many (Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus, 1997). In a socially constructed world of becoming (Chia, 1995) entrepreneurship implies coping with ambiguity (Johannisson, 1992; Weick, 1995). Entrepreneurial processes are initiated by curiosity, organized by spontaneity and intrinsically driven by passion and joy (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2003; Hjorth et al., 2003). Opportunities to explore and associate tactics to exploit them emerge in parallel (Gartner et al., 2003). This perspective on entrepreneurship shifts

the focus from organization to organizing, from formal structure to emergent process (Gartner, Bird and Starr, 1992). Ventures crystallize out of personal networks, constituted by genuine relations based on trust and defined as much existentially as instrumentally, used as much for crafting individual and collective identity as for actualizing new business (Johannisson, 2000). Entrepreneurship is accompanied by a general belief in the good will of others and their commitment to participating in dialogues for negotiating new realities.

Yet another, third, image of entrepreneurship is following Steyaert 'prosaic entrepreneurship'. Steyaert argues that

the everydayness of entrepreneurship refers as much to a mundane, and – why not – even a boring posture as to a literary connotation where a prosaic – as in the novel – addresses the actuality of becoming, its ongoing becoming effected through conversational processes. (2004: 9)

Prosaic or mundane views on entrepreneurship focus, not on model building or general concepts, but acknowledge the importance of 'the everyday and the ordinary, the familiar and the frequent, the customary and the accustomed, the mediocre and the inferior' (ibid.). All entrepreneurial processes certainly, however path breaking, include routine activities just as all human beings as adults occasionally engage in entrepreneurial processes. 'Prosaic' entrepreneurship at the firm and societal level, for example, appears in the industrial district as a localized small-firm cluster. Westlund and Bolton systematically dissect the concept of 'localized social capital', defined as 'spatially defined norms, values, knowledge, preferences, and other social attributes or qualities that are reflected in human relations' (2003: 79), and its relation to entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship as organizing is then continuous and carried by the district as a socially embedded collective of business units, that is, not by individual firms (Johannisson, 2003). As traditional family businesses, the latter are neither willing nor able to practise innovativeness and growth.

However complex networking, interaction and organizing as conceptual constructs present themselves, their (metaphorical) use obviously contributes to our understanding of why and how entrepreneurship may be practised. While opportunity-driven and enactive entrepreneurship both associate entrepreneurship with dramatic events that are instigated by strategically and tactically alert individuals, prosaic entrepreneurship is hidden behind the apparent uniformity of everyday life. In spite of this wide range of images of entrepreneurship none of them, though, tells us what

creative organizing may be triggered by if communities which appear as dormant are challenged by an external shock, an artificial or natural disaster like Gudrun.

### **Experiencing and studying a natural disaster**

The empirical study was carried out over a ten-month period. In February and March 2005, that is immediately after the disaster, the junior author jointly with fellow master students interviewed ten persons involved in organizing in the wake of the hurricane. We were looking for organizations, temporary or formal, that became visible through their achievements in the restoration work. The aim of the conversations was to find out what kind of organizing the dramatic event had triggered: who got engaged, how, after whom and after what resources the activities patterned themselves.

We think that there is a need for a narrative approach and contextually sensitive accounts when trying to grasp how existing formal and informal structures may enforce or hinder potential entrepreneurial initiatives in the face of disaster. Soon enough we understood that our informants in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane could provide no systematically reflected insights, ‘only’ stories. Czarniawska (2004), though, argues that narratives represent modes of knowing and communicating and, what is more, they may guide the enactment of the storytellers’ future lives.

Listening to stories through the media and our personal networks we used our personal contacts in the region to get access to local agents (civic associations, authorities and small firms), national incorporated structures and also intermediary organizations which bridge between the other two categories. It so happens that all our ten interviewees are men. This bias does not only reveal that the authors’ personal networks are dominated by men, but also that there were mainly men working with the restoration after the hurricane. Obviously, we have silenced some of the stories that might have been told by women<sup>2</sup>.

In October and November 2005 the authors of this chapter together revisited five of the original informants for further conversations. The informants were then encouraged to reflect upon their own stories told in the aftermath of Gudrun. We thus used quotations

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to argue that women were not involved in the recovery process, but that their roles remained less visible and that our approach did not invite them. For a discussion about the representation of women in research and media reporting after natural disasters, see Childs (2006).

from the original interview to create a conversation with the interlocutor concerning how they had experienced the event back then and again ten months later. Since our conversations concerned issues that were (and are) emotionally loaded, we allow our interlocutors to speak when we communicated our field experiences.

Our interpretation of the agents' immediate and retrospective experiences of the hurricane was organized as follows. First, the two authors independently read the raw interview texts in order to identify statements that reflected (creative) coping with the dramatic events and consequently contributed to the construction of entrepreneurship in such a setting. These primary interpretations were then, according to each category of informants, jointly reflected upon by us. The stories as presented and interpreted are subsequently analyzed further by bringing in Lanzara's (1983) notion of 'ephemeral organizations' and formal (project organization and crisis management) organizations. Our conceptual and empirical work and the images of temporary organizations are used to craft our notion of 'emergency entrepreneurship'. Our methodology obviously both resembles and contrasts the Eisenhardt (1989) idea of generating theory out of case/qualitative material. We stay with a proposed conceptualization of 'emergency entrepreneurship' that may inspire refinement by way of additional theoretical and empirical work.

### **Tales of the field: coping with chaos in everyday life**

The stories told by the informants are organized into five subsections according to what agency they represent. We shortly summarize their stories accordingly. First, we introduce a spokesman for a civic association representing a rural community and experience how he dealt with the dramatically imposed rupture in his everyday life. Then we listen to representatives of the public organizations which are formally responsible for organizing and governing territorial space, namely the financially strong Swedish municipalities. In the following two subsections we encounter representatives of business organizations: a local small firm and an external corporate structure, for which the area struck by Gudrun is part of their market. Finally, we listen to the stories told by the spokesmen for two intermediary organizations, which, due to their organizing tactics and way of doing business, created new tasks for themselves, enforcing their roles as bridges between different structures. The voices of each group of agents are systematically reflected upon with respect to their way of organizing and will be echoed in the last section for further analysis.

### *Civic associations taking charge*

Anders Malmqvist, one of the organizers of an informal community group that locally dealt with the emergency, has many stories to tell. On the morning after the hurricane Malmqvist immediately joins other residents from his village who were trying to make their way through the giant jackstraws of trees caused by Gudrun. They keep working intensively, knowing that if they fail there will be no way out of the village. In the evening, when they are about to give up, they hear the persistent sound of a tractor somewhere from the other side of the enormous mess of trees. Now convinced that somebody is trying to reach them, they get energized and continue to work their chainsaws in the growing darkness.

When the main roads are clear Malmqvist starts to discuss the restoration work with a retired electrician from E.ON (the dominant power company in the South of Sweden, a corporation that we will encounter again):

We asked ourselves: what do we need? We need to establish an information centre, where we can collect information and co-ordinate resources; we must open the gas station to secure fuel and reparations and we need to make sure that everyone working can eat at least every four hours.

Malmqvist describes the organizing as an arena for acute problem-solving: ‘We had no right to make decisions, and we didn’t. What we could do was to identify a problem and bring together those who had resources to come up with solutions’. Through the residents’ personal networks they could enact measures even if these were not compatible with the formal norms: ‘I know that we broke some regulations and maybe a law or two to get what we needed, but what could we do?’

Reflections: The stories about the first initiatives after the hurricane tell us about spontaneous and immediate organizing. There was no time to discuss or reflect upon the situation, since people were often both literally and metaphorically working in the dark, whether coping day and night with the jam of fallen and broken trees or trying to muddle through in corporate and public decision-making structures. A kind of push-triggered collective (social) entrepreneurship emerged, which released the same kind of creativity that is associated with pull-triggered individual/team commercial entrepreneurship: acting upon gut feeling, using previous experiences to cope with the new situation and network intensely.

### *The moment of truth for the municipality*

When we meet Claes Göran Carlsson, mayor of Ljungby municipality, at the beginning of March 2005, our conversation largely concerns what can be learnt from one chaotic situation to the next. In the summer of 2004, six months before Gudrun hit the same area, the main streams in Ljungby municipality flooded. During the flooding the municipal executive board, together with appropriate technical units, created a structure to cope with the acute situation:

You need to act directly and on a large scale; create a staff so you can speed up the decision-making process. You have to down size the formal processes and move to execution. But the municipal staff have to know that they have the politicians behind them in their decisions. Generally, institutions are afraid to act because of the costs and the risk of being criticized for unauthorized action. But it's better to be criticized for doing too much than for doing nothing.

When revisiting Carlsson in November 2005 we bring up the learning experiences. He then tells us that immediately after the flooding he and the rescue leader were invited to other municipalities and asked to share their lessons with them. After Gudrun these kinds of requests have increased: 'We are quite satisfied with our achievement. I know we can do it again if necessary.' Coping with Gudrun enforces the importance of established relations:

Not just having the contacts, but knowing that you can work together. When you reorganize and create space for action, you can draw as many organization maps you want, but if the [personal] relationships are not working, nothing can help you in an emergency situation. The social capital is decisive, you need to build the foundation, share the same values, before you have to deal with the emergent situation, both inside and outside the organization.

Reflections: Ljungby municipality appears as a role model for organizational learning aiming at flexibility and preparedness for emergencies. Natural disasters vary with respect to their surprise effect and have to be dealt with accordingly. In order to create space for action information has to be rationed – a unique case in an otherwise indifferent and democratic Swedish society. A dual municipal order is practised – one that copes with everyday routine operations and one that enters the scene in case of emergency. These parallel structures seem to jointly infuse entrepreneurship into a public structure. Even more important, trust is tightly connected with previous experiences and reveals itself only when the community faces an emergency. Learning and knowledge creation come from hands-on experience, but also from telling stories to others, sharing experiences. Repeated reflections on one's own action enforces self-

identity and increases the willingness to act again. Mayor Carlsson recognizes the role of emotion and commitment in the making of organized efforts. The language he then uses is more of an entrepreneurial voice, relieved from the bureaucratic vocabulary that public structures are usually associated with.

### *Small businesses: disconnected from their customers*

In this section we meet Roland Axelsson, responsible for retail at Rottne Industry Ltd. The company is one of the leading manufacturers of logging vehicles, with its markets in Europe, North America and Australia.

On the Monday morning when Gudrun had left southern Sweden, Rottne Industry Ltd immediately starts to mobilize. Emergency organizations, forestry entrepreneurs and forestry owners turn to the company asking for vehicles and drivers. ‘Several organizing solutions have been created in our community to facilitate the reconstruction after Gudrun. They are provisional and will probably dissolve and disappear when they have fulfilled their mission’, says Roland Axelsson. Rottne Industry Ltd also takes an active part in the recovery work. Even though the company uses retailers when business is as usual and never deals with used machinery, they now take advantage of their well established network to gather and disseminate information, search for subcontractors from Europe, and even to work as mediators for second-hand machinery and logging machinery of other brands.

Reflections: The hurricane makes Rottne Industry Ltd reconsider what constitutes an important customer, opening up a field between commercially and socially important actions. Self-centredness was replaced with a need to call attention to what heroic contributions have been made by others in the local context. In the face of Gudrun, action is not triggered by emerging business opportunities but by a necessity to contribute to the reconstruction of the everyday life they share with their fellow citizens.

### *Incapacitated corporate structures*

Gudrun’s impact on the infrastructure in the region, for example E.ON, the major regional power provider, is devastating. When we first meet immediately after Gudrun, Sven Ruther at E.ON is busy organizing the recovery work. He explains that they got reinforcement not just from other power companies in Sweden and Europe but also

from local networks. In the 1960s Sydkraft, E.ON's predecessor, created 'LRF-supportive groups' (developed in collaboration with the Federation of Swedish Farmers – LRF) in the rural areas, enacting the ambition to always being able to have staff available locally. Where these groups are still active E.ON uses them to cope with the damages that Gudrun has caused. In other places they re-emerge: 'Without means of communication you need to have people from the area that can guide electricians, and first, before you can even start to organize the restoration work, you need to clear blocked roads and wires.'

When we meet again with Sven Ruther he is responsible for customer contacts at E.ON. He explains his new assignment to us:

E.ON has an emergency organization that gets activated in case of a crisis. Since I live in Älmhult, I know the area and the industrial plants. I was working in Älmhult as early as in the 60s so I know the people personally. In these situations you gain a lot if you know your way around and if they know you.

In the aftermath of Gudrun E.ON has learnt about the importance of preserving local knowledge, and the corporation has re-established LRF-supportive groups in every municipality where it operates.

Reflections: Corporations such as E.ON have realized the need for a dual structure, one for routine operations and one to implement in case of emergencies, the former increasingly global, the latter increasingly local. Thus a 'glocal' matrix organizational structure emerges. A related lesson from E.ON's experience is the importance of being close, physically as well as mentally and socially. Knowledge originating in everyday local life turned out to be a major source for entrepreneurship in the emergency situation created by the hurricane. That is, coping with Gudrun also exposed collective tacit knowledge and entrepreneurship.

### *Intermediators in broken structures*

Smaland Airport Ltd is a minor regional airport with limited operations in the middle of the area struck by Gudrun. Like any airport, Smaland Airport Ltd is strictly controlled by laws and security rules, but Jan Fors, its managing director, can also tell many stories about creative organizing. Realizing that the airway is the only operating exit from or entry into the region, he and his staff jointly decide that they are going to keep the airport open round the clock until they know that all land roads have been cleared:



The regional actors have not been able to get organized; not even once did they contact us to see if we were all right or if we had the resources needed to keep the airport open. We managed to do it, but isn't that worth finding out?

When we revisit Jan Fors in November 2005 he summarizes what he and his staff have learnt from dealing with Gudrun:

The initiative and strength come from individuals; they have the commitment and the wish to help one another. And personally I have learnt to understand life in the countryside. My staff lives there, we talked a lot about their situation and I have realized that we sometimes forget about that kind of life.

According to Jan Fors, hands-on action is the most important thing when coping with a crisis, experience and also good relations to people you need to deal with: 'When there is an emergency, you don't have time to establish something new, you use what you've got, even though it is in new forms'.

Our interviewees often have difficulties communicating how they came to organize the way they did. Revisiting Mats Folkesson, coordinator at Farmers' Services, a kind of rural co-operative employment and staffing agency set up by farmers and bridging between corporate structures and civic society, again tries to explain:

I don't know how it all started, things just began to move. First it was a question of survival, to reach the main road. We started to work three and three, and as we progressed we began to gather more and more people. We never had a discussion about money or whether we should get involved or not.

Since Farmers' Services normally deal with corporate structures, such as E.ON, the National Swedish Road Administration and business firms, they could mediate between the formal structures and the private initiatives. In order to be close to where the action was Farmers' Services temporarily moved their administration from their town office to a garage in the rural area.

Reflections: From coping with the hurricane we once again get proof that large 'well-structured' organizations run into problems when surprised by (literally) path-breaking events. Smaller informal organizations, in contrast, quite easily adapt their organization to the new situation. At Smaland Airport Ltd Gudrun even triggers new perspectives on its own organization, recognizing the employees as both goals and means for bridging their core business activities and the societal context. Jan Fors's stories underline that trust appears when needed actions are embedded in long-term relationships.

The crisis situation made visible the need for recombining existing competencies according to need: individuals like Mats Folkesson brought together people and resources at hand and created solutions to problems as they emerged. Because of Gudrun Farmers' Services were suddenly offered a task environment that was begging for their way of organizing. They were the ones trained to connect between different actors, since their staff were trusted both among local residents and formal structures. Such temporary organizing demonstrates a form of entrepreneurship that is driven by emergency and practised through immediate (inter)action.

### **Searching for the roots of emergency entrepreneurship**

In this section we shall further analyse our field accounts and search for the origins of the proposed features of what we here, inspired by, among others, Gartner (1993), name 'emergency entrepreneurship'. We argue that studies of extreme situations will not only reveal entrepreneurial forces that remain hidden under 'normal' circumstances, cf. Weick (1990), but generally enrich our understanding of organization/organizing as including entrepreneurship as well as management. Therefore we first tentatively position emergency entrepreneurship in the context of the other images of entrepreneurship introduced above. Since issues associated with coping with surprises and dramas appear in the literature on management as well as on entrepreneurship we then provide a general, yet simple, model for structuring different ways to deal with turbulent environments. We especially elaborate on this theme by juxtaposing the conceptual lessons from our empirical research with Lanzara's (1983) notion of 'ephemeral organization'. After that we see a need to qualify Lanzara's understanding of formal organization and therefore we review the 'project organization' and 'crisis management' as institutionalized ways of dealing with temporary challenges and/or surprises in the environment.

#### *Revisiting proposed modes of entrepreneurship*

The stories about localized creative organizing in a region facing a natural disaster as related and interpreted above call for a different understanding of entrepreneurship than those presented in Table 4.1. First, it is in our case obvious that there was no omnipotent actor who could practise 'opportunity-based entrepreneurship'. The hurricane and the needs for reconstruction that it made obvious may possibly be seen as an instant opportunity, but the belief in calculated trust seems alien in a situation which has no precedents. Our notion of 'enactive entrepreneurship' also seems

inappropriate, since coping with a disaster certainly is not about playful experimentation instigated by a subject in order to joyfully enact new environments out of ambiguous surroundings. The triggering initiative does not belong to the agent, and the experimentation needed to cope with the emergent situation is characterized by genuine uncertainty: what needs to be done first – restoring physical structures – is more than obvious, but the feasibility of alternative action tactics is totally unknown. The notion of ‘prosaic entrepreneurship’ obviously brings limited understanding to how to deal with a natural catastrophe that undermines the everydayness of life. In the case of emergency all initiatives aim at the reconstruction of everyday life, not, as in the case of prosaic entrepreneurship, using everyday life as a basis for instigating (ad)ventures.

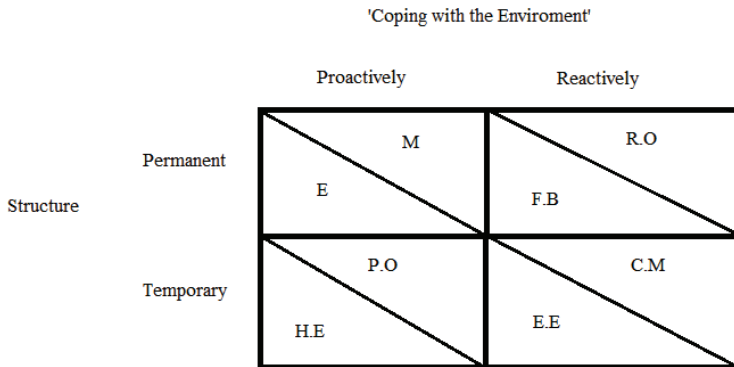
Our tentative understanding of emergency entrepreneurship is, nevertheless, in some respects related to the other modes of entrepreneurship according to Table 4.1. With opportunity-based entrepreneurship our notion of emergency entrepreneurship shares the importance of social capital in resourcing the measures taken to cope with challenges on their arrival (although emergency entrepreneurship needs bonding rather than bridging social capital; see Johannisson and Olaison, 2007; cf. Davidsson and Honig, 2003). Experimentation was certainly called for as much as in enactive entrepreneurship when dealing with Gudrun, but that was since the situation was out of control and since people desperately asked for more information. That is, uncertainty, not ambiguity, prevailed. Passivity, even paralysis, facing the devastating effects of the hurricane, though, soon enough turned into intense local interaction in order to find ways to reconstruct basic everyday life. Commitment to place and collective identity associated with the territory as a physical and social space encompassing everyday life activated the social capital needed to practise mundane, yet creative, organizing, the hallmark of prosaic entrepreneurship.

### *Organizing under pressure*

In order to come to grips with ways of dealing with unexpected events that call for (at least) temporary solutions, we have to go one step back and conceptualize a shared ground for entrepreneurship and management, certainly ways of organizing that are different in kind (cf. Hjorth et al., 2003). Here two simple dichotomies are used in order to illustrate qualitative differences between entrepreneurship and management in this context. The two dimensions are ‘structure’ and ‘ways of coping with the environment’ (Figure 4.1). As indicated, organizational structures may be permanent or

temporary. Organizations may relate to environmental change proactively or reactively. Typically, entrepreneurship, as well as management, appears in and/or as permanent structures that operate proactively. Incorporated rescue organizations, for instance, are permanent organizations which are managed in such a way that they can, reactively yet professionally, deal with environmental rupture. Even bread-and-butter family businesses which are pushed into existence are entrepreneurial while still emerging, but the entrepreneurial spirit usually vanishes once established reactive behaviour dominates their coping.

Figure 4.1: Entrepreneurial and managerial ways of structuring activities and coping with the environment.



Notes: M – Management (dominant view); E – Entrepreneurship (dominant view); R.O – Rescue Organization; F.B – Family Business; P.O – Project Organization; H.E – Habitual Entrepreneurship; C.M – Crisis Management; E.E – Emergency Entrepreneurship.

Our focus here, though, is on the temporary structures. Looking first at entrepreneurship as more or less a proactive, strategic activity, habitual entrepreneurship comes to the fore. The entrepreneurial career may be looked upon as the enactment of a bundle of temporary ventures, cf., for example, Westhead and Wright (1998). Larson and Starr (1993) and Johannisson (2000) look upon entrepreneuring as the flow of (temporary) ventures which sediment out of the personal network of the entrepreneur. Within the field of management ‘project organizing’ is a well-established proactive practice to which we shall return below. We shall also elaborate on ‘crisis management’, that is, routinized ways of reacting to dramatic environmental change. We obviously propose the notion of ‘emergency

entrepreneurship’ as an image of entrepreneurship that makes it triggered by external events and calls for immediate and temporary reaction.

Enquiring into the 1980 earthquake in southern Italy, Lanzara (1983) tells the story about volunteers who immediately entered the region being hit. There they organized their support as temporary ventures, only to exit after a few days when they were succeeded by rescue teams set up ‘from above’ by the public authorities. An institutional order thus soon enough replaced the original spontaneous rescue operations with their ‘ephemeral’ structure, lacking a history as well as a future. Since these two support structures are organized in radically different ways they have, according to Lanzara (1983), to be separated in time. Our story, in contrast, tells of how a disaster was originally dealt with from below and from the inside, that is, by collaborating local and regional agents, involving citizens as well as formal institutions. That is, the notion of emergency entrepreneurship reports on organizational endeavours, where spontaneous organizing and institutionalized structures emerged into collaboration founded in a shared history and with the prospects of a jointly built future.

Recently, it has been argued, other forms of temporary organization, such as the project organization, offer a new paradigm in the management field (Turner and Keegan, 1999), where it is usually applied to intra-organizational structuring. Research in the field usually focuses on projects within the boundaries of existing organizations (Heller, 1999). Projects are then broadly defined as ‘organizational processes of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling resources for a relatively short-term objective established to complete specific goals and objectives’ (Shenhar, 2001: 241). Peterson (1981), as early as a quarter of a century ago, used the notion of ‘operative adhocracy’ to present presumably dynamic corporations as bundles of projects. ‘Adhocracy’ was later appropriated by Mintzberg (1988) and Storper (1989), for example, when researching the alleged creative Canadian and American (film) industries. However it has also been argued that firms in the film industry constituted as hosts for projects, in fact, are themselves lacking innovativeness and entrepreneurship (Davenport, 2006). The industry invites to repeatable structures, not to originality. Projects are: (1) set up either in order to proactively exploit creative people (for example, in the film industry) or in order to implement standardized measures more efficiently (for example, in the construction industry), not in order to reactively deal with devastating environmental change; (2) arenas where the participants are expected to use their unique individual competencies, not to

demonstrate collective concerns; and (3) settings where creativity, spontaneity and improvisation are used to craft new social and mental structures, not in order to restore physical ones.

The crisis management literature also appears paradoxical regarding structure and planning. We see this literature as divided into two parts. The first one is concerned with preparing companies for potential crises, predominantly financial crises, by creating temporary structures that can be put in place to restabilize organizations (Loosemore and Hughes, 2001) and possibly use the crisis to develop them further. The second part of the crisis management literature concerns itself with planning for and managing natural disasters, using models primarily from public management and project management (inter alia Moe and Pathranarakul, 2006). These primarily empirical studies repeatedly indicate that local governments (McEntire and Myers, 2004) as well as small businesses lack plans or organizational structures aimed at coping with disasters (Runyan, 2006; Spillan and Hough, 2003). Studies also report that it is citizen responses and personal and social networks that 'save the day' (Helsloot and Ruitenbergh, 2004; Ok Choi and Brower, 2006; Pardasani, 2006). Nevertheless, critical-management research tries to fill the gap between formal plans and the way networks in a crisis actually work (Ok Choi and Brower, 2006) with models for systematically building preparedness (McEntire and Myers, 2004). We thus state that project organizations and crisis management are settings where the 'ad hocness' is very much designed as a tool for management. In Table 4.2 we juxtapose, on the one hand, the project organization and crisis management with Lanzara's notion of 'ephemeral organization', on the other, with our emerging concept of 'emergency entrepreneurship'.

Only marginal adjustments are needed when making Lanzara's general image of formal structures also include the project organization. Lanzara (1983) states that in a formal (project) organization, internal and external boundaries are distinct, while in an ephemeral organization the boundaries are fuzzy. Further, in crisis management the boundaries are distinct, since it aims at a pre-prepared plan for a specific need. As a territorial phenomenon, emergency entrepreneurship is enacted in a context where the space boundaries are unambiguous to all concerned. General time restrictions tie people and their everyday practices to a place. Many public organizations are also organized by physical space. In case of an emergency the social boundaries inside and between the private and public spheres/sectors, however, dissolve on the micro/individual as well as on the organizational level. General commitment to place

triggers residents to take initiatives also in the interest of other local residents – *homo economicus* turns into *homo curans*. The dramatically changed natural and social environments produce an ambiguity that invites, or rather requests, people to turn coincidences into opportunities, calling for hidden professional strengths and dormant entrepreneurial capabilities. As a bridging force between organizational structures and individual and local initiatives, emergency entrepreneurship reminds us of ‘situational altruism’ which ‘motivates people to help in ways that are not mentioned in contingency plans. This creates opportunities for organizations and helps let [sic] them work more actively’ (Helsloot and Ruitenberg, 2004: 103).

Table 4.2: Alternative structures for temporary organizing.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Project organisations</b>	<b>Ephemeral organisations</b>	<b>Emergency entrepreneurship</b>
<i>Boundaries</i>	Distinct	Fuzzy	Spatially distinct, socially/mentally fuzzy
<i>Leadership</i>	Central, shifting	Shifting, lacking	Local and multiple
<i>Organisational structure</i>	Formal, hierarchical	Informal, spontaneous	Loosely coupled and glocal
<i>Information flow</i>	Vertical	Horizontal	Lateral
<i>Performance criterion</i>	Economic efficiency	Practical effectiveness	Restoration of everyday life

Source: Inspired by Lanzara (1983: 88), Table 1.

Devastating events, such as natural catastrophes, trigger and force everybody to take their own initiatives, since residents in the area struck by the disaster can neither exit nor just stay placid or give voice (Hirschman, 1974). Practising a ‘heterarchical order’ (cf. Grabher, 2001), leadership in one’s own field of competence appears as everybody’s right and obligation. The very tactics used for coping with the effects of Gudrun meant instigating initiatives in as many contexts as possible, even in the borderland between the legal and the illegal, trusting others to make similar efforts and believing in spontaneous co-ordination, in self-organizing. Ephemeral organizing, as illustrated by Lanzara (1983), is initiated from the outside by people driven by general humanitarian concerns. Elsewhere we argue that sustainable development, energized by the making of a collective identity, can only be achieved if organized from below and formed inside (Hjorth and Johannisson, 2003). Even if leadership is shifting (Kasvi, Vartiainen and Hailikari, 2002), paying special attention to success criteria (Westerveld, 2003), leadership in the project management and crisis management

literature is concerned with producing general techniques for the leaders from above/outside in order to make possible the centralized control of an ambiguous situation (Moe and Pathranarakul, 2006). Leadership in the context of emergency entrepreneurship is about taking charge of one's own as well as other people's lives. Even if the leadership that our stories communicate was local and fragmented, it was appropriate.

In case of emergencies of the Gudrun magnitude any established organization structure appears obsolete by definition. There was no need to break out of existing structures, an issue often discussed in the literature on organizational learning and innovation. The structures themselves broke down, indicating a need for a more flexible order. In our case 'loose coupling' was practised as a generic organizing principle in the region at large, with local task forces operating autonomously yet interdependently (Weick, 1976; cf. also Heller, 1999). Community-based project organizations adopt a similar structure (Skutle, Iversen and Bergan, 2002). Further empirical accounts from coping with natural disasters report the same insights (Helsloot and Ruitenbergh, 2004), indicating that loose coupling is feasible for a broad mobilizing of resources. The need for immediate action and temporary restructuring calls attention to the image of 'organized anarchy' (March and Olsen, 1976), where problems and solutions are dating each other. While project/temporary formal organizations, like the permanent organization, carry a formalized administration, there was no time for planning or structuring in the Gudrun case. 'Glocal' organizing, implying core local action cells that take advantage of distant (global) resources by way of networking associated with bonding social capital, appears as a generic organizing feature of emergency entrepreneurship.

The enormous need for information reflects the huge uncertainty that most people experienced during and after Gudrun. That uncertainty could only be reduced by intense (social) (inter)action and an unrestricted, 'lateral' information flow. The sociality of the social capital that embeds economic activity has itself to be pulled out of the bed. In an emergency situation even the dark side of personal networking, the risk that it may violate democratic values and processes, has to be accepted, as much as the idea that civil disobedience may be the only way to cope in critical situations where institutions fail. For all residents in the rural part of the region that Gudrun struck it was more than obvious that on the morning of Sunday 9 January something concrete had to be done. No other performance, but local commitment and general responsiveness to the existential and practical challenges would do (cf. Stryjan, 1987).



This immediate need, though, soon enough turned into a demand for specific and certainly localized services. Activating previous hands-on experiences, individuals in local organizations were taking action far from the formal structures framing their normal routines (cf. Sauri, Domingo and Romero, 2003). Ephemeral organizing and emergency entrepreneurship share a pragmatic concern, while project organizations are primarily driven by decontextualized economic efficiency (Halman and Braks, 1999; Davenport, 2006). Crisis management aims at restabilizing and ‘managing disaster with a basic goal to minimize effectively the impact of disaster’ (Moe and Pathranarakul, 2006: 398).

### **Conclusions: towards a definition of emergency entrepreneurship**

Contemporary dominant views on entrepreneurship propose, albeit using different ontological assumptions and vocabularies and relating to different spaces for boundary-spanning (inter)action, that entrepreneurship is about the creative non-routine organizing of people and resources. Exploring unknown domains makes (business) venturing intrinsically experiential, whether global challenges are exploited in a way that change people’s everyday practices (Spinosa et al., 1997) or, as in the case of emergency-triggered entrepreneurship, established practices have to be reconstructed.

Again, entrepreneurial initiative is certainly not just driven by self-interest and concerned with (economic) growth. The Gudrun story tells us that spontaneously organized multi-skilled rural citizens both restored old relations and created new social trails in a physical landscape that had completely changed due to the disaster. The lesson told is that entrepreneurship is also closely associated with generalized responsibility and that ‘common sense’ is important as a means for taking on surprises and challenges and not only as being itself the target for change. The importance of localized social capital with its strong bonds, which promise solidarity and trigger action when most needed, is re-established as well.

As indicated, an entrepreneurial career can be described as a set of interrelated project/ventures embedded in the personal networking of the entrepreneur (Johannisson, 2000). The role of personal initiatives is made visible in Lanzara’s notion of ‘ephemeral organization’. Such organizations are instigated by an individual who sees a natural disaster as an opportunity to ‘display his capacity and [that] at the same time the opportunity “creates” the actor, shapes his system of representation, and

enhances his capacity for action' (Lanzara, 1983: 73). Obviously, the notion of 'ephemeral organization' connects what we address as enactive, prosaic and emergency entrepreneurship. This is hardly surprising, considering that a disaster breaks down the socially constructed barrier between private and public lives, forcing a new structure to be built from below. Early on, Katz and Kahn (1966) told the story about how the municipal fire brigade emerged out of voluntary collaboration between residents in a community, whenever property was on fire, and successively formalized into its present structure (cf. also Christoplos, 1998). In the absence of a public organization local solidarity and responsiveness to challenges were self-evident.

When the everyday physical world is turned upside down by a major disaster, entrepreneurial action, then meaning maintaining and re-establishing everyday practices, has to be instigated. It means immediacy and hands-on (inter)action, evoking the embodied knowledge needed for operatively coping with concrete challenges that leave little time for reflection. In parallel, people locally have to re-establish and activate existing bonds and create new relations to incorporated private and public organizations. Together they have to try to integrate their own measures with those of existing public and market structures (cf. Sauri et al., 2003). Relating then means taking the trustworthiness of others for granted. Research into how people cope with (natural) disasters also suggests that trust becomes personal (Gephart, 1984; Christoplos, 1998; Hurlbert, Haines and Beggs, 2000; Sauri et al., 2003), neither organizational nor institutional (Sanner, 1997).

We can now conclusively conceptualize the proposed notion of 'emergency entrepreneurship' in the perspective of our introductory three images of entrepreneurship. Above, we already briefly stated that the emergency entrepreneurship is different in kind to them. Regarding the aspects presented in Table 4.3, we first state that the triggering event, the initiative, is external to those concerned, appearing as a natural and/or artificial disaster that creates a rupture in everyday life. The entrepreneurial process is characterized by the need for immediate (inter)action in the face of non-negotiable conditions that put important material conditions and existential values at stake. Once the external shock is recognized, local interaction with the situation at hand appears as generic coping. The roles of social capital, the major potential resource, are multiple: a trigger, a lubricant and a safeguard in spontaneous organizing. Local commitment, instrumental in such a situation, acknowledges the need for and facilitates the use of 'swift' trust (Meyerson, Weick and Kramer, 1996) when action has to be taken instantly and incessantly. The organizing rationale appears

as a kind of ‘social bricolage’. While the (artisan) bricoleur, according to Levi-Strauss (1968/1971), brings together redundant artefacts/resources in order to compose local responses to problems as they present themselves (cf. also Baker and Nelson, 2005), social bricolage means combining and locally – in time as well as in space – integrating chunks of everyday routines according to the events that the drama produces. This indeed means practising an ontology of becoming, according to Chia (1995).

Table 4.3: Emergency entrepreneurship – generic features. Compare also Table 4.1.

<i>Aspect</i>	<b>Emergency entrepreneurship</b>
<i>Origin of initiative</i>	Rupture in everyday life
<i>Process characteristics</i>	Immediate (inter)action
<i>Generic coping</i>	Local interplay with the situation at hand
<i>Role and sources of social capital</i>	Organising based on local commitment and swift trust
<i>Organising rationale</i>	Social bricolage

Some may argue that it is unnecessary, even inappropriate, to offer yet another image of entrepreneurship in an academic community already swarming with proposed understandings of the evasive phenomenon. However, in an increasingly globalized world, social and economic changes will create sudden and radical emergencies in many local settings, as suggested by chaos theory. As a matter of fact, the most popular demonstration of that theory is that a butterfly’s movement of its wings may cause a hurricane on the other side of the globe! Our lessons from how Gudrun was locally dealt with not only bring insights about how common people may practise their entrepreneurial capabilities. Our research also communicates the potential of the ‘glocal’ tactics adopted by emergency entrepreneurship as a generic means for locally taking on global challenges and thus enriching our general understanding of organization/organizing.

# Chapter 5: An emerging legend of a Kosovar heroine: narrating female entrepreneurs

Lena Olaison

## **In search of female entrepreneurs in Kosovo/a**

While walking around in the city of Pristina, Martin Bowles's words 'When the gods dethroned, and with the State and work organizations failing, to create meaning, where can people find inspiration and direction for their lives?' (Bowles, 1989: 418) came to my mind, helping me to organize my feelings and thoughts. This was in October 2005 when I had come to Kosovo/a to find female entrepreneurs. Not having any clear connections to organizations in the region or any key persons to extract information from, I started to ask people I met if they knew of any female entrepreneurs I could talk to.

After a while it felt like I was told the same story over and over again. Often, the person I asked could not name a female entrepreneur, but they had heard a story about one. I was not surprised to find stories of successful women: it was the pattern or rhythm of the stories that did it. They were stories of personal struggle and success – struggle for survival during the war as well as struggle with their personal career – through personal achievement and devotion to the cause. The stories were far more celebrative, however – avoiding descriptions of victims and injustices – than I had expected. Soon enough I started to characterize them as hero(ine) tales.

I am not the first one to ponder into the mythical hero-like tale of stories of entrepreneurs. On the contrary, the entrepreneur as a hero is perhaps the most common image in business tales (Ahl, 2002; Pettersson, 2002; Gabriel, 2004; Bruni et al., 2005; Hatch et al., 2005). Hatch et al. when analyzing business stories, conclude that 'any culture needs its heroes and constructs them according to its key values. The values of the epic form are heroism and achievement in spite of the odds. Success stories or stories of achievement ... are epics' (2005: 40).

Myths and legends have played and still play an important role for people in the Balkans; to narrate history, to create identity and to claim the right to space and place (Ditchev, 2002). Western countries, not the least, narrate Kosovo/a – and the Balkans in general – in mythical terms (Goldsworthy, 2002). However, it has been argued that it is mainly men and male experience that have been narrated and, further, when women are included in these stories – in the Balkans primarily war-stories – women are present as bodies and further as victims:

women refugees carrying the remnants of their belongings in plastic bags; women dragging frightened and exhausted children; weeping women, angry women, women impregnated by rape, traumatized women. Whatever happens, women are depicted as bodies (Kestic, 2002: 311).

In organization theory, as mentioned above, it has also been shown that women are primarily portrayed as the ‘Other’; the one that the male or male experience is not (Gherardi, 1995; Ahl, 2002; Pettersson, 2002; Bruni et al., 2005). In this chapter I want to contribute to the imaginary of women (as heroines) rather than building on the exclusion of gender and on gender blindness (Gherardi, 1995). We need role models to be put forward, on their own, and we need to avoid the convention to ‘portray women’s organizations as “the other”, or “the alter”, and sustain social expectations of their difference, thereby implicitly reproducing the normative value of male experience’ (Bruni et al., 2005: 11). Here we will meet The Intrapreneur, the Spirit, the Controller and the Peacemaker. I narrate the stories from and about the women through writing them as an emerging legend of a Kosovar Heroine; a legend I see as creating space for new stories; embodying the tension between reproducing the past (male experience) and producing the future (female experience).

### **Emerging myths and legends**

We will now return to the initial quote by Bowles (1989). Bowles argues that myths and legends are important in ‘structuring peoples’ experience and in providing meaning’ (Bowles, 1989: 406) and when the traditional mythologies, predominantly our religions, are losing their power, there is need for new, or ‘creative’ mythologies.

The emergence of myths has also been problematized by Laclau (e.g., 1990). While Bowles is problematizing the importance of creative myths primarily in the context of Western societies, and their relation to organizing, Laclau is writing on (dramatic) political or social change – in his recent works (Laclau, 2005) using the case of

Kosovo/a. For Laclau myth is not at all primitive, not contributing to irrational behaviour:

[M]yth is constitutive of any possible society . . . Any space formed as a principle for the reordering of a dislocated structure's element is mythical. Its mythical character is given by its radical discontinuity with the dislocations of the dominant structural forms. (Laclau, 1990: 67)

Further, the greater the 'dislocation' (change) is – as Laclau puts it – the greater is the need for the emergence of myths and mythical spaces in order to reorganize social life. However, and this is an important point for Laclau and for this chapter, although these ('creative') myths that emerge are indeed 'new', no dislocation is total, and myths will always echo the struggle between the before and the now. Myths are constituted by the interviewing processes of alteration and repetition. The structure as well as the content of the myth will resemble the local context and its (hi)stories as well as the break with these (Laclau, 1990). Listening to Laclau when making an analysis of emerging myths – in this case female entrepreneurs in Kosovo/a – one could gain from not rejecting the old stories, but making use of them. They are an important part of the emerging story, as the past is for the future.

### **Writing up an emerging legend**

I use material from my field study in Kosovo/a. I asked people I met if they knew any female entrepreneurs; I also found and collected these stories in the written form; finally, I interviewed the women themselves. This is my interpretation of, and contribution to, the stories about female entrepreneurs. This is not an attempt to represent, or write, the true story of these women. I am as much a storyteller as anyone I talked to, and I have chosen to use the style and voice of a storyteller, rather than trying to repeat what I was told by quoting. In order to write up the emerging legend, I will use the model of primary story types as described by Hatch et al. (2005: 24). I use the epic drama – or the hero legend – to analyze my stories and hence start to trace the emerging legend: how is a female entrepreneur portrayed in Kosovo/a? What is the plot focus? What are the main achievements and challenges? Who is the villain, the assistant, and who is being rescued? What emotions are provoked by the stories? How are the stories being used?

## **Narrating female entrepreneurs in Kosovo/a**

### *The Intrapreneur: making use of existing structures*

She starts to talk even before we shake hands. She turns to my interpreter and says (in English) ‘I don’t speak English’, and then she immediately, in Albanian, starts to describe everything we see (we meet at her farm). Repeatedly during our conversation, when she thinks that the translation is not good enough, or losing her point, she translates that part herself, impatiently. To make her point she often compares herself, and her farm, with other dairy producers, nationally and internationally, and she often goes into detailed, technical descriptions.

After the war she had started to work for a dairy production reconstruction project, run by an international aid organization whose goal was to give ‘one cow to every household’. By the end of the project she was given the chance to buy 36 cows from the project, and she was also given machinery and a tractor. She says, with pride, that now, just a few years later she is the third biggest dairy producer in Kosovo/a. She might lose the farm nonetheless, she tells me: she owns the buildings and the machinery, but the property is not hers. It is one of the former state-owned farms and it is now in the process of privatization.

During my visit there are two men at the farm and I understand that one of them is her husband. I do not get introduced to him, not even when he drives us into Pristina. In fact, we do not discuss her family at all; we talk about her firm and the projects she is leading in connection with the firm. Her main project is to help others to set up and start dairy production. She believes that it is from the countryside that Kosovo/a can be rebuilt: the land is there and will always be there, now people just have to learn how to run a modern business, she says. Her strategy is simple, yet surprising: when people come to her asking for help, she offers them a chance to work at her farm. When she feels that their commitment is sincere she gives them, for free, 1-3 cows. At first they can keep the animals at her firm and use her machinery; gradually they move to a place of their own.

### *The Spirit: anything is possible and life should be beautiful*

The spontaneous suggestion: ‘Why don’t you open your own florist shop if you like flowers’ started it all. This was in 2003, during a visit to London. She had gone to

London to celebrate her birthday and she was given a beautiful bouquet of flowers; not plastic, but fresh roses. She thought to herself ‘why not’ and two years later I meet her in her florist boutique. There is also a small counter with chocolate pralines in the shop. The Spirit explains that making this difference – bringing joy into people’s lives – has inspired her to introduce other products in Kosovo/a, such as chocolate (real chocolate, as she calls it).

The Spirit is the youngest of my interviewees. It is clear that her independence is very important to her. As an example, when I ask her what people are important for her and her firm, at first she answers no one. Then she tells me that if she needs help she finds it at her job as an IT engineer; they are all professionals there, she says. Then she reveals that she has a mentor in Skopje and that it was her family that helped her financially when she started.

The Spirit has two degrees, and she thinks it is important that women go to university and at the moment there are two young women – both of them studying at the university – working in the florist shop. The Spirit admits that it is not the most efficient strategy; florists need training, and since her staff only stay as long as they study, she will spend more money on training than necessary, but she thinks it is worth it. First of all it is her way of contributing, she tells me, and second, young people bring new ideas and energy to the firm.

*The Controller: this is a one (wo)man show*

She has eight women employed in the bakery. The Controller tells me that her husband also works at the bakery sometimes, driving the van – I can see her husband behind a curtain, watching us, but we do not get introduced to each other.

Before we start to talk she insists on providing me with a selection of cakes from the bakery and a coffee from the café next door. Her story is told in short sequences, because as soon as she sits down she runs off again: to the kitchen to make sure that everything is proceeding accordingly; she is the only one allowed to answer the phone, which is constantly ringing; she opens the back door if there is a delivery, and takes care of the customers. The other women mix ingredients and bake the cakes, but when it comes to the final part – the decorations – the Controller makes them all. Her specialty is birthday cakes (or cakes for any other special occasions): she shows me pictures she has collected in an album – more than 70 by now. The album works as inspiration for her customers when they order cakes.



When I ask her what makes her successful she answers straightaway that it is the quality of the cakes: they are home-made. Her mother gave her the recipes, and she tells me over and over that there are no cakes in Kosovo/a like her cakes: She is the most expensive and the best you can find. Then there is some noise from the kitchen and she is gone again.

Once returned to the table, she gives me some background to her choice of career. She had supported her family, during the occupation, through selling doughnuts in the street. After the war she started to work for a women's NGO, in a project providing work training for women.

Through the project she got funding – on the premise to train women – and started the bakery. When the project came to an end she continued to train women, and several of them are now working for her. She also helped four women to start their own bakeries; they came to her for training, she helped them with equipment and gave them advice during the start-up phase. She tells me that she has no spare time, but that her greatest joy, and what she appreciates most about her firm, is to see her family and the families she has met through her bakery grow up.

### *The Peacemaker: live and let live*

The first time I hear about the Peacemaker is at a women's NGO. She lives in the village of Obilic, an important place historically and culturally for Kosovo/a, and one of the few places where people of different ethnicities live side by side. The Swedish K-for escort me to the Peacemaker; not because it is dangerous for me to go there, but it makes the Peacemaker less nervous if they are there. She is a Bosniak, one of the minority groups in Kosovo/a, and although she speaks Albanian almost perfectly her accent can cause her problems sometimes.

The Peacemaker started the firm – manufacturing plastic bags – as a way to help women in her community. She is a Bosniak, but her partner, a woman working at the municipality, is Kosovo/a-Albanian, and the women working in the factory are of different ethnic heritages, too. They have been multi-ethnic from the beginning, she says, but they always find a way to communicate; they do not need language.

Before and after work, and also during breaks, she goes to the factory. The Peacemaker's partner never works there, but her husband does, more or less full time, without payment. Like the other men I (almost) meet he does not say a word during my

visit to the factory. I notice that all the texts on the plastic bags are printed in German. The Peacemaker tells me that the plastic bags sell better in this format – people are suspicious of domestic products.

During my visit to the factory there is a power cut, and there is no one else at the factory. The Peacemaker explains that when there is no power they can't use the machines and it makes no sense for the women to stay in the factory. Therefore, the women go home to take care of the household. When the power returns they come back and start to work.

### **Discussion: tracing the legend(s) of a Kosovar heroine**

The emergence of female entrepreneurs in Kosovo/a provides a novel situation for studying a myth-in-the-making. There are of course a thousand faces of the Hero (Campbell, 1949, quoted in Bowles, 1989) and this is not an attempt to write them as ONE, neither to reject the old hero myths and legends. The aim is rather to resituate the Hero myth – a play in the structure – thus giving voice to silent parts of the story and a potential to alternatives – in this case women's experience in Kosovo/a.

My analysis is summarized in Table 5.1. The *plot focus* is struggle and achievement: if one tries hard enough, one can succeed and create life for oneself, for the becoming-nation and for the people. The stories avoid traumas, misfortune – which clearly breaks with the stereotype images of women in Kosovo/a – and details about the family. Further, there is a tension in the setting of the stories, in the *predicament*. The mission these women emphasize is the reconstruction of Kosovo/a and the creation of a joint future. The challenge for the women is connected to their firms; how to create and run a business successfully, how to find customers, suppliers and material; similar to challenges every person running a business struggles with. However, in the context of Kosovo/a this struggle becomes a tension, since some decisions – like the Spirit who enables women to study at the university – are irrational in the economic profit context.

My *protagonists* seem to be somewhere in-between the 'independent-minded entrepreneurs who struck out alone, building empires and revolutionizing social and economic life, overcoming crisis and leaving lasting legacies' (Gabriel, 2004: 82) and entrepreneurs as driving-forces of social change and entrepreneurship as forms of social creativity (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006). They seem to be driven not primarily by an economic rationale, *homo oeconomicus*, but by creating, or re-creating – the firm, families, the nation, the people, as well as themselves and their career (cf. Hjorth and

Johannisson, 2003) – so perhaps we can understand them as representatives of *femina curans*<sup>3</sup>. However, this analysis is dangerously close to seeing them as ‘mothers’; caring about mother earth – an image they themselves carefully avoid. Therefore, through a discussion of the context of *other characters*, where, or with whom, these women operate, I hope to reach a more multi-faced image by the end of this chapter.

Table 5.1: Tracing an emerging legend of a Kosovar heroine.

<i>Aspects of Story</i>	<i>Epic drama</i>	<i>A Kosovar Heroine</i>
Protagonist	Heroines	Female entrepreneurs
Other characters	Rescue objects	Creating heroines
	Assistant	Husband
	Villain	The Past
Plot focus	Struggle and success	Bravery
Predicament	Challenge and mission	Tension between the reconstructing Kosovo/a and business success
Emotions	Nostalgia and admiration	The woman before and after the war
Role in business	Inspiration	Creating market economy and a place for women in it

Source: Hatch et al. (2005: 24).

Kosovo/a – the heart of Europe’s most complex transitional region – seems to be trapped on the threshold between the past and the future: its people cannot continue without dealing with the past; neither can they continue without carrying the past with them. Here, according to Laclau (1990), mythical spaces and emerging myths will be visible, and during my interviews people did refer to mythical events to explain Kosovo/a: ‘It all started in 1389’ (the answer to ‘What year did the war begin’); ‘People trust “The Canon<sup>4</sup>” more than the law’ (explanation of why the implementation of laws is difficult); and the conflict during the 1990s produced

<sup>3</sup> *Femina curans* is inspired by Monika Kostera, and her discussion on *femina imaginas* (see Kostera, 1996) and by *homo curans*, a discussion initiated by Bengt Johannisson and Elisabeth Sundin (see Johannisson and Olaison, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> ‘Kanuni I Leke Dukagjinit’ [The Code of Leke Dukagjini].

new/reproduced old heroes, images used in public as well as private debates. Kosovo/a itself is in this sense the *villain*; the tension between being haunted by the past on one hand and the reconstruction of Kosovo/a on the other. This tension is also present in the stories, The Peacemaker is an explicit example of that, and so is the Intrapreneur, albeit more implicitly.

Physically present in the stories, but still excluded, were the men – my protagonists ignored them completely when I was visiting. However, when describing the day-to-day activities of their firms, it appeared that the men clearly had a role to play – as *assistants* – as a person close to the hero. I cannot know whether I did not get introduced to the men because it is indeed the women that run the show, or if this is a joint strategy (i.e., the international organizations promote women and gender equality, and, therefore, a female business owner can sometimes get funding where a male cannot).

Either way, it is interesting that my protagonists choose to reconstruct society. However, the women seem to be more than a means to reach a goal. On a micro level they are the *rescue objects*; the entrepreneurs are saving them from the villain – the situation in Kosovo/a – making them into heroines of their own. This also means that they are creating their own competition, but during discussions they avoid this topic; The Intrapreneur says that Kosovo/a needs more people working, and The Controller quickly adds that no one is as good as she is anyway, and hence there is no real competition. There are many interpretations of this: perhaps they need competitors for their own business to work better; or perhaps the ‘social dimension’ is something that others (men) can relate to without getting jealous. Further, as in the case of the Controller, she got funding to train women. However, no one forced the Controller to provide means for others to set up their own firm.

When I talk to people in Kosovo/a, their stories always start with ‘before the war . . . after the war . . .’ I interpret the war as marking the ‘dislocation’, using Laclau’s framework that provokes a mythical space which is both connected and disconnected with the past. The women start their stories by telling me what they did before the war, what they were working with, and, more importantly, how they used this experience after the war to create their success, i.e. creating a professional career (having a professional career seems very important). It is as if they use this strategy to cross the threshold from the past into the future: using the scars from the past – often ethnic and/or cultural heritage – evoking *nostalgia and admiration* rather than melancholia.

Organizational storytelling, according to Hatch et al. 'is an act involving others, it has the power to engage and thereby the possibility to motivate and inspire' (2005: 15-16). As *inspiration*, the stories travel beyond the way they are used by the narrators themselves; they are, through the creative, or emerging, legends creating a space for women in the Kosovo/a that is emerging. Further, re-reading my heroine tales I interpret them as performing the image (they have) of the Western male entrepreneur hero in the (functioning) market economy. In a place without property rights; without laws and regulation; without social security and a functioning market, this needs to be created. Even competition, an important feature of a functioning market, needs to be created. In emerging companies, Gartner et al. (1992) argue, people are acting as if they had a stable organization, and this is how the firm eventually becomes a firm. In Kosovo/a these women are acting as if there was a market economy; as if there were property rights; as if minorities can live in peace; and as if the status were already solved. When thinking of the stories as 'acting as if', the tension in the stories starts to make sense. I rather understand the social dimension as an economic necessity than as 'motherhood'. The heroines are creating, by performing, a market (economy); indeed the turn of *femina curans* is creative.

## **Final remarks**

One important question to raise is whether I am not making the mistake Bruni et al. are warning about. Am I not just 'implicitly reproducing the normative value of male experience' (Bruni et al., 2005: 11) rather than contributing to the imaginary of women by using the hero tale and by calling them entrepreneurs, two labels connected to male experience? So it might be. At the same time every story has its intertextuality and, listening to Laclau (1990), any emerging myth will carry a trace of its local history. Therefore, I believe that using the same structure and storytelling provides an opportunity to resituate the story and listen to other versions. This also seems to be the strategy of the women I met: by using the same storytelling, or myths, perhaps the women are seen as less alien and frightening. By drawing on specific values, such as contributing to the rebuilding of society, helping others and being professional they seem to be recreating a market, a world, for themselves and others (cf. Spinosa et al., 1997). Therefore, I do not believe that I am just repeating the male experience, pushing these women into a story they will not recognize or belong to. On the contrary, it is their turn now.

# Chapter 6: The indirect approach of semi-focused groups

Frederic Bill and Lena Olaison

## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to present an alternative way of using focus groups in research – a role-play-enhanced focus group method – in which participants are presented with the challenge of dealing with a specific task while playing a familiar but nevertheless fictive role.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The research is performed through an experimental approach in which a focus group of small business owner-managers are assembled and presented with a prepared case exercise. The design is a role-play-like setting in which the participants are to act as the board of a company.

**Findings:** Carefully designed, well-prepared role-play-like activities can add substantially to focus-groups.

**Originality/value:** Adding an experimental dimension to focus groups offers the possibility of addressing topics indirectly and thus increases their usefulness.

## **Keywords**

Focus groups, Pragmatism, Role play

## **Introduction**

With some exceptions, like shadowing, social science methods tend to address the explicit knowledge of the respondents. Surveys and interviews are obvious examples of this, where questions are posed to the informants in a setting that decouples action and reflection. Thus, what the informants offer is their post-facto understanding of what they would have done in a specific setting. This means that survey or interview questions are presented in an artificial setting. Thus, it is presupposed that knowledge can exist decoupled from the actual setting of action. It has been argued, by

ethnographers among others, that knowledge about an informant's presumptions and attitudes towards phenomena is best acquired in everyday situations. In many cases, however, ethnographic inquiries could prove difficult to arrange, which justify methodological experimentation with alternative approaches. Furthermore, as interviews are often used in ethnographic work, the method presented in this paper by pragmatism (Dewey, 1910; Peirce, 1905), this paper proposes an alternative way of using focus group interviews so that the spheres of knowledge and action are intertwined. In this paper we report on how and why we developed the focus group data collection technique by adding a dimension of role-playing. More specifically, we presented the participants with a task to be solved collectively during the session.

In this paper, we have named this method the indirect approach, and we will throughout refer to it as either a semi-focused group or as the role-play-enhanced focus group method in order to highlight that adding a role-play dimension to a traditional focus group session does in fact reduce the focus of the group.

We will present the empirical session through an excerpt from the transcripts and the use of role-play described in general terms. We will also briefly explain the research project that inspired us to develop a technique for indirectly approaching a subject. Section 2 offers a literature review on focus groups, followed in Section 3, by a description of our indirect approach. We then continue to present role-playing as a tool for our data-gathering. In Section 4, we reflect on the potential of the method, and finally, in Section 5, we summarize our experiences and draw some conclusions.

## **Introducing role-play**

Moderator: OK, we have chosen a perhaps unusual set-up for today's session. You represent a board at a firm. There is a stressful situation at hand and you need to act immediately. The background to the board meeting today can be found in the hand-out in front of you. I suggest that you read this before we continue.

*A few minutes' silence.*

Moderator: OK, I see that you have read the papers. The only thing I will say to you now is that you are the board of this firm. At noon a car will pick up two of the members to go to the airport, so there's no time to waste; you have to be finished by then. How you organize yourself to manage that is up to you. If you don't have any questions, I hereby hand over to the board to start its meeting.

*A few minutes' silence.*

Participant 5: A very silent board, if I may say.

Participant 2: [Giggle]

Participant 5: And without a chairperson. [. . .] OK, I think one first needs to analyze the existing problems in the firm, and see if we agree what the problems are. I think the strategy of the firm is confused.

P4: To say the least.

P2: [Giggle]

P5: If you focus on the activities, I think one needs to figure out what one wants. So if we start by focusing on what we perceive as the major problems.

P2: From the text it's difficult to see what they want.

P5: No, there are many possible roads to choose.

P3: Mmm.

P5: They have already decreased the range of products [. . .] Or, I mean we have already decreased the range of products, we are the board. And I guess we need to ask ourselves if that was right or wrong.

P3: Are you the chairperson P5?

P5: Oh, no!

P3: Well, it certainly looks like it.

P5: It's just, I'm just wondering how you feel about such an analysis. If we agree where the problems are in the firm, then I guess we have to see what we can do about them.

P2: The task for us is to evaluate each candidate and rank them.

P5: Yes.

P2: And finally to appoint a new CEO.

This transcription of the first tentative minutes of the semi-focused group session provides the empirical basis of this paper. We invited five owners of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to discuss the 'conditions and challenges of SMEs in contemporary Sweden'. When they arrived at the session, however, they were told that today they were to 'represent a board' of directors for an SMEs in search of a new CEO. The task of the meeting was to appoint a new CEO. Apart from a hand-out – a description of the fictive company and fictive curriculum vitae (CVs) for the four



leading candidates – the only clues on how to proceed with the task are included in the quotes above.

Role-play suggests something fictional. We constructed an entire scenario with a set of rules and roles and asked the participants to act upon it and play it out. A role-play has a script with rules and constraints, but it also leaves room for the group's decision-making abilities, analytic acumen, and, most importantly, the experience, emotions and imagination of its members. Our scripts also had rules, such as time limit to solve the problem, and the participants started their role-playing in a specific setting that they could not initially control or co-create (a board of directors has rules for how to act and how to make decisions). Not least, the 'adventure' or problem at hand had a role-play construct; the four CVs constructed personality traits that they had to evaluate and create and develop characters around and choose which one was most suitable for the task of being CEO for the firm. To solve the task, or 'to play the game', the participants first had to accept the setting and script, and then they had to co-create it and give their own characters life (the board). The given script did not afford them enough information to do so; they had to play it out and co-construct the setting as the session developed.

We did not intend to study decision-making, the functioning of board meetings or how CEOs are chosen by owners of SMEs. Instead we were trying to indirectly address the rationale behind owner-managers' paradoxical decisions to time and again participate in support programmes, although these programmes unquestionably demonstrated negligible effects on growth and profitability (Bill et al., 2009). Assuming that there might be a difference between how to talk about a phenomenon and how to act upon that phenomenon, we decided to develop a method to address this question in an indirect manner. We introduced support programs only as one of many topics to be discussed, rather than confronting the informants with specific queries. This, of course, meant that we neither gave them information about our purpose for creating the role-play nor did we tell the participants what we were looking for when we observed them. As a result, they did not know why they were assembled. It was a fictional setting, an experiment with individuals. Of course, the participants were informed about this and consented to participate in the role-play.

To make up a fictional event and invite individuals to participate (without knowing what they were really doing) has a great many implications. What we intend to report in this paper is not an answer to our research question. Instead we focus on the development of the account-gathering technique – where we combine a traditional

focus group with role-play – and therefore we concentrate on how the topics were discussed. By this means, we hope to offer insights into how groups can be constituted and the interaction and communication enhanced.

### **On the paradoxical SMEs support**

Our specific problem with data collection stemmed from the puzzlement we felt when faced with public attempts to foster growth and prosperity by inaugurating various support measures for SMEs. Such public support measures have very little impact on the growth of targeted firms, at least there are no evident positive correlation between support measures and either firm growth or economic development (Norrman and Bager-Sjögren, 2006; Faoite et al., 2004). This is true in a variety of national settings (Ankarhem, Rudholm and Quoreshi, 2007; Lambrecht and Pirnay, 2005). More significantly, it has been suggested that the probability of an individual becoming involved in entrepreneurial activities varies inversely with the attitude towards support programmes (Greene and Storey, 2004). Paradoxically, however, it would seem that this lack of scientific support for their effectiveness has not discouraged the support, funding and creation of support programmes and organizations. If this is not to be seen as mere irrationality, there must be effects and intentions besides those officially proclaimed, i.e. that support initiatives are primarily intended to improve the conditions and performance of business venturing (Bill and Olaison, 2006).

In order to dismantle this paradox, the taken-for-granted assumptions about these programmes must be challenged. However, with the rigorous evaluation literature in mind, it seemed rather pointless to ask the SME owners what they thought about support measures or why they participated. After all, previous attempts to do so have shown results similar to those of surveys and statistical-based studies. We concluded that we could not ask them about the ‘genre’ of support measures at all. As soon as we mentioned support initiatives the respondents would be pointed in a certain direction, and we might even activate a pre-set frame of understanding among them. In fact, there might actually exist among the owner managers some knowledge regarding how to talk about public support measures. This knowledge could, however, be very different from the knowledge of how to deal with such initiatives in the practice of everyday action.

We have mentioned ethnography with its use of observation as perhaps the most elaborate attempt to gain access to everyday practices. The natural choice of research design seems to be that of following a support programme, observing its expected and

unexpected effects. However, their long-term character makes using ethnographic approaches rather complicated. This is why the idea of using focus groups consisting of SME owners to ‘trigger each other’ into conversations was born. We initially planned a session in which we would pose questions regarding what support programmes should be like, instead of simply asking the informants why they had participated. Discussing what a support programme should be like in their opinion would, we hoped, cause them to indirectly address the rationale of participating. Even though there are several tools for designing such a study proposed in the focus group literature, like using words or topics as input, we concluded that raising the question of support measures would in itself be detrimental to our study. We wanted to study something that had hitherto been overlooked in the research/evaluation of support measures. Squeezed between the need of getting our informants to discuss ‘our’ topic and the requirement of not getting involved in the discussions, we needed to develop a method that would facilitate such an arrangement.

## **The focus group as a research method**

### *Introduction*

Focus group interviews as a research method go back to World War II, where focus groups were used in military research on propaganda and morale (Cote-Arsenault and Morrison-Beedy, 2005). To this day, focus groups are frequently used in both marketing and public health care (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson, 2001), but also in communication, education, anthropology, psychology, and political science (Wall, 2001). In social science, however, focus groups were not generally used until the 1980s, which means that it did not develop alongside other methodologies. This historic development of the use of focus groups has had the consequence that the methodological development of focus groups does not have the same foundation in philosophy as other methods do, which may explain the lack of understanding and discussions about what actually occurs during a focus group session (Cote-Arsenault and Morrison-Beedy, 2005).

Modestly described, a focus group interview is a ‘research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher’ (Morgan, 1996: 130). The focus group interview is not primarily aimed at gathering data from the individuals in a group, but at using the discussions in the group as a means of reaching insights that the participants were not previously aware of and which they were thus

not able to articulate. Through the discussion the participants are stimulated to reflect on subjects they have some knowledge about but are not normally conscious of (Morgan, 1996). Focus groups are said to be productive when ‘the goals of the research are general, call for qualitative data, require data that is not in the respondent’s top-of-mind, and when there is minimal prior knowledge about a particular problem and the range of responses that are likely to emerge’ (Zeller 1993: 1 in Hartman, 2004: 403).

### *Challenges to the method*

Most literature on focus groups notes that a focus group interview differs from many other methods in that it does not take place in an environment that is natural to the participants. The group is originally put together by the researchers, who also define the topics to be discussed. It is the researchers’ responsibility to create a productive and friendly atmosphere (Cote-Arsenault and Morrison-Beedy, 2005). We would like to add that any situation where a researcher tries to ‘extract’ something from an informant is a non-natural situation for the participant. Meeting participants in their natural habitat, such as the informant’s office space, only partially solves this problem. It is always, not only in focus groups, the researcher’s task to create an environment where the participants feel inspired and free to discuss the subject in a fruitful way.

A group can be conceived of as a gathering of individuals sharing something, such as a profession or an experience. A group can also be seen as members sharing values, norms, or rules. Hydén and Bülow (2001) point out that a distinction can be made between a focused gathering – people that meet to agree to focus on a single thing for a while and then part, and a group – which has a life of its own. Their main argument is that the group participants may constitute themselves in many ways within the group, and perhaps not behave as a group at all. The formation of a group for Hydén and Bülow (2001) is a two-fold process: to establish a common ground for the group and to contribute to the common ground. From this perspective, most focus groups can be seen as ‘focused gatherings’, since they at least share the topic to be discussed. When such processes work, the participants ‘act and view themselves as members of a group sharing a common ground – as belonging to something that is more than the sum of its individual participants’ (ibid.: 311). This common ground is not solid but will be re-established during the session. For Hydén and Bülow this means that it will be possible for the participants to introduce new aspects, disagree with each other, and still remain members of the group. There will be an interaction between the participants by pragmatic markers such as ‘mm’; ‘I agree’; ‘correct’; laughter; asking each other for

opinions; going back to things other members of the group have said (not necessarily something that the person agrees with) and so forth (ibid.).

Hollander (2004) identifies two problems associated with the interaction in a focus group setting: problematic silences, which imply that the participants may not 'speak their minds', and problematic speech, which implies that the participants share information that may not represent their actual beliefs and thought. Hollander herself introduces a twist: the problem is not that participants fail to reveal their underlying beliefs; it is that researchers believe that there are underlying beliefs. Groups produce social contexts, and what happens there belongs to that context. That is, there are many layers of interaction in the group that will always limit the use of focus groups with regard to capturing individual attitudes, feelings, beliefs and so forth.

Group formation, interaction and the layered social context seem to be the greatest challenges to the focus group setting. Initially they must be dealt with before the sessions, and then of course, in the subsequent analysis. As a result, it has been suggested that the group should be homogenous and even that it should only consist of members who already know each other, because this will create a favorable atmosphere (Jonsson Ahl and Florin Samuelsson, 1999). Although this might be a solution to the 'problem', we would like to point out that such a move can also work against the very purpose of focus group interviews, which are about collecting various views and triggering a discussion. It might even streamline the possible conversations, because if the participants know each other too well, already established hierarchies and dynamics will be transferred to the focus group: it will already be determined who can say what. As Hydén and Bülow (2001) points out, it is not as much a questions of selecting promising individuals to participate as it is a challenge to provide a (social) context where the participants, not the researcher, can formulate and re-formulate a 'common ground'.

Asking too direct questions or outlining too precise problems can thus be problematic, since the way the questions are outlined can guide the participants too much towards what the researcher is looking for (Hartman, 2004). It is believed that if the moderator is experienced, he or she can use questions in the discussions to trigger strong reactions (Lehoux, Poland and Daudelin, 2006), or, if the discussions have moved away from the subject matter, direct the discussion 'back on track'. From our perspective, every such interference will of course, have effects on the results. If the researcher is looking for spontaneous answers, we think that the moderator has to be patient, allowing the discussion to go back and forth. Every group has its particular way of reasoning and its

flow of communication (Morgan, 1996). One way to work with the role of the moderator could be, according to Hartman (2004), to make notes, and if the discussion halts, the moderator can comment on what has been said and ask for more comments. Asking too direct questions in marketing research, where focus groups have been frequently used as a tool to capture consumer behavior, has shown to be problematic with reference to the interaction in the group (Pearce, 1998). When facing, for example, products in a focus group, individuals make one choice, but when faced with the product outside the group (in a shop or even outside the room directly after the session) they make other choices. This has been analyzed through group dynamics and interaction. When faced with a problem in a group, individuals tend to answer in a way they think reflects their identity, what they would like to identify themselves with, or what they want others to think that they identify themselves with. Neither of these behaviours will necessarily coincide with choices they make in everyday life, or with how they conduct their lives (Penz, 2006). One proposed solution to this dilemma is to give the group various tasks or scenarios to deal with in order to make them focus more on the problem they are faced with than on how the other members of the group might perceive them as individuals (Pearce, 1998; Bloor et al., 2001). How we formulated such a task – role-playing – is the topic of this paper.

### *The use of role-play in focus group settings*

As a data-generating technique role-play is very rare. In fact, the only attempt we have come across so far is a study where it has been used to evaluate the language skills of non-native speakers (Halleck, 2007). Role-plays have successfully been used, however, in medical education, for example to teach communication with patients (Jacobsen, Baerheim, Lepp and Schei, 2006). In medical education role-play is seen as a pedagogical tool facilitating problem-based learning (Menahem and Paget, 1990). In that capacity, role-play has been advocated for learning social values and decision making (Thorson, 2002). In management training, too, role-play has been adopted as a pedagogical technique (Sogunro, 2004); here it is used mainly for learning accounting and leadership skills and for improving the work place, both with students (to exemplify text-book knowledge) and by consultants (as a tool to activate clients). Role-play is advocated as a useful technique when dialogue is promoted as a teaching agenda (Morrell, 2004). When employed as a method for learning, the most common approach is to use a pre-written script that the participants play out (Alden, 1999), or a well-described realistic historical scene (Lyon, 2001).

One could argue these examples are not really role-play – as in playing out a certain game with certain roles and tasks, but rather various learning-exercises where a person in educational purpose learns to behave in accordance with a ‘role’ corresponding to a professional role, such as a manager or a nurse. We use the term ‘role-play’ slightly differently in that we allow the participants to form their own characters from their own experiences, something we will develop in the following section.

## **The indirect approach**

### *Methodological foundations – pragmatism*

Regardless of one’s position regarding the dispute on the existence of an absolute truth, the pragmatist standpoint would be that theoretical knowledge cannot be severed from its practical setting. It is clear that despite contemporary pragmatism, which tends to be divided between subjectivists like Rorty (1982) and empirically oriented researchers like Putnam (1995), the idea of an objective truth is generally rejected within the framework. That is, no general truth can be arrived at, since truth exists only as a facet of action – and vice versa. Truth is thus an integral aspect of ‘successful’ action and consequently an empirical fact; theoretical insights and normative statements combine in a unity and can only exist as parts of this unity. Putnam notes that the ‘holistic interdependence of fact, value and theory’ (1995: 57) is apparent already in the founding of pragmatist epistemology. Furthermore, categories and typologies are not natural entities but nominal constructs that are invented to serve a specific purpose in solving certain problems. Thus, in order to get access to information on respondents’ understanding of a topic or problem one needs to observe the informant actually dealing with the topic in practice. This has previously been attempted through the use of ethnographic methods (Bill and Olaison, 2006). But a number of problems, especially as regards getting access to situations in which the relevant actions are carried out, have become apparent. It is, for example, difficult to assess beforehand when a certain topic will require action; it can also be very difficult to get access to relevant real-life situations. The second of these is especially problematic if external participants, like customers or suppliers, are involved in the situation where decisions are to be made. One way of getting round this obstacle is to stage a life-like situation and confront the informant with this setting.

It has been argued that the pragmatist answer to the challenge posed by the rejection of a single objective truth should be founded on action and anchored in a democratically

conducted inquiry, since ‘the way in which we will find out where and how our procedures need to be revised is through the process of inquiry itself’ (Putnam, 1995: 74-75). This more experimental approach of staging the situations in which data-gathering is to be carried out also has the advantage of allowing the frame of the study and the input material to be developed over time and to be changed in calculated ways. Thus, it offers the possibility to allow the informants to participate in forming the inquiry.

### *Design of the semi-focused group session*

Merging what we have learned from the extensive focus group literature with our thoughts on pragmatism and role-playing, we constructed a session with several parts. Here, it is important to point out that we did not use role-play alone; we added role-play as one dimension of a focus group session. Role-play satisfied the need to ‘ask without asking’ and therefore allowed for an indirect approach to research SME-support by giving the respondents a task, a problem to solve (Pearce, 1998; Bloor et al., 2001), but with the advantage of not having to direct them towards our research question. We conducted the session as follows:

- (1) A letter was sent to the participants, stating that we wanted to gather a group of SME owner-managers to discuss the conditions for SMEs in contemporary Sweden. That is, we did not tell them that what we really wanted to investigate was their rationale in participating in public support measures. We selected the participants with the help of an Application Level Multicast Infrastructure (ALMI) the regional development agency.
- (2) While having coffee, the participants introduced themselves with a brief biography. The purpose was to allow the participants to craft the social context. This was valuable for creating context to the role-play as well as for bridging between the role-play and the following discussion.
- (3) Then, the role-play was introduced. It was announced that the participants were expected to take on the role of members of a board at an SME. This board-meeting had just one item on the agenda: to hire a new CEO for the company. We provided them with a two-page presentation of the company, and a half-page CV for each of the four candidates who, according to their applications, were the most qualified. As a board they were expected to evaluate each of the final applicants and then rank them (see the introduction quote from the session).



(4) When the group ‘closed’ the board meeting, the moderator initiated a discussion and could use both the individual presentations and the conversation during the ‘board meeting’ to pose questions. Here, the participants could motivate statements and, for example, explain why some issues were not dealt with. They were also asked about experiences from their everyday life and invited to compare those with experiences from the role-play.

(5) After the session we all had lunch together, where we – the researchers – could explain what our intentions were and how we had experienced the session.

(6) The participants were asked to reflect upon the meeting in writing.

(7) We, the researchers, discussed and reflected together after the meeting. Jonsson Ahl and Florin Samuelsson (1999) recorded the discussion they had immediately after the completion of the focus group meeting. We were, however, invited by one of the participants to visit her company. This demonstrates the possible tension between the need for rigorousness on the one hand and the need to take responsibility for dealing with processes begun in the participants on the other.

The whole meeting lasted two hours, one of which concerned the board meeting itself. About 20 min concerned the presentation round and 40 min were thus devoted to the more general discussion.

## **Experiences from the role-play, some examples**

### *Introducing role-play demands patience from the researcher*

To force the participants to take charge of the session, we hardly introduced the set-up to them at all. These are the minutes presented in the introduction of the paper. At first, they glanced towards us, as if they were searching for clues. We did not, however, acknowledge this and their response to this, we must admit, surprised us. They did not ask us any questions. The opening line ‘A very silent board, if I may say’ followed by ‘And without a chairperson’ shows, rather, that they took the moderator’s instructions seriously and turned to each other to decide what to do. In these first minutes of the session, all included in the introduction to this paper, the conversation is probing, as they try to agree upon how to proceed with the task. In that way the participants themselves had to create a common ground – and also try to contribute to it (Hydén and Bülow, 2001). It is true that we provided the frame, but then it was up to them to

organize and perform the role-play. Already here it was apparent that even if they were searching for clues about what to do, they engaged in the role-play, correcting themselves: ‘Or I mean we have already decreased the range of products, we are the board’.

The early phases of the role-play, in particular, demanded a lot of patience from us as researchers, careful not to break into their way of reasoning with each other, which was emerging. We think that this reticence is very important when creating a life-like environment that demands action.

### *Getting into the play*

After deciding what to do, they started to analyze the firm as well as the participants. During these discussions, they increasingly identified with the task they had been given; the firm became theirs. They no longer needed to correct themselves into playing: ‘And then we also have the contacts with the EU, which we have failed to engage in’. Note that it is not the firm that has failed; it is now we.

Soon enough the fictional CVs were not fictional any longer:

P1: Further, I think that he [one of the candidates] is a bit sloppy in his applications. ‘I speak German ad well as English’.

P2: Yeah, I know, I thought of that too. It is important to spell correctly.

P3: Yes. The least you can demand is that he edits his application.

P1: He might be dyslectic, but [. . .].

P2: Yes, I can certainly accept that. But that’s why we have computers to help us with that.

P1: Is he sloppy or is it something else?

P2: When you find such errors in an application it makes you wonder.

P1: Yes, he should have noticed this, in my opinion.

P2: Yes, to say the least.

This typing error was not intended by us to be a part of the game. However, for the participants it became very important in determining who the applicant was as person. We did not experience their conversation as an ironic discussion aimed at us as writers of the fictional applications. For them the typing error (‘ad’ instead of ‘as’) was as

serious as the fact that the applicant stated that he could speak those languages. Further, their focusing on the possible sloppiness of the applicant is also symptomatic of much of the evaluation of the applicants. What they did search for most in the hand-outs were clues to what the applicants were like as persons.

### *Co-authoring the role-play*

When they did not find enough answers in the hand-out, they discussed it and agreed upon how things really were. As in this example, discussing a candidate for the CEO post stated that had previously been a CEO at ALMI (a regional development agency, working with SME support):

P2: But what is it about him that you like?

P4: Let me just say, if we take this Arvid Karlsson, we are running the risk of thinking that, well, since he has been working in the public sector, he is, really, disqualified to start with. But I think it's a shame, really, to read the text too fast, because if you look at it, you know, you can think whatever you want about ALMI [. . .].

All: Hahahaha [laughter].

P4: But he has shown, in any case, that he has been working, and also that he must have certain skills.

P2: Yeah, but, Arvid Karlsson has, in any case, no contact with, how should I put it, with what might be called the business world. It is just too much social insurance office and ALMI and [. . .] No, I put him last. It is a plus that he's mentioning his wife and that he wants to move back home, but [. . .].

P4: Well, one could say that, from an educational perspective, that he's got just a two-year high school business administration education, well that is [. . .].

P2: Yeah, that is certainly a deficiency.

P4: Yes, that is his big flaw, apart from that, I think, he has been working, I mean, he has been working also in business organizations, as Human Resource Director, and.

P5: But he became a CEO at ALMI?

P1: Yeah, I thought about that too. Why him? I mean, out of 30 candidates. It makes me wonder: who, apart from him, applied for that job?

P4: It is a bit strange, I agree, but you can view that from two perspectives, I think.

P5: Hmm, I don't know.

P4: Well, they might have chosen him because he made such an impression, regardless of his lack of education, he might have, you know, that kind of charisma, or whatever it is called.

P2: Yes, that must be it.

P4: Yes.

P2: He must have charisma.

P5: Yes, he must have, I'm sure is a good leader. But is that what we need right now?

P3: No.

Arvid, to a large part due to his post as CEO at ALMI, made an ambiguous impression, making it difficult for the board members to characterize and evaluate him. After trying several explanations, they add a new one; the consensus of the group became that he must have charisma and that that they (the now not so fictional firm) needed other qualities. They therefore could dismiss him as a candidate.

### *On the paradoxical SME-support*

In the description of the company one could read that 'the current CEO has not acted upon the possibility to join the cluster initiative, partly financed by EU that was launched a year ago'. We gave this information because research shows that regional development through, for example, cluster initiatives help SME's to grow. In line with this research, we were rather sure that this clue would trigger discussions of cluster initiatives and support programs connected to them as a way forward for the firm. To our surprise the participants ignored this clue, they briefly touched upon it when they summarized and ranked the candidates. When we asked about why so little attention was given to support measures and the ability to interact with public agencies in the region, one of the participants offered a somewhat surprising answer:

P4: I might, I maybe think that we must have some kind of idea of what they should prioritize in this company; that is, I don't think that anyone would come into this company and say that now we are to prioritize clusters. Instead, entering this company the task is to define the problems. What are required to get the sales going, to get our products out, to get the organization working, the quality of the products must work. These questions will become more important.

P2: Mmmmm [Unarticulated sounds of agreement].

P4: Then, when the foundation is laid for this platform, then we can start ponder to what degree we should be extrovert and in which contexts we should appear, and so on. I think it's very natural [ . . . ].

The idea of the company experiencing a crisis of sorts was from our side intended to steer the thoughts of the participants toward support measures such as the cluster initiative mentioned in the case description. As the example shows, this had the opposite effect on the participants.

This example shows the difference between talking about a topic and dealing with it. If we had asked them for their opinions about cluster initiatives in, e.g. an interview, they would most likely have given us an answer corresponding to the dominating discourse on cluster initiatives – that cluster helps the firm. This is what we could call the ‘talk about’ framework. Because of the experience from the role-play we could pin down certain things they did, forcing the participants to confront what they actually had done and said.

### *Role-play*

In this paper, the term role-play is used to describe a situation in which the participants in a focus group session deal with a ‘case-exercise’ while acting out a fictive character. The role and nature of this character is specified in a highly skeletal form, merely as a member of the board of directors, and it is left to the participant to develop it and imbue the character with life. The initial attempt by the participants to decide on a chairperson in a way marks the beginning of this process, which then continues throughout the session. In effect, this encourages the creation of characters representing the participants as a board member in the described company. Characters that straddle the boundary between reality and fiction are fashioned; in a sense, the participants impersonate themselves as they would act in the fictive setting.

This boundary area is further enhanced in that the task is not to simply deal with a defined problem, but also to do so while acting in character, i.e. as if they really were the board of the company described in the pre-prepared case.

Therefore, participation implies building a character by drawing on previous experience as owner managers. Maybe the difference between role-play and normal case-exercises becomes clearer if one thinks of a role-play as consisting of three parts:

- (1) a set of rules;
- (2) a script formulating the situation in which the participants find themselves;
- (3) a session in which the participants play out their roles.

With respect to case-exercises, our version of role-play is different mainly with regard to parts (1) and (3), as developed below.

The set of rules (1) in our case was implicit in that the participants as owner-managers themselves all had experience with running companies as CEOs and board members. Nothing was said or related to them regarding this, so in effect it was up to the participants to formulate the rules for the session within the general framework of their experiences with running companies. They played out a fictive setting but doing so in accordance with rules adopted from their everyday experiences as owner managers.

The session (3) includes a more subtle but no less important difference in that it has no end beyond itself. The session is framed and there are clues in the material intended to guide the participants in certain directions, like the references to support measures. This is not to say that we as researchers did not interfere in the process. For instance, already in choosing a board of directors as theme for the setting, a set of rules was implicitly introduced – even though they are enacted by the participants rather than explicitly stated. In this form of ‘case-exercise’ the participants are expected not only to deal with the problems posed by the case but also to simultaneously develop both their own character and the scenery in which the session takes place.

In our form, role-playing is dynamic in the sense that the very framework of the game is to some extent always under negotiation. The setting is ambiguous in that there is no apparent correct decision and there are no hard borders delimiting the choices of the participants.

#### *The eight steps of the indirect approach*

Finally, we would like to comment upon the session containing different parts. In order to help others who wish to use this kind of method, we will describe the eight stages in our use of the technique and how we created connections between them. The stages are, in sequential order: Preparation, Assembly, Introduction, External discussion, Internal discussion, Ownership, Debriefing, and Termination.

## (1) Preparation.

The first stage is the composition of the input material and the selection of participants. In our case we wrote a case description of the company and a CV for each of the CEO candidates. The fictional company was from a region similar to the participants' own, and its operations were rather straightforward in order not to distract the attention of the group towards technical complexity or long-term market ambiguity.

We wished for the candidates to demonstrate different strengths and weaknesses, primarily with regard to educational level, professional experience, international experience and the experience of support programs and support agencies. The CEO candidates were all males of approximately the same age. The candidates ought to be equally good in order to encourage the participants to weigh the different competencies together. We realized as the session started that we had made one of the candidates a bit too strong, but the board still decided to really make a thorough evaluation of all of them.

The importance of this stage cannot be underestimated. The board meeting began, as is apparent from the opening quote in this paper, with the participants trying to understand the situation of the company. 'OK, I think one first needs to analyze the existing problems in the firm, and see if we agree what the problems are. I think the strategy of the firm is confused'. One of the participants also expressed this clearly at a later stage of the discussion: 'When reading this document, I perceive this to be a company in a crisis, and if the company experiences a crisis a special kind of individual is required. It is not [. . .]'. Creating the necessary tension between familiarity with the situation and difficulties related to balancing the possible solutions is very important, since the indirect approach requires the topic sought after to be one of several possible solutions to the problem. The idea of the company experiencing a crisis proved to be very influential in the discussion.

## (2) Assembly.

The second stage was to assemble the group, and we decided on as neutral a setting as possible. The meeting was held in a meeting room at the municipal administrative building in the home region of the participants. Assembling at one of the participants' companies or at the university might have given rise to a host-guest relationship, disturbing the discussion by affecting the roles of the participants.

### (3) Introduction.

The third stage is to introduce the task to the group and this is somewhat tricky since the participants tend to be clue-seeking. However, in order for the method to work, the researcher or researchers introducing the task need to motivate the participants without giving away clues to their interests. In our case we began by presenting ourselves and asking the participants to present themselves. The following conversation was geared towards the situations and conditions that you meet as a small business owner-manager. In this way, we could express our interest in and devotion to small business generally without giving away the specific area of interest.

During this stage it was also possible to judge whether the participants considered each other as legitimate owner-managers and respected one another's experiences. In our case we had no indications that made us suspect the contrary.

### (4) External discussion.

In the fourth stage, the fictional board meeting commenced and during its first part the participants viewed the company from the outside. The company was initially referred to as by someone watching it from the outside. At a certain point this began to shift, however, and the perspective became blurred. First there was a conscious choice to say we and not they, as is demonstrated in the examples earlier. Following this, the perspective shifted between 'us' and 'they' for a while. This is a very sensitive phase of the session, since the participants must focus on the problem as a board rather than as a group of informants.

### (5) Internal discussion.

When the participants begin to refer to the company as us without thinking about it, the session has entered the fifth stage. The owner-managers are slowly migrating from merely taking part in a study about a company to a mindset in which they are solving a problem – as if they were leading the company.

### (6) Ownership.

In our study, it is only when entering the sixth stage, however, which we label ownership, that the participants actually ceased to consciously act 'as if' they were directors and began to act like the board of directors. At this stage, the focus of the group had shifted away from the intention of solving the 'puzzle' presented to them. Instead they tried to find the optimal CEO. It is of course, difficult



to assess if and when the participants enter into this kind of mind frame. One of the incidents that convinced us was due to the aforementioned spelling mistake. During this sequence of the session, the participants were actually searching for information beyond what they have been given. Not only to rank the candidates, but to actually find the candidate best suited to run their company. It is when the session reaches this stage that the owner-managers really begin demonstrating the knowledge of how to do something rather than the knowledge regarding how to talk about something.

#### (7) Debriefing.

When the participants had finally ranked the candidates, we began the seventh stage of the study, a group discussion with the senior researcher as moderator. The moderator alternated between posing direct questions regarding what had passed and presenting topics for further discussion among the participants. The advantage of this step was that we could pick out sequences of the previous role-play and ask the participants about their rationale for arguing or proposing various ideas. As the example above illustrates, our presumptions about the research question – based on previous research – had the opposite meaning for the participants. This illustrates that the debriefing session following the role-play is very important both as a means of closing in the rationale behind the participants’ choices but also as a means of opening the eyes of the researcher to new ideas and hitherto unseen explanations.

#### (8) Termination.

The eighth and final stage is termination. Since the intention is to get the participants to behave as if they solved a familiar real-world problem together with a group of people that they do not know very well beforehand, the events taking place in the group can become very personal and emotional. Because of this it is important to terminate the session in a friendly manner, to get the feeling that no one leaves the setting with feelings/emotions that he or she may have a hard time handling.

### **Discussion**

This paper presents an attempt to add a dimension of role-play to a focus group session in order to create what we label an indirect approach or a semi-focused group and addresses the feasibility of staging an executive board role-playing session in order to learn more about the way owner-managers in SMEs think and feel about public support programs. By adding a dimension of role-play, the participants are not only given a

case-exercise, but they are also asked to deal with it while enacting a role or character that is partly fictive. This duality between fictive and real is important since it implies that the participants act on the boundary between them. They are role-playing themselves, as they would act in a fictive situation and this is one of the main reasons why the role-play enhanced focus group method is useful in indirectly addressing topics. In a situation where the purpose of the role-play is learning, it does not matter if the characters are completely fictional. In our case this is different. Since the intention of the role-play enhanced focus group, or semi-focused group, study is to address the experience of the participants, if doing so without asking them directly, it is necessary that they create their characters in a way that allows these to express the experience and knowledge of the participants themselves.

As can be deduced from the discussion on pragmatism, we believe that knowledge manifests itself through actions as well as through words. This implies that there may actually be some specific knowledge regarding how to talk about something – e.g. support programs. Owner-managers have learned over time the way to frame and discuss support programs among themselves as well as together with others. If we had asked our respondents directly what they think about support programs or why they have participated in such, they would offer this knowledge: the knowledge of how to talk about the topic we are investigating. The knowledge of how to speak about something might, however, differ from the knowledge about dealing with this same something. This is where role-playing becomes useful, since it allows us to study the owner-managers in a setting that is familiar to them and thus in a sense real while simultaneously being fictive and to some extent possible to guide in certain directions through altering the framing.

By placing the owner-managers in a rather familiar situation and allowing them to interact without interruptions from us researchers, we kept them in their ‘dealing with’ mind frame. Considering the presence of us researchers, the participants were of course, aware that we intended to study them, but not knowing what we actually studied caused the situation to be ambiguous for the participants. Such ambiguity is necessary to prevent the participants from slipping into a ‘talking about’ mind-set. From our experience, this seems to be a definite risk, as demonstrated by the thorough way the participants dealt with the formal education of the various CEO candidates, where they stated explicitly the value of higher education. We are not trying to say that this was insincere, but that it could be considered as reflecting their knowledge of how to talk about education rather than their knowledge regarding how to deal with

questions of educational level in their everyday work as owner-managers. This is in our experience one of trickier parts of using the role-play enhanced variety of the focus group method. In framing the session, in our case writing the company description and the CVs for the candidates, it is necessary to provide enough clues to get the participants to treat the intended topic while simultaneously not giving away the purpose of the role-play session. In our case, we made one of the candidates too strong and thereby caused the question of support measures to be downplayed during the session. When doing subsequent semi-focused groups, the framing could be continuously refined and adjusted in order to increase balance. Considering the effort required creating the empirical setting, and the time offered by the participants, we recommend letting someone with a background similar to the intended participants read the background material in advance. This may improve the balance of the material in advance and the focus group session may yield richer results, while simultaneously presenting more of a challenge to the participants – making it a more worthwhile experience for them.

Despite this dilemma of framing, we did not experience that our participants slipped into a ‘talk about’ mind-set. Owing to the indirect approach they did not have any reason to do so as far as support measures were concerned, even though we had included some information on the various candidates’ previous experiences of public support agencies and programmes as well as some information regarding a cluster initiative in the region. When we shifted to a more ‘traditional’ setting after the role-play session, we could thus go back to the comments made by the participants and ask them why they said this or that. In part of the session, the discussion was still centered on the previous statements of the participants. It would seem that, having their own remarks to relate to, the participants were at least partially prevented from slipping out of the mind-set of ‘dealing with’. Taken together, we ended up with some unexpected ideas and insights into support measures. Owing to the indirect mode of studying the topic and the ability to confront the participants with their own remarks on support agencies and support programmes we for instance realised that the owner-managers did not primarily see support measures as a means of helping a company with problems. On the contrary, the case company, having some immediate concerns, was seen as directly unsuited for participation in, for instance, the cluster initiative.

The critical aspect of our method development effort resides in the idea of the need for a means of indirectly addressing the topic of our research. Where previous studies primarily addressed the ‘speaking about’ dimension, we wished to reach the

knowledge about support measures that manifests itself in action. This was done through creating a setting that was simultaneously real and fictive, getting the participants to act as if they were actually dealing with a problem rather than narrating how they would deal with a problem. Further benefits of this approach was that the participating owner managers developed the setting further by filling out the skeletal characters and descriptions offered in the framing of the session. This probably resulted in a more life-like setting than what we as researchers could have created, since we lack the vast everyday experience with handling a company that the owner managers possesses.

This is not to say that the creation of the background material is of little importance since it will anyway be developed by the participants. As we have discussed earlier, it is not self-evident that the participants will actually reach a stage when they claim ownership over the process. Our owner-managers initially referred to the company as ‘they’ and only after a while shifted to using ‘we’ when referring to the company. We have previously argued that this indicates a transition in the treatment of the company, from the internal discussion (fifth stage) where the participants refer to the company as ‘us’ to the ownership stage (sixth stage) where they stop trying to solve the puzzle (or case) presented to them and starts to actually seek the best CEO for their company. As important as reaching this stage is, it cannot be taken for granted that a specific group of participants will actually reach this stage. In our case it seemed to be due to the company as well as the candidates actually being considered realistic in the sense that what was stated about them seemed reasonable and the need for additional information was primarily related to the personal sphere of the candidates rather than to clarifications of what was stated in the handed out CVs. It would also seem that we were fortunate in so far as the owner-managers took the task seriously and opted to make the most of the situation, while accepting each others’ experience and competence. The mixed age of the participants seemed also to be an advantage since the more experienced owner managers initially was the most active and talkative, while it took somewhat longer for the younger ones to start participating actively in the discussions.

## **Conclusion**

This project suggests some general conclusions. First, the material gathered in sessions of the kind here described tends to be very rich because the indirect approach forces the participants to cover a wide range of topics. Having a clearly defined purpose is therefore of the utmost importance when carrying out the analysis. Solid ground-work

is of course, always important, but the intrinsic lack of focus in our method suggests that particular care be taken.

We have provided a few examples of the interaction between the ‘members of the board’ in order to demonstrate how a role-playing can be used to indirectly address a research topic, and we have offered some insights into how we have treated the gathered material. In general, these examples show how role-playing developed in various ways during the session. We try to pinpoint especially how the participants moved from the external stage (fourth stage), where they talked about the company and its problems as though it were a ‘case-exercise’, to the internal stage (fifth stage), where they started to actually play their roles, conscious that they were to imagine themselves as the company, and finally the ownership stage (sixth stage), in which they started to act like the actual board of directors for the company.

We have shown how the participants accepted our rules without questioning them, while also bringing their own understanding of what it meant to be a board member into play. We were especially happy that they both made use of the clues we gave them and less apparent and unintended clues, such as a spelling mistake. Thus, allowing for the participants interpretations, the play moved forward as they started to co-author the role-play. Another example of this is the adding of charisma to one of the candidates. We draw two interconnected conclusions from this. First, that one should not be overly concerned about introducing mistakes and ambiguities into the material that is initially given the participants. In our case, we spent much energy trying to create realistic accounts that included relevant information. This is of course, necessary, but what we learned is that the material also ought to stimulate the imagination of the participants so as to allow them to imbue the case with life. In our case, the spelling mistake did not generate much information regarding our research topic, but it was one hook that the participants could use to attach themselves to the situation. This leads to us to the second conclusion, since if done successfully this will add insights through the way it is done while simultaneously making it easier for the participants to reach the stage of ownership (sixth stage) during the actual session. The stage of the game when the participants stop thinking about the task given them (to rank the candidates) and engage with the task as such (looking for the best candidate), thus when they start the transition from talking about the topic to actually dealing with it. Thus, our study demonstrates that, if carefully designed, adding a role-play dimension can add substantially to focus group interviews. Especially, in the sense that it allows researchers to address the knowledge and experience of the participants as it is

manifested in everyday action rather than as it is framed in the narrations offered during for instance a normal interview. The role-play-enhanced focus group method, however, requires a lot of preparatory work when staging the session and for a great deal of patience among the researchers. Furthermore, it also requires of the researchers to realize that the participants, if allowed to do so, will be helpful also in improving the original script. Therefore, this data gathering technique positioned on the boundary between fiction and reality will allow the participants to act and talk as if they were dealing with a real task, rather than merely narrating their experience to the researchers. In circumstances where one might suspect that there exists one type of knowledge regarding how to talk about a topic and another type of knowledge regarding how to deal with a topic, this substantially improves the odds of obtaining useful insight.

# Chapter 7: Limits of the gift: exploring interaction in antiquarian bookshops

Frederic Bill and Lena Olaison

## **Abstract**

This article is based on an ongoing organisational ethnography of antiquarian bookshops. It argues that studying the exchange of antiquarian books offers new insight on the phenomenon of gift-giving. First, the general tendency in the literature on gifts (i.e. Bourdieu and Derrida) is how gifts are commoditized, while in the antiquarian bookshop it makes more sense to consider how commodities are transformed into gifts. Second, the literature on gifts argues that actual gifts are either impossible or at least undecidable since they cause the receiver to be indebted to the giver, and a separation in time is necessary either to evaluate the gift or to make it possible. However, in the antiquarian bookshop this situation is different since such a debt is directed towards the book rather than the giver. The receiver is indeed indebted but the debt takes the form of a responsibility to care for the book. In analysing our material, we argue that every meeting between antiquarian and bookshop visitor results in liminal ceremonies that produce a space (what we, adopted from Lefebvre, call a representational space) for their interaction. Such analysis suggests that the interactions are taking place somewhere on a continuum of spaces stretching from commodity to gift. The role of the antiquarian thus stretches from seller to giver, the visitor, from buyer to receiver, and the bookshop, from shop to collection.

## **Key words**

Gift, Commoditisation, Gift-giving, Exchange transaction, Liminal space, Antiquarian books

## **Introduction**

One day a man walked into my shop, he was dressed in suit and tie. I immediately recognized him as one of my favourite customers, no big spender, but with a taste in fiction

close to my own, and always with a kind word. In his early seventies – a retired physician – he was normally accompanied by his wife, but today he was on his own, and I straight away noticed that something was wrong; the man didn't look well, far from it!

Normally a very discreet man, only discussing literature, he now started talking about his childhood. There was something desperate about the way he spoke, like he needed to share these memories, and was pressed for time. While I listened to his anecdotes, I realised that I would never see him again!

When he finished, he smiled – I think he felt a little embarrassed – then he nodded, and bid me farewell. When he left I noticed that he used a cane. Sure enough, two weeks later, this quiet man was dead – cancer of the lungs! His wife – now a widow – called me, and wanted me to go through his books, and I agreed.

This happened more than five years ago, but I can still remember that day, when I went through his books – many of them bought in my shop – a very sad day!

This short story was written by an antiquarian that we met while doing ethnography on antiquarian bookshops. We quickly found the conduct of their owners and visitors to defy the conventional logic of business. Interactions that would elsewhere be straightforward and business-like here often failed to make sense. We wondered why and found an answer in the conception of antiquarian bookshops as sites of what van Gennep (1909/1960) called *rite de passage*, and more specifically transitional rites or liminal rites, as developed by Turner (1974). Our analysis suggests that the activities in such places are situated on a continuum from shop to collection. The role of the antiquarian thus stretches from seller to giver, the visitor, from buyer to receiver, and the book, from commodity to gift. For this transformation to happen, there must be a connection between the three (the book, the antiquarian and the visitor). This connection is created through ceremonies.

To see this, we must augment Turner's liminal ceremonies with Lefebvre's work on space (1974/1991). The notions of 'spatial practises' and 'representations of space' capture in a very general sense what takes place in the liminal ceremonies. Lefebvre would call the outcome of these liminal ceremonies 'representational space' and we use these three concepts to analyse the space of the antiquarian bookshop as something that is both lived and created.

From an anthropological perspective (e.g. Malinowski, 1920; Mauss, 1925; and later Levi-Strauss, 1958), gift-giving is a form of exchange that to some extent operates outside a regular product-monetary exchange. Bourdieu (1997) emphasises time as the crucial factor in perceiving a gift as a gift and argues that for something to be a gift the



acts of giving and receiving must be forgotten. Derrida (1992) agrees in principle with this need for forgetting but explores further giving as a paradox. The acts of giving and receiving are fluid and it is impossible to know whether the gift will be nullified by a return gift of equal or greater value at some future time. Gifts are therefore according to Derrida always necessarily undecidable. The undecidability and in-betweenness of gift-giving have been explored by other researchers, but normally as a feature of historical or so-called primitive societies (e.g. Malinowski, 1920; Mauss, 1925; and later Levi-Strauss, 1958), rather than as an integral part of contemporary life. Due to this empirical orientation, those analyses focus on gift-giving and stress the possible commoditization of gifts as a means of including them into an economic model. We will on the other hand demonstrate that commodities can be morphed into gifts as well. That is, in the case of antiquarian bookshops, a commodity (a book) can be completely or partially transformed into a gift.

Our thesis in this paper is that it is the production of certain spaces that makes gift-giving possible (or impossible) in antiquarian bookshops, not a separation in time as argued by Bourdieu and Derrida in more traditional cases of gift-giving. Through this transformation, a responsibility (debt) is transferred to the receiver, but the responsibility is to the object rather than the giver. The undecidability and possibility of gift-giving are in this case collectively constructed in each encounter, rather than evaluated by the actions and intentions in retrospection. Thus, the antiquarian seeks an answer to the question of whether the customer will be capable and willing to care for the book while the customer seeks an answer to questions of what will be required for the antiquarian to relinquish control of the object.

### **Field account: the antiquarian bookshop**

We started our fieldwork with observations complemented with interviews, a rather classical design for organisational ethnography (e.g. Kostera, 2007). Our experiences during the fieldwork made us widen the search for narratives, such as public stories (e.g. web pages), personal stories (interviews), and we also started to collect fictive stories – stories written by the antiquarians themselves – like the story introducing this paper. Based on the method of narrative collage (Kostera, 2005), we wrote the first sentence, and then we asked the antiquarians to finalize the story.

Following Czarniawska (2004), we believe that narratives represent not only events but also modes of knowledge. Thus, they are means not only of description and

communication but also manifestations of the enactment of social life. The antiquarians have repeatedly emphasised the importance of spending time and being part of the everyday life ‘as an antiquarian bookshop has an atmosphere that can be felt’. In the spirit of that account, the antiquarian bookshop that the reader is about to spend some time in is a fictional one, made up as an amalgam of the antiquarian bookshops that are part of our ongoing organisational ethnography. All the described events have happened, and all the quotes are taken from interviews, web pages, newspaper articles, and other kind of texts that we have collected during the study. The section is written as if we were walking around in the antiquarian bookshop together. We will point out things that we find particularly interesting; we will observe interactions between the antiquarian and his visitors; read newspaper articles; we will tell you a few anecdotes from our study; and we will also ask the antiquarian a few questions. It is our intention that some of these manifestations of an antiquarian bookshop will be experienced through the story.

Before we go into the antiquarian bookshop, we pause outside for a while in order to look at the books in the shop-window. It is our understanding, however, that experienced visitors don’t bother to do this before they enter an antiquarian bookshop as they already know what they are looking for (and they certainly won’t find it in the shop window), but we will start here nevertheless. At a first glance it seems unorganized does it not? You find a little bit of everything, without any particular order or hierarchy. But lean closer to the window, look at each volume – what do you see? Often, as is also the case here, you discover that the window is mirroring the present-day – these days often TV-shows. Look, there are books on gardening, climate change, home styling, and, of course, some Ian Fleming and a couple of (well known and fairly light) classics. As an antiquarian bookshop is, almost without exception, specialised in one or two fields, those might be represented as well. It’s not really necessary though – collectors know very well which bookshop to go to, they are often part of networks and circulation lists of various kinds, and the antiquarians also recommend each other to their visitors.

Without further ado, let’s go inside. Antiquarian bookshops usually have several sections that are separated from each other; most of them also have several small rooms. Even if the premise where the antiquarian bookshop is housed only offers one physical room, the place will be structured in such a way, making use of bookshelves and other material, that several spaces are created and, not the least, experienced. Some

of the spaces are public, some private, and some are somewhere in-between. There will also be several hidden or secret spaces that not all visitors can get access to.

In our antiquarian bookshop, the outer room, located closest to the street and thus the entrance, is looked after diligently. From the door you see the counter straight ahead. Walking towards it, you have factual literature on display (i.e. what this antiquarian is specialised on) on your right side, and there's only one row of books there. On your left side, you find some fiction (i.e. books to read) and you can see several rows behind it. Before we walk up to the counter, however, and meet the antiquarian himself (yes, we have so far in this study only met male ones) – we will linger in this first room with its several sections somewhat more.

We turn left, passing alongside the window and walk to the last row of books. From here we can work our way, row by row, until we hit the counter again. Here we find philosophy and, to our surprise, when we turn into a new row, an impressive collection of children's literature. Don't move too fast! Take the time to read the small signs that can be found all over the shop, on the bookshelves, on the walls or any other free space. Here's one that is informing the visitors that mobile phones should kindly not be used; the next one is about the current movements in the 'city-struggle'; and further down the aisle there are also a few intriguing newspaper articles regarding second-hand bookshops. Look at this one; it's a piece on how antiquarians describe themselves online. The web page is where the antiquarian communicates to other antiquarians and book collectors. Because, as said, the shop-window is meant for costumers that buy books to read, and not intended for book collectors looking for a certain item. This orientation actually shows in the text presented on the web pages of various antiquarian bookshops. They differ from the shop windows by stressing books as collector items as well as the professional skill of the antiquarians. The Ian Fleming books from the shop window are nowhere to be seen. Consider the following quotes:

It was a lovely shop! High ceiling and jammed with books all the way up to the gypsum stucco. The counter was covered of bundles of books, primarily recalled or limited editions, and in one side of the counter there were a place for cover paper and straps, i.e. pre-modern plastic bag.

Being involved with books is for us a profession as well as a hobby.

I would like to describe the Antiquarian bookshop as a typical Swedish antiquarian bookshop; a well organized shop with a wide and varied range. There is a lot of Swedish topography, and the shelves with the finest selection are behind the counter. After pondering around among the shelves most of visitors should be able to find something suitable. The

prices are not that discouraging. The enthusiast can most likely find a bargain or two within their specific domain.

Let's move on to a better position in order to observe a few interactions between the antiquarian and his visitors, but don't miss the poster, on the bookshelf over there, closer to the counter, all the antiquarian bookshops of the town are listed there. And on the counter you should find folders with addresses and special areas of the antiquarians in the network. If you can't find it, ask him, it's there somewhere, perhaps he has forgotten to refill it, that's all. But let's stay here, behind the shelf for a while, or perhaps, if you find that more appealing, move on to the section of books on history. You see, when we entered the shop two middle-aged men entered together with us, and they have been lingering in the first, or outer, room, just like us. One of them now asks the shop manager if he has a book by Strindberg that he has been looking for. He does, and the man buys it. A short while later, the other customer first walks towards the inner room then suddenly leaves the shop without talking to the antiquarian, who looks a bit annoyed.

Now an old man enters the shop. Let's have a look at the section with Swedish poetry while they talk. The antiquarian says 'I brought the book for you' and leaves the shop through the main entrance. The man stands next to the counter desk, waiting, impatiently. The antiquarian returns with a large book in his hand but, even before the antiquarian has closed the door, the man says 'no, it's not the one' with disappointment in his voice. They talk for almost 20 minutes about the book that the man is looking for. It turns out that when the man was young a journalist interviewed him, and the interview appears in the book – a book about the local town. He has never seen the final result and has now been looking for the book for 20 years. After long consultations, the antiquarian takes some notes and the man leaves.

An elderly woman enters the shop; she goes straight to the counter with three books in her hand (they must be from the book boxes standing outside the shop). Listen! She tries to haggle over the price (three for the price of two, she says), but she has no luck – the antiquarian is adamant. She tries once more, gives up, decides to buy two books, and leaves the shop. A bit annoyed. And so is the antiquarian.

As she leaves, an old man enters, with two books in his hands. The antiquarian says to him: 'just one of these is 5 SEK. The other one is 20 SEK, so perhaps you would prefer to choose another one'. Without any more words he offers the man his chair, reaches after a pile of post cards that he keeps under the counter, and gives them to the old man

who is now seated in the chair. The man sits down on the chair and starts to study the postcards very carefully.

Apart from the old man studying post cards, the shop is empty. This is our chance to ask a few questions. We have been here many times before, and he knows why we are here today. That's the reason why we have been able to sneak about here for so long without any interaction with him. He likes that we are here, observing. Through our observations we have gotten to know the story of the old man who is studying post cards over there. He comes in almost every day, he looks briefly at the books, often in the book boxes outside, and then he tries to buy one or two. His main interest is not books, however; he is a collector of post cards. Especially post cards with railroad station houses from Sweden. In his hands right now he has a few newly arrived ones, but he probably won't find anything new today either. It gives him pleasure to go through them, and that's what this is mostly about anyway – spending some time in the bookshop. Since the antiquarian knows that he does not have a lot of money, he tries to help him a bit with what he buys. Most days the man just buys a book for the pleasure of carrying it home, and the antiquarian figures that in those cases it might as well be one from the book box, since they are just 5 SEK apiece.

Let's think about the book boxes and the woman who tried to haggle over the price. Prices are normally something to be negotiated, but not for the books in the boxes outside. The costumers like book boxes because of the sense of 'searching for lost treasures' as the antiquarian would say. In order to make the costumers take the step from the book box to the shelves, he tries to have something interesting there all the time. Mainly, however, he puts books there that do not really belong in an antiquarian bookshop or books that have been difficult to sell. This 'may-fly literature' often comes as part of the package when the antiquarian buys book collections from relatives to deceased persons. Those books wear him out and he takes a loss on them regardless. He used to procure all the books he was offered but nowadays he is more selective, even if it saddens him to turn the hopeful relatives away when they bring the books of their loved ones. He often emphasises that an antiquarian has to be very cautious regarding the quality of the books he offers; there cannot be any tarnished or worn down books, every tome is selected carefully because of its general character and finish. This extends also to some degree into the content of the books. He often speaks of 'love for the book', and we should let him explain what that is:

It is the passion and love..... it is.... You have to be... Okay, that [points towards a shelf with modern literature] I don't like. But I think.... Well, love is perhaps not the right word. But

look [he picks up a old volume from a shelf] I think this book is wonderful to hold in my hand. You have to love... I like to hold this. Beautiful books like this you see [hands the book to us], it is from 1801, it is in Spanish. Perhaps love is not the right word. But I am fascinated by the books. It is the knowledge that the books keep. And the image you get when you read them. You can't get that from anything else. That is fascinating. You can tell me something, but that is not preserved. But in a book it is. You can open it again and again. If you tell me something I might forget it. But a book doesn't. [He turns and looks at the books that he keeps behind the counter, and continues]

Once, when I had invited my colleague [another antiquarian] to my house, he offered me a large amount of money for three of my bookshelves. It was enough money to buy a really nice car. He said 'you will have the money on your account on Monday morning'. But I just laughed at him. I mean, he was serious, he wanted that collection. But I said no. That is how much I love books: I love my books more than money.

During our conversation, a woman has entered the shop, and she walks up to the old man who is looking at the postcards. He has been here for over 20 minutes by now. 'It's time to go' she says. The woman is a care taker; here to take the man home. The old man gives the antiquarian 5 SEK for the book he brought in from the book box and then he leaves together with the woman.

A man in working attire enters the bookshop as they leave. The antiquarian greets him quite loudly, they exchange some phrases about the every day life in a small town; an estate – rather spectacular we understand – has been sold, and another neighbour has started a renovation project which – according the two men – seems to be a bit out of their league. Then the man dodges in behind a shelf and we will not hear from him again for over an hour.

A man enters, perhaps 35 years old. He greets the antiquarian, quietly asks him something, then disappears into the inner room. Let's follow him there. You know, we have been here for almost an hour now, and he's the first one to go there.

In the inner room, the rows of shelves stretch from floor to ceiling and are considerably dustier than in the first room. Here we find specialised subjects, like this column – with Spanish linguistics, or look at the one to your left – with biology, gardening, plants generally and a few odd books on organisms. Or here, why not these old and yellowish books on book collection and book care taking. When we reach the deepest reaches of the shop, dusty old tomes, wrecked books and piles of yellowing whitepapers on homemade bookshelves from floor to roof surround us. It is silent – not even the man we followed in here reaches this far during his 30 minutes in here – the books are semi-

ordered and give a rather haphazard impression, there are also some old catalogues and even some pieces of broken furniture. The innermost corner is separated from the rest of the room by a broom, an old and tarnished leather band and the remains of a broken reading chair. Despite this, the secluded space is clearly different, primarily through being considerably messier. Let's dwell here for a while, absorbing the atmosphere of tranquillity in this dusty room where no other clients will venture during our observation.

Now an old man enters – let's see what he wants. He asks, cautiously but with anticipation, for a bibliography on a local poet. 'I look for NN. I have been at the NN-house and you have a street named NN-street. So if I am to find this book somewhere, I thought it had to be in this city.' The antiquarian answers: 'I know which book you mean but I do not have it.' The old man counters, now with disappointment in his eyes: 'You could only find it in second-hand bookshops?' and the manager answers: 'Yes'. The old man can do nothing but leave the shop as the antiquarian glares after him.

The man we followed to the inner room appears again. He goes straight to the counter with a book in his hand. Keyed up, holding the book in front of the antiquarian, he excitedly starts to talk about the book – the book was his favourite book as a child – and then leaves the book on the counter while asking for some other books. The antiquarian makes some notes, because he does not have them at the moment, but he will do his best to find them for him. The antiquarian asks where the man is from and what his profession is, and tells him that he is welcome back any time. The man leaves the shop without buying anything.

Now the man in working attire appears behind the shelves, his arms are jammed with books about aquariums – he tells the antiquarian that he is about to start one. The antiquarian says that he has some newly arrived books that should complement the man's book collection on gardening, but the man answers 'not today', pays for the books on aquariums, leaves and then an elderly man with a plastic bag full of empty bottles enters the shop. He quickly moves around the shop and then exits, without interacting with anybody.

Before we leave, let's ask the antiquarian about why he became an antiquarian and about his relationship to books. 'Wait', says the antiquarian, with his eyes on an older well-dressed man that has just entered the shop. 'This is one of my favourite costumers,' he whispers, 'he is a genuine and knowledgeable book collector and he comes to the shop at least two times a week.' The antiquarian returns a greeting,

leaving his position behind the counter and starts to show the man some new books. Then he leaves him to his own searches and walks back to us:

Yes, I spent a lot of time in Paris in 67, 68 and 69, the important years there, and I had a strong interest in film and during that time literature on directors, film and such was very scarce. So it started with private collecting. And then I came into contact with some people who would meet and barter books with each other. Suddenly one had doubles as the own book collection was growing. Because I was a librarian, there was no Internet in those days, colleagues from other libraries asked me: could not you, who are an antiquarian, acquire a certain book. And thus one became more and more of a link and this caused the dilemma that since the buyer was a library, they required an invoice – creating a need to have a business. ... And then I really had to make a choice, what am I entering? One had heard a lot about bookkeeping and everything and that was not what I wanted to do. It was the books, I wanted to mediate books. It was not like if I experienced any wish to start a company. It was on the contrary very problematic, I am a man of the sixties and, I finished school in the sixties, you know, the border between the private and the public and as a librarian I belonged to the public then, the public sector and you know the businessmen, how lowly they stood. So it took me many, many years to get over that.

Apart from the books – to mediate books, as he puts it himself – the people receiving the books are important:

Then there are all the people that come to me. All different kinds of people that I meet. That is amazing. Sometimes in the car, in the morning, I ponder over ‘will someone come today’ and ‘what will happen today’. You never know who you will meet. In this business extraordinary things happens all the time. Just in one day. I have always liked to meet people. I think that is one of the great joys in life to be able to do that. To see each other to meet people. I would not be able to go on of it were not for all good relations I have.

This might seem a little bit weird, since we have seen that he does not always pay attention to every visitor, and some of them even seem to bother him with their presence. One gets the impression, in any case, that the seller/buyer relation is somewhat unique in this case, especially when the interaction is a positive one, since the transaction is held together by the common interest of the parties. It not so much about ‘finding’ customers as it is about finding solutions that will make possible the transfer that is actually wished for by both parties. As an example, the first time we were here, the antiquarian did several things to get to know us, or to test our interest in books. While the antiquarian was talking to a customer, we found an interesting bookshelf, and we started to study the books a bit more carefully. Suddenly the antiquarian, who had apparently been following our movements said, ‘It’s going to be



interesting to see what books you choose, there are a few books there I'm really found of.'

We selected a few books and brought them to him. He picked up one book, looked at us for a while and then he showed us a few books that he kept under the counter. He explained that he had brought these books from his home, they were for a costumer that collects books for his son, but if we wanted to, and if we would find any of the books interesting, we could choose some of them. He then went over them, one by one, pointed out the publication year, or something else that was particularly interesting for him, while he asked us questions about the author, about a few concepts in the books and the like. At the end of the day we had six books that we wanted to buy: three from his private collection, two non-fiction books from the bookshelves and a trilogy from a classic Finnish author. He looked a bit worried, picking up the books, one by one, talking for himself (or to the books), saying things like 'what do we have here'; 'what shall we do with this' and so forth, and then he looked at us and said a price that is less than half the price of what the books are altogether, and he said 'what do you think, can we live with this'.

This is enough for today, let's leave the antiquarian to his business. The man who the antiquarian has a lot of respect for, wants his attention. He has found a book of fairy tales. A first edition. He pays and then, after exchanging some more pleasantries, he leaves the shop. So do we.

### **The liminal space of the gift**

The literature on the concept of gift is extensive. It stretches from some of the seminal works of anthropology e.g. Malinowski (1920), Mauss (1925), Levi-Strauss (1958); over sociologists like Bourdieu; to philosophers like Derrida. Inspired by observations on traditional loans of livestock by Kabyl peasants, where the lender felt an obligation to the borrower because the later cared for the animal during the loan, Bourdieu (2005) argues that the basis of our economic model is in essence an ahistorical vision of singular exchanges. Continuing to explore this responsibility, as West points out, a bond was created between the giver and the receiver: 'although the recipient becomes responsible for his own obligations, there is no corresponding loss of responsibility on the part of the giver. If anything, the giver becomes still more implicated in the predicament of the receiver' (West, 1996: 11), indicated a collective responsibility for the object, incomprehensible from a purely economic point of view.

Bourdieu (2000) investigated gift-giving as a part of a more general social system, which facilitated the accumulation of symbolic rather than financial capital, and the creation of long-term resilient relationships.

Such relationships were already a feature of the Kula-system that Malinowski (1920) described based on his observations during fieldwork in the Trobriand Archipelago. This system of interlinked ceremonial exchanges ‘based primarily upon the circulation of two articles of high value, but of no real use’ (Malinowski, 1920: 97) co-existed with a parallel system of barter that in turn was based on the social relations formed by the Kula-system.

Based on Malinowski’s findings, Mauss (1925) and Levi-Strauss (1958) turned the gift into a part of a structural model by analysing notions of circular exchanges. For Mauss (1925) gifts could only be understood by treating together the object given and the social relations regulating giving, receiving and repaying while Lévi-Strauss (1958) by treating expectations of counter-gifts as a general dimension of communication expanded the scope of such reciprocal structural models. In order to distinguish the gift from such calculable exchange models of the economy, Bourdieu added irregularity into the system. He introduced the perspective of time in gift-giving. As Ssorin-Chaikov puts it, what is important is ‘the time when it is neither too early nor too late to reciprocate’ (2006: 362). That is, the period of time between the gift and counter-gift makes it possible to deny the self-interest, and perceive the gift as free, i.e. a gift, where no reciprocity is expected.

Derrida (1992) does not accept such temporal asymmetry and instead emphasises the debt a gift creates, which, according to Derrida, lingers until it is negated by a counter gift:

Even though all the anthropologies, indeed the metaphysics of the gift have, *quite rightly and justifiably*, treated *together*, as a system, the gift and the debt, the gift and the cycle of restitution, the gift and the loan, the gift and credit, the gift and the counter gift. (1992: 13, italics as in original)

To explore this further Derrida (1992) accepts this argument as a description of a position within a general structural system but develops the position by arguing that for a gift to really be a gift, it needs to never be reimbursed. Something given within the framework of gifts and counter gifts would therefore be poisonous, since it implies the unspoken expectation of reimbursement at a future point in time. This expectation is unspoken, however, and this is what causes the undecidability. It has therefore been

argued that ‘Derrida positions responsibility not in the space of certitude that one has done the right thing or known which path to take, but instead responsibility involves undecidability’ (Jones, 2007: 526).

Common for these scholars are that they tend to understand gifts by incorporating them into a commercial framework, where something is exchanged for something else or by challenging the very separation of the social economy from the financial economy.

The literature on Gifts is, of course, widely known and studied in the areas of anthropology, sociology and business administration. While for example Derrida’s discussion on gift and responsibility has been used to problematise for example business ethics (Jones, 2003), others have tried to explain what they call ‘gift economies’ e.g. a system of free bicycles (Nelson, Rademacher, and Paek, 2007); or to explain the importance of personal networks and exchange (Sjöstrand, 2008); or to discuss ‘free’ and ‘open, in e.g. ‘high tech gift economies’ (Shumarova and Swatman, 2007) or software sharing communities online (Rehn, 2004); or to environmental studies, such as exchange models for sustainability (Coates and Leahy, 2006); or to academic production (as altruistic) (Rehn, 2004; Martínez-Alemána, 2007). Most of them are applying the notion of gift economy metaphorically, as pointed out by Rehn (2004). Such studies propose gift economy as being an alternative to market economy, or they make use gift economy to account for uneconomical or irrational elements in the market. If at all, the temporality is discussed in terms of a separation between gift and counter-gift, and the objects given and received are seldom objects or even something that is owned by any individual. Rehn (2004) touches on responsibility to the result rather than the developers in software development and discusses virtuality and interaction. Although it is not his focus and therefore not something elaborated on, Rehn (2004) observes a spatial conceptualisation adopted from Baudrillard.

In the case of antiquarian bookshops we have observed a commodity that seemingly is completely or partially transformed into a gift. As in Bourdieu’s and Derrida’s analysis, this is not always clearly the case; the situation is ambiguous. It is not, however, due to a separation in time, but rather due what we understand as the liminal space of the gift; it stretches from commodity to gift, and the responsibility that the object evokes.

Van Gennep (1909) introduced liminality in his work on the structure and classification of social ceremonies, *rites de passage*. To a great extent this classification concerned life-altering situations such as birth, betrothal, marriage,

pregnancy, childbirth, funerals. But Van Gennep also tried to understand and classify more mundane situations, where the economical or intellectual spheres were not enough to explain the interaction. He thus differs between the profane (economical and/or intellectual) and the sacred (symbolic and/or cultural). Three rites constituted a *rites de passage* consisting of the preliminal rite of separation, the liminal rite of transition and the postliminal rite of incorporation. Further, for Van Gennep, a 'passage from one social position to another is identified with a *territorial passage*' (Van Gennep, 1909: 192, italics as in original), in semi-civilized tribes this often meant literally a boarder or certain place.

Liminality as a conception of its own has since then been adopted in many ways, not the least by Turner who defines liminality as 'the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two positions' (1974: 237). In Turner's early work this meant the analysis of temporal rituals or ceremonies, where the rituals are unspecific and with uncertain outcomes, and in his later work to analyse groups of people, *communitas*, such as hippies and monastery life.

We use liminality to analyse the spatial dimension of the gift, stretching from commodity to gift. Further, the transformations taking place during the liminal ceremonies are considered as collective phenomena in which the visitor, the antiquarian and the book(s) create an understanding of their meeting. Thus we need a conceptual apparatus that can serve as analytical tool for the construction and outcome of this liminality.

Since Lefebvre (1974/1991) introduced his ideas regarding the importance of social space, separating social space and the physical world is becoming increasingly popular. Social space is not neutral; rather it is shaped from power relations and social strife, which is trying to bend it. Space is thus used in the model as a concept encompassing more than the physical world. Rather space is something that is simultaneously socially produced and socially productive: 'Through the adaptation of the physical world, the social and cultural worlds have also come into being. ... The spaces and places around us construct us as we construct them' (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 1). There are sets of perceptions that guide our understanding of and interaction with our surroundings.

Although Hernes (2004) introduced Lefebvre to organization studies years ago, we have chosen to adopt Lefebvre directly. We describe processes of formation using Lefebvre's conceptual apparatus of Spatial Practises, Representation of Space and

Representational Space, while Hernes model encompasses notions of physical, social and mental space and therefore goes somewhat beyond the scope of this article.

The first two concepts, Spatial Practises and Representation of Space, are involved in deciding the outcome of the transformation, as the spatial practises regards the participant's mode of competence regarding how to handle the interaction (the perceived) and representation of space regards the participant's mode of conceptualising their interaction (the conceived). The Representational Space is the concept used to describe the pattern of interaction in which visitor and antiquarian ends up after and during the transformation (the lived), as the representational space is the mode of directly living space through the symbols and images connected to such space.

### **Interaction in antiquarian bookshops: model and its analysis**

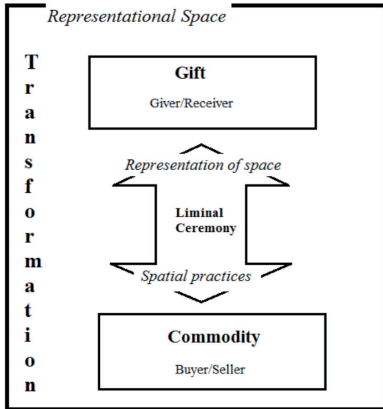
The empirical difficulties to pinpoint and separate gifts and commodities have been described by among others Bourdieu and Derrida, and that has been our starting point for the analysis. However, in our case, we have a reversed situation. We have a business practice that cannot be understood from conventional business logic. That is, we are trying to understand seller-buyer relationships, rather than giver-receiver relationships, where a commodity seemingly can be transformed into a gift. In sum, in each instance of interaction, the exchange of antiquarian books can be understood differently. An antiquarian bookshop can be perceived as anything between a shop (where seller offers commodities to a buyer) and a collection (where a giver offers a gift to a receiver).

We have created the model below, figure 8.1, to illustrate how our concepts are interlinked and to describe the continuum along which the interaction in the antiquarian bookshop takes place. Using examples of transformations resulting in four different representational spaces, we will below offer empirical illustrations of the model.

In the first case a visitor picks up three books in the book box outside the antiquarian bookshop and enters the shop with them in order to haggle over the price of the books. This spatial practise implies representing the space of the antiquarian bookstore as a place for bargaining over cheap books and suits badly with what the antiquarian would prefer it to be. Thus, in the trisection of the cheap books, the antiquarian and the haggling visitor the outcome of the liminal ceremony becomes an interaction between buyer and seller focused on the books as commodities. The representational space

caused by this transformation is one with minimal understanding and interaction between antiquarian and visitor.

Figure 8.1: Liminal space of the gift.



Thus, what kind of relationship you get with the antiquarian depends to a large extent on which books you express interest in. This interest can be expressed by a visitor by using spatial practises like for instance talking to the antiquarian about books, moving through the antiquarian bookshop in specific way or sometimes even by simply touching the books. In a simplified sense, you express through spatial practises and the demonstrated representation of the space of the bookshop whether you for instance consider yourself moving through a shop or among a collection.

When an elderly man enters the bookshop somewhat later and buys a similar cheap book from the book box, without haggling, and sits down to study some postcards it amounts to a totally different encounter. The antiquarian knows the elderly man and believes that he becomes happy when buying books. Therefore, even though the antiquarian himself doesn't hold much respect for the cheap books, through his manifested joy of buying books the elderly man demonstrates a different spatial practise compared to the previous visitor. Furthermore, since the man is also a collector of postcards the antiquarian considers him to be part of a different representation of the bookshop space. The elderly man is even prevented from buying a more expensive book by the antiquarian who in this way offers a kind of gift in ensuring that the man, as a receiver, saves his money for possible collector items.

The book boxes are there for the costumers to touch, and to start searching for a book worth buying – but really, they are there to get people to search for real treasures among the shelves. Therefore, to the antiquarian there is a fundamental difference between the haggling visitor and the elderly man. On the surface, they acted in the same way; they were searching for treasures in the book box, found something they liked, and entered the shop. However, the woman just wanted to buy the books – and she had no further interest in the antiquarian or the antiquarian bookshop. The man on the other hand, could go through the book box without eliciting anger from the owner, since he cared for the books; it was the best part of the day for the old man (the owner imagined) and this gave them a special relation. Also, he was a real collector of something, real treasures, which is really the reason he is there – his passion for post cards (especially of railroad station houses).

The liminal ceremony results in very different transformations and thus in very different representational spaces. The elderly man passed through a threshold in the system that makes him something more than a mere bargain hunter; he's after real treasures, treasures that includes the antiquarian as guide, companion or owner/holder of these treasures.

It is like the case of the man we followed into the inner room. He entered the bookshop and almost immediately disappeared into the inner rooms. We were intrigued by this and cautiously moved in the same direction to check on his movements and actions. As we did this, another visitor entered the bookshop and walked up to the counter to inquire about a certain book on a poet. The antiquarian answers negatively and gives no further information. Then the first visitor returns with a book and talks with the antiquarian about it for a while before he asks about another book. In this case the antiquarian takes some notes and apparently seems intent on keeping a lookout for this title. Again, the second visitor was there to buy a certain commodity and in the interaction with the antiquarian this ceremony resulted in a transformation, opening a representational space oriented towards buying and selling. The first visitor on the other hand behaves as a collector, meandering around the collection. Thus, when the spatial practises of the visitor are confronted with the antiquarian's understanding of how space is represented a representational space very different from the previous one is brought about by the meeting.

We believe that these examples demonstrate how the perceived special features of the book are guiding the interaction or ceremonies taking place in the antiquarian bookshop. Much like the objects exchanged in the Kula system described by

Malinowski (1920), the books are considered valuable despite not being intended for any real use. Furthermore, when considering the books only as useful objects (for reading) it seems as if the bookshop visitor actually depreciates their value in the eyes of the antiquarian. It is only when visitor and antiquarian consider each other as parts of the same system of book collectors that their interaction becomes aimed at something more than a mere transaction. The visitor below who on a certain occasion refuses to buy some books on gardening further illustrates this.

In the third case, a visitor that apparently knows the antiquarian enters the shop and they exchange gossip for a while. He then disappears among the bookshelves and upon his return to the desk he brings with him a number of books on aquariums. At this point the antiquarian offers to show him some new books on gardening that might develop his collection but the man blankly refuses to see them. Thus, in this case the man was normally a collector of books and the antiquarian treats him as such. He has been thinking about this collector and not only assembled a number of books that ought to be interesting for him but also kept them hidden beneath the counter. In this way demonstrating the spatial practise and representation of space that was connected to a representational space where they were both collectors, simultaneously giving and receiving in their exchange. In this case however, this liminal ceremony breaks down as the visitor is there looking to buy commodities (books on aquarium). The transformation therefore blurs and breaks down as the collector on this specific day experience only the shop.

The fourth example is from our own experience. Upon approaching the counter, having wandered around in the antiquarian bookshop for a while and in some cases even being asked by the antiquarian to pick out some books, it sometimes happens that the antiquarian decides to show some books that were actually put away for other customers. When we buy these and/or some other books, the antiquarian then starts haggling with himself, reducing the price with as much as 50 %. In the meeting between the antiquarian's and our own representations of space as well as spatial practises, a transformation positioning our interaction somewhere between the collector type and the shop type of interaction takes place. In a way it could be argued that the antiquarian actually gives away half of the books at hand. However, as the following analysis will demonstrate, the situation is a bit more complicated than that.



## **The exchange of antiquarian books: responsibility and debt**

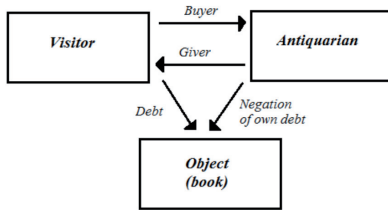
In antiquarian bookshops, it seems, the exchange can be considered as partially or potentially a give/receive situation as well as a buy/sell situation, with the consequence that we have a situation where commodities sometimes can morph into something that can be understood as gifts. In this section, drawing upon our conceptual understanding on gifts together with our experiences in the antiquarian bookshops, we argue that the exchange of antiquarian books might contain an added dimension compared to our general understanding of gifts.

It could be argued, as Derrida (1992) does, that gifts contain a poisonous dimension since they imply a temporary asymmetry that places the receiver in debt. In the case of antiquarian books the representational space resulting from the exchange is however affected by the existence of the book as a distinct third element. There are situations when the customer must qualify himself to be allowed to buy and receive a certain book, since buying it is not enough. In such a situation, there is of course an exchange of money for object but antiquarians tend to offer very generous terms of payment if need be. Regardless, the customer (the receiver) receives the object and would thereby be exposed to its poisonous nature since she is supposedly indebted to the antiquarian (the giver). Even if this might to some extent be the case, the special dimension in this case is that the debt is transferred from the giver to the object. Upon having proved oneself worthy and receiving the book, the debt that the receiver in a gift situation ought to feel towards the giver is moved to the book. The receiver in this case accepts an obligation and expectation to take care of the object, which has been succeeded by the previous holder.

In the logic and terminology of Mauss (1925) it can be argued that the three obligations of a gift, to give, to receive and to repay are realigned since the obligations to give and receive are played out between giver and receiver while the obligation to repay are in this case transferred to the object.

In the model, figure 8.2, we have illustrated this situation in which a gift is received and how this gift causes the debt owed to the object by the holder to be moved to the receiver. Thus the receiver's debt to the giver is at least to some extent negated by the transference of the debt owed to the object by the giver. We have tried to show this situation in the model below, which describe how the visitor, the book and the antiquarian interact in a liminal ceremony that gives rise to a giver/receiver situation.

Figure 8.2: The exchange of antiquarian books: responsibility and debt.



The negation of the own debt of the antiquarian refers to the circumstance that he accepted a debt (responsibility) for the object (book) when he received it. In the Kula trade described by Malinowski (1920), there is a requirement for the receiver to care for the symbolic object but also to subsequently move it along to someone else. There is a difference in the case of antiquarian books, since the receiver is more or less supposed to have lifelong possession of and responsibility for the book. This is apparent in the antiquarian's story ending with him reclaiming the objects (books) once succeeded to the other collector and thereby reversing the flow in the sense that he was buying and simultaneously recouping again the debt in the form of the responsibility for them. The chain of collection is broken and the books retraced to the previous owner and thus in one sense all the previous successions were for naught. Further, our experiences where the antiquarians start haggling with themselves further illustrate this. The antiquarian feels confident that we will care for the books, even the ones put away under the counter, and is therefore willing to sell them. He reduces the price, however, since the exchange is not only between buyer and seller but also one between giver and receiver. We receive the books but we are also indebted in return. Not to the antiquarian as Bourdieu or Derrida would suggest but rather to the object itself. In receiving the book(s) we also accept the responsibility for them. We get a discount but also a lingering debt to the object that we received.

## Conclusion

The short story that introduced our paper is written by an antiquarian. We asked him to write a story (fictional or real) informed by everyday life in an antiquarian bookshop. When we gave him the starting line he immediately questioned the use of the word shop: 'This is an antiquarian bookshop', he said, 'more than just a shop'.

Already this story demonstrates many of the findings we have presented in this article. There are motives for the actions of both visitors and antiquarians that transcend those of traditional roles of buyer and seller. This is not always the case however, but rather a very specific outcome when what we inspired by Lefebvre call the spatial practises and the representations of space coincide and allow for the creation of another space that encompasses both visitor and antiquarian. In this representational space, the lived experiences of the visitor, the antiquarian, and the book together form the foundation for a co-creation of common space. Instead of seller and customer, the participants becomes collectors and the exchange of books are complicated by an added dimension of gifts. In our analysis it is the construction of such space that makes giving and receiving possible, rather than a separation in time, that is crucial for Bourdieu's (2000) analysis of gift-giving.

The second part of our analysis suggests that this gift is not poisonous in the sense proposed by Derrida (1992) and to some extent Bourdieu (2005) in that the receiver is indebted to the giver. This is not to imply that no debt emanates from the gift. The receiver is still indebted but the debt is due to the object (book) rather than the giver (antiquarian). The debt is transformed to a responsibility to care for the book since it would not be given unless the giver believed the receiver capable of handling such a responsibility. It may even be that the giver is indebted in the same sense since the book was once succeeded to him and that the transition of the book is also a succession of debt and responsibility. Just like the antiquarian describes in his story, indeed a very sad day!

# Chapter 8: Results and concluding discussion

This PhD dissertation operates within the processual view of entrepreneurship studies (Steyaert, 1997) that draws on process philosophy to develop research strategies. It has revolved around two strategies for understanding entrepreneurship: ‘moving’ (e.g. Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003) and ‘unveiling’ (e.g. Jones and Spicer, 2009).

In this concluding chapter the main results of this dissertation will be discussed. I will particularly focus on how the research practices has been manifested in the four studies and in the development from a processual approach that shares many features with an interpretive approach towards an approach that draws more closely on process philosophy. Once these research practices have been ‘worked out’ the main results of the study of entrepreneurship at the limits will be discussed. With the aim of clarifying the contributions of the study, the last two sections will discuss what the future perspectives for process studies in entrepreneurship research might be.

## **Working out a processual approach to entrepreneurship**

Chapters 4 through 7 have presented four attempts at working out a processual approach to entrepreneurship research. The goal in this section is to reflect on how this processual view ‘should be worked out’ in practice (Kristensen et al., 2014). Chapter 3 has provided a methodological reflection on process research, based on the two research strategies of moving and unveiling. This chapter continues that reflection, but here the focus is on the research practices in order to substantiate what has been learned during the research process. This reflection will further clarify the contribution of the dissertation.

Both the unveiling and the moving strategy emphasize that research practices must be transformed if the notion of entrepreneurship is to be transformed (e.g. Steyaert, 2011; Sørensen, 2006). Transformation lies at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1986; 1987/2004) notion of a ‘major’ and a ‘minor’ science, concepts that call into question the social science project. According to this view, major science, or royal science, is based on a hierarchical structure that attempts to structure everything to a singular,

hierarchical or trunk structure. Deleuze and Guattari consider the trunk of a tree as a model for totalizing theory, the function of which is to be a 'restricted stratum', to be applied to the world, ordering that which is not ordered: 'Many people have a tree growing in their heads, but the brain itself is much more a grass than a tree' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2004: 17). Deleuze and Guattari thus propose an alternative model of grass, or rhizome, as a new mode of thinking; a minor science. A rhizome does not have a defined center, nor a clear hierarchy or structure, and a rhizomatic structure can assist in the deconstruction of the dominant views of thinking:

To be rhizomorphic is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses. We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. (ibid.)

Building on this framework, Hjorth et al. claim that the process view, emphasizing creativity and contextualisation, is a 'minor' literature that 'can call the major to account' (2008: 81, see also Chapter 2). Other process thinkers, such as Steyaert, emphasize the need to break free from the trunk or tree model and accept the consequences of a rhizomatic model. He calls for studies that can account for 'mess' rather message (Steyaert, 2004: 11) and claims that process thinking poses challenges to the current organization of the social; the hierarchical system of science must be broken up (Steyaert, 2011). Steyaert (2011) further reads Law and Urry (2004: 390), who speak of 'messy' methods. In Chapter 3, such a processual approach was contrasted with the classical case study, the latter then representing a tree model or a royal science.

In the following, this discussion is applied to the studies that comprise this dissertation. It will become evident that breaking free from, or breaking up, the structures of royal social science is more difficult than it might seem. In the first individual study, Chapter 4, the aim has been to advance a new understanding of entrepreneurship, an alternative view that could transform the dominant conceptions of entrepreneurship. The study argues for a 'narrative approach and contextually sensitive accounts' in its method and attempt to 'dramatize everyday life', in line with the hurricane, a disastrous event which dramatized their lives. To do so, the study outlines an understanding of qualitative methods as simulating 'grounded theory'. The unique situation leads to the creation of a new concept, called 'emergency entrepreneurship', and through interpretation, defining the 'features' of this particular configuration of

entrepreneurship. A closer look at the text, however, provides another reading regarding the study's methodological aspirations:

The empirical study was carried out over a ten-month period. In February and March 2005, that is, immediately after the disaster, the junior author jointly with fellow master students interviewed ten persons involved in organizing in the wake of the hurricane. (Chapter 4)

In October and November 2005, the authors of this chapter together revisited five of the original informants for further conversations. (Chapter 4)

Clearly, these descriptions carry traces of royal science conceptions such as validity and reliability. The ordering and presentation of the study – ten interviews, five of which then repeated; ten-month duration of the study – are all features of social science proper. What is more, despite the study's efforts to claim that entrepreneurship cannot be defined or structured comprehensively, the major part of the paper does precisely that. It seeks to limit and separate the definition of entrepreneurship from other concepts that might have some bearing on the accounts used. Examples of this demarcation process include the use of abbreviations like:

M – Management (dominant view); E – Entrepreneurship (dominant view); R.O. – Rescue Organization; F.B. – Family Business; P.O. – Project Organization; H.E. – Habitual Entrepreneurship; C.M. – Crisis Management; E.E. – Emergency Entrepreneurship. (part of the model 4.1 in Chapter 4)

In short, the authors are 'frontiering'. Parallel with Shane and Venkataraman (2000) and their colleagues' emphasis, in Chapter 2, that entrepreneurship must be separated from related fields, we are nervously making sure that our accounts cannot be mistaken for something else. A similar insecurity is also found in Shane's (2000) case study in Chapter 3, where Shane worries that we can't control all variables when we experiment with 'live cases'. The paper in chapter 4 is arguably presented as a systematic royal tree structure, turning it into a social science proper. Gartner (2012) eloquently picks up on Shane's insecurity and performs a reading or deconstruction of Shane's analysis. Gartner offers several possible interpretations of Shane's case material, but instead of arguing that this means that qualitative studies are useless, Gartner celebrates this possibility as a strength of qualitative research:

I would posit that our scholarship and views about the phenomenon of entrepreneurship need to focus on the 'more' rather than on the 'either/or'. If 'variation' is a fundamental metaphor for entrepreneurship, then our efforts must be to encompass a wider range of: theories, ideas, methods, data, genres, vocabularies, etc. that may evoke insight into what entrepreneurship is, and can be. (Gartner, 2012: 30, c.f. Gartner 2013)

This may be exactly what the paper in Chapter 4 failed to do. Where this first study empirically operated with ‘an open field’ in the study of organising after a natural disaster, it suffered from the constraints of its rigid theoretical and methodological frame. In contrast, Chapter 5, as an illustration of quite the opposite relation between theory and practice. In Chapter 5, the struggle between the dominant understanding of entrepreneurship and the aim of producing locally valid accounts took place in practice. Entrepreneurship, as concept and practice, was an open field in Kosovo/a, in the sense that these were new and emerging practices in a post-conflict, post-communist region. The powers that be, however, did not derive from the local inhabitants of this area, but rather on the level of the international aid organisations, who had money and knowledge. Based on Western models of entrepreneurship, networks, cluster and so on, conclusions were drawn about the total lack of female entrepreneurs in Kosovo/a: ‘We won’t build an economy through women selling vegetables in the streets’, as one consultant declared at a meeting of USAID personnel. This was also a lesson learnt regarding this dissertation; in practice, to transform conceptions of entrepreneurship, one must engage with its practices. Not only did the study face exclusionary discourses on entrepreneurship, the very research practices were challenged. The little introduction anecdote in Chapter 3, the interview with a woman from Obilic, Kosovo/a, revealed that the conditions for conducting a study were far from ideal. The first two studies revealed the limits of entrepreneurship discourse, as well as limits to our traditional research methods, as well as those of my study and research practices.

In conclusion, the challenge that posed itself was that in order to carry out process studies, one needs to unfold a minor science that not only breaks with the dominant paradigms but that may further transform it in practice. While an interpretive paradigm or a narrative approach, as was deployed in the first two studies, problematizes the dominant paradigm, it still remains well within a royal social science paradigm. Steyaert has, for example, on several occasions hinted that Gartner might develop his ideas further if he were to engage in process philosophy and process thinking when reflecting over these questions (1997; 2007). But what is it that an interpretive approach struggles with, to which a process approach based on philosophy might offer a solution? Foucault’s conversation with Deleuze may shed light on this question, which essentially is about the very relationship between theory and practice:

Possibly we’re in the process of experiencing a new relationship between theory and practice. At one time, practice was considered an application of theory, a consequence; at other times, it had an opposite sense and it was thought to inspire theory, to be indispensable

for the creation of future theoretical forms. In any event, their relationship was understood in terms of a process of totalization. (Deleuze in conversation with Foucault, in Bouchard, 1977: 205)

Here Deleuze outlines one of the basic assumptions in royal science: the ostensible hierarchy between practice and theory. This hierarchy is structured around two ideal forms of science: deductive and inductive logical reasoning. These are two ideal forms, where the deductive method is followed as closely as possible in positivistic approaches (for example Shane, 2000), and the inductive method is mimicked in interpretive research (for example Chapter 4 and 5). Where a functionalist like Shane is striving for a definition of entrepreneurship that he can then apply onto practice; qualitative oriented research, of which the first two studies in this dissertation are examples, strives to generate theory out of practice. Where in most cases the division of the field is between positivist and interpretive/critical, Deleuze and Guattari, as well as Foucault, will accuse both these approaches, in their ideal forms, of being structured like the tree model.

The first study mimicked, as argued, frontiering in entrepreneurship research, with the result that the researcher becomes confined to a passive stance, subjected to the structure of social science proper. Further, the stories from the field were being severely delimited by the rigid conceptual apparatus of acceptable entrepreneurship research that was forced upon them. Yet it was still claimed that the stories were indispensable for a re-conceptualisation of entrepreneurship. In the second study, moreover, rigid archetypes of the entrepreneur as an assertive, individual male in a for-profit organisation disciplined what quickly became the 'truth' about entrepreneurs in Kosovo.

The conflicting insights from the first two studies pose challenges to the research practice and methods deployed in this dissertation. These insights, in turn, pose challenges to theory, in line with the ideas that are proposed in Chapter 3: it is a case of a politics of method (Steyaert, 2011; Law and Urry, 2004). A politics of method implies considering method from an ontological perspective, focusing on: 'how we can act and intervene as scholars' (Steyaert, 2011: 78). For a process study, this means more than just considering one's position as a researcher: it means that we *intervene* when practicing research. Again, from Foucault's conversation with Deleuze:

The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself 'somewhat ahead and to the side' in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms



of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of ‘knowledge’, ‘truth’, consciousness’, and ‘discourse’.

In this sense theory does not express, translate or serve to apply practice: it is practice. But it is local and regional, as you said, and not totalizing. (Foucault, in *ibid.*: 207-208)

To this Deleuze replies in terms of ‘usefulness’:

Precisely. A theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself. If no one uses it, beginning with the theoretician himself (who then ceases to be a theoretician), then the theory is worthless or the moment inappropriate. We don’t revise a theory, but construct new ones; we have no choice but to make others. (Deleuze, in *ibid.*: 208)

The last two studies take the learning experiences from the first two studies as their point of departure. Their goal is to reconsider traditional social science methods and its categories. Obviously, new practices are needed to break open the concept of entrepreneurship, and new methods of producing knowledge of entrepreneurship as well. The traditional research method vocabulary, including storytelling and narrative research, seems to steer away from the challenges regarding how research must invent new forms: ‘Representation no longer exists; there’s only action – theoretical action and practical action *which serve as relays and form networks*’ (Deleuze, in *ibid.*: 206-207, italics added). These ideas, pointing to the fact that theory is not a metastructure to practice, help substantiate the rationale of the last two studies.

Here, we as researchers assumed responsibility of being our ‘own methodologists’ (Steyaert, 1997: 27). The role-play enhanced focus group method, in the third study, is one such example of methodological invention. The role-play was constructed in such a way that it simulated a situation familiar to the SME owners, i.e. a board meeting. A fictive, yet realistic setting was sought after, where action and reflection were assumed to be inter-linked. This new mode of knowledge creation was brought to bear on entrepreneurship discourse.

This new mode of knowledge means that a practice from the social sciences – the focus group – is combined with a practice from art – role-play. These two practices operate with quite different rationales and on different planes. This invention both challenges and develops social science; it has become a new practice. We created new conditions where research could be practiced and where something new could become possible. A focus group enhanced by role-play cannot be completely incorporated into social science. It has something else, with it, yet it is also part of social science. Such

in(ter)vention, as Steyaert (2011) would call it, cannot be evaluated or measured on the usual terms. Knowledge produced this way will not be ordered as a tree model but as a minor science or rhizomatic structure:

Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2004: 23)

This suggests a new mode of doing research that differs from royal social science; a minor science that can call the major into account (paraphrasing Hjorth et al., 2008). As Steyaert (2011) proposes, research practices are formed when the researcher takes on the responsibility of performativity and enactment.

The fourth study is also experimenting with a rhizomatic research practice. Here fiction was used as an element for collecting stories, in the sense that the antiquarians were asked to write stories themselves. In this example, fiction was brought into social science to be combined with narrative interviews. Fiction does not define a situation in detail, but it can open up and create new understandings. To make use of narratives, or even fiction, is not new in social science. Kostera's method of narrative collage, 'a method that consciously goes beyond realist storytelling' (Kostera, 2006: 9), on which the fourth study draws, is also an example of a rhizomatic research strategy. Kostera attempts to study the imaginative aspects of living and experimenting. Kostera argues that there are at least three creative ways of using stories in social science: we can make sense of stories, i.e. fill in or finalize any initiated story; we can perform re-readings of fictive stories; and we can compile narrative collages, encouraging respondents to make up stories. In the fourth study, fiction became a practice to 'enter the domain of the social imagination' (Kostera, 2006: 9).

Further, the study took concepts from entrepreneurship and brought them into a context alien to entrepreneurship, namely antiquarian bookshops. This is also a rhizomatic research strategy, where a concept is taken up and deployed in unknown terrain, thus becoming a practice that alters the concepts: '[Philosophy] groups under one concept things which you would have thought were very different, or it separates things you would have thought belonged together' (Deleuze, 2006: 214, quoted in Kristensen, et al., 2014: 506). One of the aims of such a strategy is to make visible what was not visible before. Through this process of horizontal moving, putting together and breaking, new practices are created and concepts reinvented. That is, this strategy

creates a new practice in itself. The difference, for example, between the second study on women in Kosovo/a and – the fourth on antiquarian bookseller is that even if women are different (and Other) to men, they are a necessity as such other. Giving them voice creates an alternative story, develops the narrative, but at the same time it is more of the same. It is an unfolding of, in this case, the more well-known male experience. Antiquarian bookshops, as a heretofore-invisible entrepreneurial niche, also create something new.

Taken together, in the PhD dissertation, rhizomatic strategies are also used in relation to theory and practice. Deleuze says that practice and theory are related through ‘relay[s]’ (Deleuze in Bouchard, 1977: 206). To exemplify this, Deleuze (in Bouchard, 1977) gives the example of how Foucault, when investigating confinement in psychiatric asylum, came to the conclusion that the inmates needed to be given voice, to speak for themselves. Instead of investigating this insight in the psychiatric asylum, he went to the prison, as the prisoners could more directly speak of their situation. But, Deleuze argues, Foucault was not applying his theories in a new setting, as one might be led to think. The theory was instead trying to connect the dots, which led Foucault to another practice where a new problem could be investigated.

In Chapter 3, reflexivity and responsibility, rather than validity and reliability, were brought forth as two practices relevant to processual studies. With such an approach, what can we hope for in terms of results? Here again, Deleuze argues in terms of usefulness: ‘The question facing every writer is whether or not people have some use, however small, to make of the book, in their own work, in their life, and in their projects’ (2007: 180). In line with this, Steyaert suggests that empirically-based entrepreneurship studies should opt for ‘holistic studies that focus on local knowledge and create “fragments” of entrepreneurial reality that are understood in their processual complexity without claiming any direct transfer to other contexts’ (1997: 24). Jones and Spicer, finally, argue that there is no reason to stop unveiling, just because it seems that the project will never reach its conclusion:

Even if we only find a second mask behind the first mask, and behind that yet another, this is for us not a reason to stop seeking to unmask – which would mean to stop thinking – but rather is the reason for more efforts to follow. (2009: 4-5)

Rhizomatic thinking is minor science, where studies are layers upon layers in a rhizomatic fabric.

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be', but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and ... and ... and ...'. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2004: 27, italics as in original)

The relations between layers take the form of intersections and limits which in turn create intensifications. Knowledge is perhaps best understood as limits and intersections which connect the rhizome of actual knowledge production and the categorization of knowledge implied in the tree trunk structure of modern science. The two both exist and are intertwined with each other with varying emphasis. While the moving and unveiling strategies tend to foreground rhizomatic thinking, the fronting conceptions tend to replicate the tree trunk. Rhizomatic thinking helps us identify otherwise overseen intensifications and creates relays between different figures such as fronting, moving and unveiling.

The next section will summarize and discuss entrepreneurship at the limits. This discussion will lead us into the final section, which discusses some key intensifications connected to processual entrepreneurship studies, followed by some suggestions for future research.

## **Results: entrepreneurship at the limits**

The first study, Chapter 4, and its conceptualisation of 'emergency entrepreneurship' is an empirically-based account of entrepreneurship as social creativity and localized creative organising (Hjorth et al., 2003; Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Steyaert, 2004). The assumption made here is that the hurricane that hit Southern Sweden (a very unusual event in that region) places everyday life at the limits, and this might generate unique and otherwise hidden processes of organisation creation. The aim is to broaden the understanding of entrepreneurship through stories that are 'alternative' to the dominant ideas of entrepreneurship. At the time of the study, this meant a focus on entrepreneurship as a social rather than individual activity and as a societal phenomenon, in contrast to Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) rational, for-profit opportunity-recognition view. A storytelling and narrative approach was used to describe how this event is narrated and talked about by the participants, i.e., their lived experience. In practice, the study becomes part of the symbolic value of the event itself, in that it collects and repeats stories. In entrepreneurship research, the study produces discursive knowledge that is then conceptualised into 'emergency entrepreneurship'. How do emergencies generate entrepreneurship? And how are

emergency entrepreneurs different from ordinary entrepreneurs? The account illustrates a moving strategy, in that it narrates and moves our understanding for how people might, in practice, create the organisations they need when faced with an immediate challenge in the form of an extraordinary event.

Chapter 5 is an empirical illustration of narrative knowledge in entrepreneurship studies (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004). This study contributes to entrepreneurship at the limits in two ways. The discourse on entrepreneurship in both practice and research alike, remains male-dominated. It is the discourse of men's achievements (Ahl, 2002; Hatch et al., 2005), while women remain at the limits. In Kosovo/a, women could not be included in entrepreneurship practice. The assumptions behind such exclusion is unveiled through a practice-based critique, where these women are written into the discourse through a narrative approach. The study also illustrates a moving strategy. As a researcher, I was moved by the situation and came to take on the role of an activist. Everything in Kosovo/a starts with a Hero, a legend. It is not an exaggeration to say that legends have played crucial roles in political conflicts and even armed conflicts in the region. All heroes are males, however, whereas the victims are women. Therefore, it was a performative move to rewrite this emerging legend and in this capacity provide space for the hitherto silenced aspect of the discourse on entrepreneurship. More importantly, the study gives voice, in practice, to a group that is not only repressed or silenced in society, but that was believed not to exist. In order to achieve this combined process of moving and unveiling, the study operated with two practices: the hero-based storytelling approach as developed in entrepreneurship and the storytelling approach in practice based on legends.

The third study, presented in Chapter 6, also takes issue with the dominant view of entrepreneurship, but from the perspective of SME support. Investigating the somewhat paradoxical results of SME support schemes (e.g. Greene and Storey, 2004), the study shows that entrepreneurs are on the one hand celebrated while also being described as in dire need of support (Perren and Jennings, 2005). The assumption made was that if you ask entrepreneurs about entrepreneurship, they will reply with a response based on the dominant understanding of entrepreneurship. Therefore to place entrepreneurship at the limits, the study sought to produce new knowledge of the assumptions made in entrepreneurship discourse regarding SME support by generating ideas about why SME owners would participate in support initiatives and why these initiatives were launched in the first place. The article in Chapter 6 focuses on the methodological innovation in the study, where practices of focus groups are combined

with practices of role-play. The new research strategy illustrates a processual approach, where traditional hierarchies and boundaries are challenges and a new mode of creating knowledge is created (Steyaert, 1997, 2011; Sørensen, 2006). The purpose of combining these practices in a new way was that we wanted to construct a setting where the practices of SME support manifested themselves and where we could observe how SME owners would deal with these support initiatives. The role-play enhanced focus group provided a setting that was both real and fictive: the participants had the chance to act as if they were dealing with a topic instead of narrating how they think they would have dealt with the topic.

Fiction as a method in social science is further developed in the last article, Chapter 7. In this capacity, it further develops the processual approach to entrepreneurship studies (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Steyaert, 2004; Hjorth et al., 2008; Steyaert, 2011) through practical application. In this study however, fictive accounts and fictive writing techniques are experimented with as methods to generate knowledge. However, fiction does not replace other methods in the study. The study is based on organisational ethnography and makes use of narratives (Kostera, 2006), thus sharing this approach with the first two studies. Fiction is used as a means to open up the field, both the field of entrepreneurship and methods in social science research. The study brings practices of art and literature to social science methods, thus generating new modes of producing knowledge. The study further contributes to the small but growing field of studies targeting entrepreneurial processes in their everyday context (Steyaert, 1995, 1997, 2004; Boutiba, 2004; Rehn and Taalas, 2004; Sørensen, 2006; Verduijn, 2007; Bill et al., 2010). It brings entrepreneurship beyond its present limits through the empirical setting of antiquarian bookshops. Using the detailed descriptions of how economic transactions are socially and culturally embedded, the study offers a philosophical reflection based on these accounts, where the concept of gift-giving (Derrida, 1992 and Bourdieu, 2005) is reconceptualized through the notion of the liminal space of the gift.

The first two studies contribute an empirically-based conceptualisation of entrepreneurship; the first study focused on organisation creation and the second provided stories of emerging practices of female entrepreneurs. From a perspective of frontiering, these two studies are experimental or perhaps not even social science at all. From a perspective of a processual approach, both moving and unveiling, these two studies illustrate early ideas of the European School of entrepreneurship that were based on discursive and narrative interest. As attempts to apply these conceptual ideas in practice, the two studies contribute to the work within the European School

(Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Hjorth et al., 2008). However, the two studies do not contribute to moving the processual research approach as such beyond its present limits. They remain within the realm of traditional social science methods, applying rather than creating concepts.

The last two papers, based on the experiences from the first two studies, take on this challenge and are more experimental, also from the perspective of a processual approach (Steyaert, 1997; Sørensen, 2006; Steyaert, 2011). Through this process, the contribution to a moving and unveiling strategy is also clarified. Whereas the two first papers can be seen as empirical illustrations that offer conceptualisations of entrepreneurship through narrated knowledge, the last two papers attempt to work out how we can produce knowledge as developed in practice, where action and reflection are intertwined.

### **What a processual study of entrepreneurship might be**

The contribution of this dissertation to processual studies in entrepreneurship research is twofold. The first two papers are illustrations of an *application* of process concepts, while the last two papers illustrate the attempt to *create* process concepts. Taken together, the studies demonstrate how a processual study of entrepreneurship might be worked out. This contribution will be further unfolded by re-examining processual studies in entrepreneurship.

The problematic of this dissertation has been unfolded through a combination of empirical investigation and philosophical reflection. The first two studies emphasize empirical investigation, thus promoting a moving strategy, while the last two gradually turn to process philosophy. This analytical movement connects to an unveiling strategy. By elaborating and forming research practices of process studies, this dissertation positions itself fully within the debate on process theory.

The movements between the two first papers and the last two in this dissertation, I want to argue, is what Kristensen, et al. (2014) has pointed out as a new direction for poststructuralist thinkers. Where certain seminal thinkers, such as Derrida, give priority to language, the new direction, set out by, for instance, Deleuze and Guattari, reflects a ‘suspicion’ towards language and must therefore struggle with language:

Deleuze doesn’t trust language as such to be a conveyer of what is ‘Interesting, Remarkable, or Important’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 82). The philosopher must struggle directly with language in order to create a concept which may intervene ontologically in the world, and

*through this intervention* create something interesting, remarkable, or important. (Kristensen, et al., 2014: 500, italics as in original)

This mistrust in language constitutes the ‘break’ in the dissertation between the first two papers and the last two. The first two papers focus on language as a tool for defining concepts in practice. They attempt to provide alternative conceptualisations of entrepreneurship: emergency entrepreneurship in the first paper and an emerging legend of female entrepreneurs in the second. Without suggesting that these two papers fail, they are clearly placed in or based on the linguistic paradigm (Kristensen, et al. 2014). Although they may be trying to break free from royal science and the hierarchical structure of the tree model, they are nevertheless kept within this frame.

The last two papers make use of what is learned in the first two papers. Like Deleuze and Guattari, they articulate a ‘suspicion’ of the role played by language in the first two studies. The two last studies deploy a rhizomatic research strategy, where practices serve as relay to theoretical points and vice versa. Through a strategy of combining and breaking up, both the research and the researched object become strategically activated in the studies, in line with what Steyaert (2011) calls in(ter)vention or experiment, and the two studies attempt to produce new forms of knowledge. The first two papers are illustrations of entrepreneurship in a ‘creative process’-view, focusing on ‘how we talk about’ a subject, but they also become passive, applying their form rather than creating new forms. The last two papers, on the other hand, attempt to wrestle themselves out of this linguistic paradigm based on the tree model. The papers experiment with a pragmatic methodology applied to process studies, as suggested by Kristensen, et al. (2014: 503): ‘we will here argue that process organization studies, from a Deleuzian perspective, should focus on the creation of concepts that make it possible to bring something new into the world’. In this sense, the last two studies may be said to be active and creative. Gradually, a pragmatic methodology was developed, to invent new ways of producing knowledge.

The transformation described in this dissertation, to a large extent worked out through empirical investigation, mirrors the overall development in process studies of entrepreneurship. The two strategies of processual thinking in entrepreneurship studies – moving and unveiling – have emerged from two sources. The first source was the interpretive approach in organisation theory (Steyaert, 1995), an approach whereby process became ‘becoming’, based on process philosophy (Steyaert, 1997). Under the umbrella of process studies, a great variety of such approaches can be found, with narrative and discursive approaches being the most popular (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004;



Steyaert, 2007). This strand of research is referred to in this study as a ‘moving’ strategy. The second strategy in process thinking in entrepreneurship studies originates in critical management studies (Jones and Spicer, 2009) and a particular view of philosophy as a source of transformation and political intervention (Sørensen, 2004). For this reason it has been referred to as an ‘unveiling’ strategy.

Both these perspectives are characterised by an interest in process philosophy. The basis for this joint interest is the insight that it is not enough to interpret or critique entrepreneurship. It must also be transformed. This is exemplified by a recent anthology on organisational entrepreneurship (Hjorth, 2012) where the chapters are a mixture of unveiling and moving strategies. In various ways, these perspectives seek to change entrepreneurship and to take responsibility for the current versions of entrepreneurship. The moving strategy seeks to move the understanding of entrepreneurship via process theory, while the unveiling strategy insists on unmasking the impossibilities of the current state of entrepreneurship research. Both strategies seek to integrate creativity and contextualisation (Hjorth et al., 2008).

While they promote tools and conceptualizations for developing more practical and pragmatic methodologies (Steyaert, 1997, 2011; Sørensen 2005, 2006, 2012) these processual approaches have, arguably, mostly remained in the realm of conceptual experimentation. Examples of such conceptual experimentations include: dramatization (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2002; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2006); literature analysis (Hjorth, 2007; Popp and Holt, 2013); biophilosophical concepts (Styhre, 2008); deploying art, aesthetics and design (Hjorth, 2007; Beyes, 2012); and non-representational theorizing (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012).

Returning to the idea of theory and practice as relays, this study has identified a tendency in the formation of the European School of entrepreneurship studies which may have consequences for its political ambition in the future. In its gradual development through process studies and its call for enactive and performative studies (Steyaert, 2011), and for an active role in transforming entrepreneurship (Hjorth et al, 2008; Jones and Spicer, 2009), this dissertation has sought to map out a shift in the engagement of critique of the dominant paradigm, here referred to as ‘frontiering’. It has, as it were, both pushed back and pushed forward the frontiers of entrepreneurial studies.

The critique of the dominant paradigm, frontiering, in entrepreneurship research has been the catalyst for both the moving and unveiling strategies. These key texts, such as

Gartner, 2001; Steyaert, 1997; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2003, and Jones and Spicer, 2005 and 2009, are full of careful critique; they move between positions, relating, unveiling. After observing how these emergent research communities formed under a common name, the 'European School' (Hjorth et al., 2008), one may identify a shift in how this critique is expressed. In the Hjorth et al. (2008) text, the critique is harsh and polemic rather well-grounded in argumentation. Other texts would follow the same pattern. In his review of process theory, Steyaert (2007) dismisses writers such as Aldrich and Shane and Venkataraman in a single sentence. There seems to be a consensus in the field that scholars should focus on forming communities around concepts and shared interests (Gartner, 2008, 2013; Steyaert, Hjorth, Gartner, 2011), and that there may be little use in trying to engage with, or even substantially criticize the dominant view.

This may be interpreted as exhaustion, and is certainly understandable. Why bother to compare or contrast different approaches to entrepreneurship studies when they appear incommensurable. In theory, and as a debate between researchers, this does not seem to be the most productive way forward in terms of unveiling underlying assumptions and so on. In practice, however, the imagery produced by the strategy of fronting and the tree model remains dominant. Therefore, one cannot refrain from participating in this debate. It seems obvious that if we are to transform entrepreneurship, we should never underestimate the practical relevance of our rhizomatic strategies. If we do not debate different approaches, how can we expect that policy makers will take different approaches into account? My research in Kosovo shows that when a single paradigm dominates (in this case the U.S. paradigm), women got excluded by default, as they were not acting like self-made men. In such situations, we need to engage in the debate in order to be able to begin to tell the stories of those who have been overlooked. It is not a matter of definitions but of the possibility to see and be seen in the change and development of a research society and, moreover, societal practice.

The alternative is the tree model, which would structure our research practice into 'schools' and communities. Shane (2012) makes no effort to promote dialogue between different perspectives in the field. In fact, Shane claims to have read over 2586 articles that Google Scholar provided as citing Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) proposal. According to his summary of these 2586 articles, not a single one seems remotely critical of their approach. The only researcher from the European School that Shane cites is Gartner, and this refers to Gartner's remarks on the importance of Shane's own work: 'other authors have said that our effort has led to better connected and specific explanations for entrepreneurship and has facilitated the development of

the field's legitimacy (Busenitz et al., 2003; Davidsson, Delmar, and Wiklund, 2002; Gartner, 2001)' (Shane, 2012: 12). It seems as if Shane excludes every scientific treatise that does not speak in his favour. From Shane's perspective, the present dissertation may not be research at all, and neither is any research based on a moving or unveiling strategy. In this light, we are all performing entrepreneurship at the limits. Therefore, it is time to push the fronting strategy to its limit. In Chapter 2, I argued that Shane and Venkataraman, through their own dialogue, have demonstrated the inadequacy of the tree model in practice. First, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) proposed a definition of entrepreneurship, whereupon they received three responses with suggestions for revising their definition. Shane and Venkataraman (2001) then proposed a refined definition where they added a line regarding outcomes, pointing to 'the effect of the entrepreneurial process on society at large' (Shane and Venkataraman, 2001: 16). This refined definition is now supposed to replace the old one, and it is suggested that more precise limits of entrepreneurship has been achieved through the scientific method. Finally, the continued work should now focus on testing this new definition and refining it further in a continuous process.

Ten years have now passed, and the original definition from Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) proposal has become the most cited definition in entrepreneurship research – not the refined definition (Shane and Venkataraman, 2001). In other words, the fronting strategy seek to function as a tree structure, where knowledge blocks are built upon each other step by step, fitting onto or into each other. A milieu where a definition gets refined over time through debate and progress. In reality, however, knowledge is not a building block. It is a swarm, a rhizome. And in fact their proposal, in line with what Deleuze and Guattari has termed rhizomatic, has spread, intervened and grown in all directions:

The coordinates are determined not by theoretical analyses implying universals but by a pragmatics composing multiplicities or aggregates of intensities. A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2004: 16)

Unsurprisingly, Shane remains frustrated over this development, and over the fact that entrepreneurship scholars have not yet, more than 10 years after the initial definition, managed to unite the field: 'I am not convinced our efforts have led to a consensus about the domain of the field, its boundaries, purpose, areas of focus, or theoretical base' (Shane, 2012: 12). He further believes 'that the field has taken a problematic approach to dealing with this unresolved definitional debate. Instead of hashing it out,

the field has largely adopted what Venkat and I put forward in “Promise” as its conceptual definition’ (ibid.: 13).

The inability of the frontiering strategy to uphold its positions gives hope to a pragmatic methodology. Not even the most rigid frontiering strategy can control the knowledge it produces, because knowledge is rhizomatic, even if the original categories have been based on a tree model. This means that it will be possible to develop forms of critique for intervening with this intensified rhizome of frontiering, in research and perhaps more importantly in practice. That would mean to work out new strategies with which we can break the field open and create new forms of knowledge, and ultimately new practices. A pragmatic methodology might thus be the creation of the relays that Deleuze and Foucault (in Bouchard, 1977) speak of, a node or synapse lying between the tree and the rhizome, between theory and practice. It may be the explication of these relays, nodes or synapses, their emergence and disappearance, that could form the basis for a processual study of entrepreneurship.

### *On the ‘promise’ of processual entrepreneurship studies*

Paraphrasing Shane and Venkataraman, what might the promises of a process approach to entrepreneurship at the limits be? Let us, finally, reflect on a handful of these promises.

On the promise of storytelling and narratives: Although I have discussed some of the limits this study has met while working with storytelling and narratives, I want to emphasize the value of these methods for social science research. All four studies actually make use of narratives as forms of knowledge, but the last two attempts to open up the practices of storytelling and narratives in order to create new modes of knowledge. What I have tried to describe are some of the mistakes I have done myself, or difficulties that I have experienced. These may or may not be relevant or indicative for other researchers.

One of those difficulties in my own research, but also beyond the scope of this study, has been that narratives and storytelling tend to promote entrepreneurship as a success story. It seems as though a storytelling approach runs the risk of enhancing, rather than problematizing or providing a corrective to the success-narrative of the entrepreneurial process (see also Popp and Holt [2013] for a critical discussion of entrepreneurship and narrative analysis). Happy endings, i.e. successful entrepreneurs, make ‘better stories’. This tendency is reinforced by the tendency of the entrepreneurs themselves to present

themselves as ‘great storyteller[s]’ (cf. Smith and Anderson, 2004). The media tend to repeat, if not embellish, these stories (e.g., the talking, writing and showing) and to ‘romanticize’ the material rather than focus on the daily grind, the frustration, the setbacks and the sheer tedium that is integral to entrepreneurial practice.

One of the reasons why a narrative approach might promote the success-oriented narrative in entrepreneurship might be the efforts to identify ‘entrepreneurial languages’ (e.g. Gartner et al., 2003; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004). The usefulness of narrative and discursive approaches comes from the interest in language as active and creative agent rather than a passive tool. ‘Words lead to deeds’ as Gartner claims (1993), to which Steyaert replies ‘words are deeds’ (Steyaert, 1997: 17-18). The search for ‘entrepreneurial languages’ draws upon the human sciences and philosophy. The language used to describe entrepreneurs and their life-worlds includes words like ‘passion’, ‘joy’ and ‘creativity’. They connote a relation between the creative process of entrepreneurship and art and aesthetics, all depicted as an alternative to the rational language of economics. Such an understanding of entrepreneurship, one could argue, has tended to limit the search for entrepreneurship in special places instead of in special individuals. We have seen studies that search for creative spaces in creative places, e.g. creative industries, design, or fine culture. Further, a language-oriented study might lead to a focus on the most extraordinary aspects of the data instead of the routine characteristics of the entrepreneurial process.

These are some of the reasons why the third and fourth study ended up searching for methods that might be able to ‘ask without asking’; we felt we were told a rehearsed or standardised story. The ‘promise’ of narrative and storytelling approaches that this dissertation has identified has been to experiment with social science methods, to further develop new modes of knowledge that can combine practices and that can challenge the discourse on entrepreneurship. For example, approaches that more carefully combine practices of moving with unveiling might better balance the desire for ‘better stories’ with the need for critique.

On the promise of everyday practices of entrepreneurship: The everyday, the ordinary, the prosaics of entrepreneurship, have been valuable approaches for my own research and one of the pillars of the ‘creative process view’ to which this dissertation aims to contribute. Although researchers call for studies of the ‘daily practices and the way we live’ (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004: 3), few studies have actually done so, and those who attempt to present everyday entrepreneurship seem to struggle to capture the life world of entrepreneurs and their everyday successes and failures. It seems as if mundane

approaches also tend to emphasize the successful aspects of the material. In my own study of organizing after a hurricane, (Chapter 4) the success-narrative is certainly highlighted. Naturally, Chapter 5 also emphasizes the success narrative, although also serving a performative and political function. Worth mentioning here, as contrasting examples, are Boutiba's (2004) close-to-practice descriptions of a Danish SME, where everyday failures are mixed with everyday successes; and Verduijn's (2007) study of entrepreneurs and their life-worlds, focusing explicitly on the 'ordinary' instead of the extraordinary.

On the promise of the darker sides of entrepreneurship: There has also been a call for investigating the 'darker' sides of entrepreneurship (Sørensen, 2006; Rindova et al., 2009; Tedmanson et al., 2012). Failure has been a long ignored aspect of entrepreneurship (Olaison and Sørensen, 2014), despite the rule of thumb that only 1 out of 10 entrepreneurs actually succeed. Research discourse has not been able to account for failure, and as Gartner and Ingram show in a recent study of entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, when entrepreneurs talk about failure, they do it in terms of clichés (Gartner and Ingram, 2013). Exploring the darker sides of entrepreneurship, beyond conceptual or textual analytic explorations, holds great 'promise' in processual studies, and can at the same time pose many challenges to the researchers, compelling them to be their own methodologists (Steyaert, 1997; 2011).

On the promise of liminality as a transformational concept: The fourth study introduces a concept that might have potential in breaking up and transforming entrepreneurship, the concept of liminality. Liminality, like entrepreneurship, is an elusive concept. Meaning in-between or threshold, from the Latin word *limen*, it bears many similarities with how entrepreneurship has been conceptualized, particularly in the moving strategy. Liminality has a very broad use and application, it connects to 'everything', just like entrepreneurship. For example, Van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1974) focused on communal rites of passage and performativity; Douglas (1966) described liminal beings and transformations; Haraway described a hybrid liminality (1991); and Kristeva (1982) delves into liminality by way of the abject, that which cannot be assimilated. Liminality is also implied in Deleuze and Guattari's work, and Haraway (1991) has drawn on their work in her own analyses. 'The sublime object' is also a liminal notion, as discussed by Lacan and Žižek all of which has worked its way into the entrepreneurship studies of the European School (Jones and Spicer, 2005, 2009). Garmann Johnsen and Sørensen (2014), for example, raise the question whether entrepreneurship is situated in a permanent liminality, implying that it is a 'limbo',

with all of this concept's frightening, theological connotations. Olaison and Sørensen (2014) perform a discourse analysis of expressions of failure, venturing into that which cannot be expressed in the entrepreneurship discourse and is therefore abjected (Kristeva, 1982).

Handled with care, I believe liminality could work as one such transformative tool in process studies of entrepreneurship, in order to understand transformation, not only cultural, but also social and political processes. Liminality may be productive in 'breaking boundaries'. The second study, for example, would have benefited from such efforts which could have helped to clarify women's position. Also, the role of myths and legends could have been further problematized through this notion.

On the promise of juxtaposition as processual approach: Juxtaposition as a method has recently been developed in organisation studies, Science and Technology Studies and entrepreneurship studies as well (Sørensen 2010; 2013; 2014, Gorm Hansen, 2011). The juxtaposition method situates together things that do not seem to belong together and separates things that do. In hindsight, the second study could have made use of this method, juxtaposing the folk legend and entrepreneurship tale in a more systematic way. The fourth study could also be re-read with juxtaposition as tool, to clarify its contribution to entrepreneurship studies.

On the danger of the limitlessness of entrepreneurship: There seems to be no limit to how much entrepreneurship is needed in our current economic situation. Also, there seems to be no limits to where entrepreneurship is needed. According to Venkataraman (1997: 121), there seems to be no limit to the continuous supply of entrepreneurship either. This proposed limitlessness of entrepreneurship might be the most thrilling and yet dangerous trait of entrepreneurship. Deleuze and Guattari (1984/2004) offer an analysis of the capitalist system as relational, and they predict that whatever we do to break up or break out of this system, it will create connections and relations to reinvent itself as exactly that which can incorporate our attempt. Recently, for example, we have seen how capitalism and entrepreneurship have reinvented themselves as the solution to crises and injustices created by the system itself, such as social problems and poverty (Barinaga, 2012), as well as the twin crisis of ecology and economy (Dean and McMullen, 2007). From this perspective, it seems as though entrepreneurship has no master. To paraphrase Garmann Johnsen and Sørensen (2014), it may be in a state of permanent liminality. With this in mind, entrepreneurship scholars should proceed with caution. Liminal spaces without any masters are potentially very dangerous. While processual entrepreneurship studies might not master to tame the limitlessness

of entrepreneurship, this study argues that processual studies holds promise in regards to developing new forms of critique that can both problematise and develop more fruitful concepts of entrepreneurship at the limits.



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Includes both the references in the four papers and the references in the meta-text around them.

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