

## **“Let them not make me a stone”- Repositioning Entrepreneurship**

### **Abstract**

Entrepreneurs create our tomorrows and we have a responsibility to comprehend as well as appreciate what they do. A repositioning of entrepreneurship scholarship is essential, if we are to fulfil our purpose, enact our principles, and engage fully with the peoples, places and processes of entrepreneuring’s edgy ecotones. We argue for embracing the biosphere, and exploring the in-between. We confirm the need for research that champions everyday entrepreneurs, and challenges dominant ideal types. We propose and support an ethics of creative and circular frugality. To achieve these consistent and coherent aims, it is time for entrepreneurship to re-position as a connective, heterotopic, engaged and transdisciplinary ecotone; rich, diverse, and embedded in the in-between.

### **Keywords**

Entrepreneurship; Entrepreneuring; Place; Everyday Entrepreneurship; Marginality; Theory

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### Abstract

Entrepreneurs create our tomorrows and we have a responsibility to comprehend as well as appreciate what they do. A repositioning of entrepreneurship scholarship is essential, if we are to fulfil our purpose, enact our principles, and engage fully with the peoples, places and processes of entrepreneuring’s edgy ecotones. We argue for embracing the biosphere, and exploring the in-between. We confirm the need for research that champions everyday entrepreneurs, and challenges dominant ideal types. We propose and support an ethics of creative and circular frugality. To achieve these consistent and coherent aims, it is time for entrepreneurship to re-position as a connective, heterotopic, engaged and transdisciplinary ecotone; rich, diverse, and embedded in the in-between.

### 1. Introduction

*I am not yet born: rehearse me*

*In the parts I must play, and the cues I must take when*

*old men lecture me, bureaucrats hector me, mountains*

*frown at me, lovers laugh at me, the white*

*waves call me to folly and the desert calls*

*me to doom and the beggar refuses*

*my gift and my children curse me.*

*(MacNeice, 1964, ed. Auden, pp74-5)*

Louis MacNeice wrote from the perspective of an unborn child; we think this resonates with our understanding of the birth of new firms, and, perhaps, growing fields of scholarship, too. He wrote at a time of heightening concern about monolithic large-scale industrial dehumanisation and the destruction of war; we write at a time of heightened concern about profligate use of resources, destruction of the biosphere and the sustained impact of health and economic crises alike. MacNeice’s unborn child was

powerless, but we are not. Yet even though as researchers we face similar pressures to conform and comply, we are not stones.

We can believe and we can think and we can act, we have the privilege and the power to explain entrepreneurship. We have a moral responsibility to our students, our colleagues and our publics to comprehend and demonstrate the power of entrepreneuring as the means of benevolent change (Leitch et al, 2010). Yet this authority is dependent on the authenticity of what we do. Have we been stones in obstinately reifying entrepreneurship as an economic phenomenon only for wealth production (Anderson, 2015)? If we are not stones, have we been bewitched by the archetypal hero myth (Rhen et al, 2013) that offers us some ontological security for “seeking meaning in fluidity” (Laine and Kibler, 2019; 82). Have we neglected the different kinds of value that entrepreneuring can produce (Korsgaard et al, 2016)? Do “we systematically devalue entrepreneurship as a whole, by failing to see the pleasures and benefits of entrepreneurship unless they can be accounted for in wealth accumulation and job creation” (Welter et al, 2017; 315)?

We add our voice to a critical chorus<sup>1</sup> (Tedmanson et al, 2012) that has begun to reverberate the challenges to the narrowing conventions of our domain. We suggest reassessing the fundamentals and questioning *what underpins all that we do?* We present a polemic critique, but argue that by repositioning entrepreneurship we can better recognise its width and depth and all its capabilities; yet comprehend its frailties. We offer an alternative viewpoint; perhaps one better able to follow, conceive and report entrepreneurship’s ability to change things for the better without consuming them in the process. To this end, we discuss repositioning of how we conceive entrepreneurship, by philosophizing a little around

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<sup>1</sup> We do not provide here a definition or discussion of the wider critical chorus in entrepreneurship, or its overlaps with qualitative scholarship (McDonald et al, 2015; Dodd et al, 2014, 637; Leitch et al 2010, 70). Rather, we take heterogeneous entrepreneurship as a broad, inclusive and flexible umbrella, for the purposes of this essay. Erecting new boundaries is not our aim here. However, our community of practice does indeed resonate with qualitative entrepreneurship research’s “openness with regard to methodology and epistemology, insistence on grounded interaction with people and text, an explicit rejection of positivism and a passion for the philosophy and practice of engagement” (Dodd et al, 2014).

some fundamental questions, in this essay. What are the *processes* which comprise entrepreneuring? Which are the *places* inviting a repositioned entrepreneurship in? Who are the *peoples* co-creating these places through their enterprise? What is the *purpose* of our collective work? Which *principles* does a repositioning imply? We join and extend recent disquiet in the literature, bringing together and extending insights from the wider critical chorus (see, for example, Ramoglou, Gartner and Tsang; 2020; Fayolle et al, 2018; Welter and Baker, 2020).

As Fayolle et al (2018) recommended, we will step back and reflect. To be an authentic researcher means taking seriously the interaction of the warps and weaves of our world (Hlady-Rispal and Jouison-Laffitte, 2014). In order to begin repositioning, we must account for people, places, relationships, reflexivities, histories, practices, beliefs, narratives, times, process, and their connections (Malecki, 2009; Welter et al, 2017; Gartner, 2007; Suddaby et al, 2015; Fayolle, 2013; Ogbor, 2000).

This problematising is not new, we know our concept is rich, but elusive (Verduijn et al, 2014). The liminality of the entrepreneurial space and the milieu of change makes our empirics fragmentary and difficult (Anderson and Starnawska, 2008). This suggests our entrepreneurial questions are ultimately theoretical questions, of a philosophical nature. Hjorth (2015; 42) describes our philosophical task as informed by, “social creation process that rigs action in fictional anticipation of actual actionable value potential”; or in the words of Bruyat and Julien (2001; 173), “A heterogeneous scientific object within a dynamic of change”. Yet our pursuit of understanding is much like the lost key, we look for it where we shine the light. Moreover, like Procrustes, we may cut up the concept to fit our traditional theoretical boxes; here, our aim has been to open up, rather than to cut down.

This manuscript takes an essay form, as is (perhaps ironically) traditional for such thought pieces. In a small homage to the heterodox (see, for example Gartner, 2008), short excerpts from MacNeice’s plaintive poem are scattered around, woven into those sections of our writing which they inspired, in the

hope they might do likewise for others. Entrepreneurship's critical chorus too has a passionate commitment to interrogate "the sins that in me the world shall commit, my words, when they speak me, my thoughts when they think me" (MacNeice, 1964, 74-5). Our essay is a connective contribution to that chorus, drawing out implications for the way ahead by reflecting on where we are now.

We begin with a short overview of growing demands for conceptual repositioning, highlighting recent key contributions to this collective discourse. Next, we tackle in turn these major repositioning hurdles facing us; the processes, places, peoples, purpose and principles implied by the trajectories of a repositioned entrepreneurship research. We discuss some of the epistemological implications of our analysis, paying special attention to transdisciplinary perspectives. Entrepreneurship research, repositioned, embraces the biosphere, and explores the thresholds of the in-between. It champions the everyday entrepreneur, and challenges dominant ideal types. Entrepreneurship is processual: change-making, connecting, re-combining, and our research, repositioned, should reflect this. Entrepreneurship research should surely value *all* value – not just economic capital – and advance an ethic of creative circular frugality. To reposition ourselves on these foundations, a connective, heterotopic scholarship, of many perspectives and disciplines, is argued for, and we illustrate this with a small guide book to some parts of this new terrain (Welter and Baker, 2020, p15).

First, however, the initial question we must address is *why* reposition entrepreneurship research? What is wrong with where we find ourselves? Which paths, maps, compasses and visions have emerged in response to this losing of our way? What directions do they promise?

## **2. Why Reposition Entrepreneurship Research?**

Fayolle et al (2018) point out that we will not make much headway in advancing entrepreneurial scholarship if we do not stand back and reflect on our empirical direction and argumentation. Ramoglou, Gartner and Tsang (2020) also argue for reviewing the positioning of entrepreneurship. Concerned about

disputes and lack of progress in our academic problematising of entrepreneurial phenomena, they too propose we adopt Wittgenstein's solution, 'stand back and carefully reflect on whether we have good reasons to maintain commitment to recalcitrant projects'. Their repositioning away from linguistic distortions draws out and strengthens the common-sense view of the contingent and contextual nature of entrepreneurial agency. Like Ramoglou and Tsang's (2017) view of opportunities, they see how agency may arise *because* of the context. **Places** as context are incontrovertibly at the heart of the repositioning imperative: "place matters, as the social site of entrepreneurship, the relational and material geography that shapes practice, and is shaped by it in turn" (Drakopoulou Dodd, 2014, p 166; Johnstone and Lionais, 2004, p 219; Welter and Baker, 2020).

Addressing the longstanding debate about whether opportunities are discovered or created, Ramoglou and Tsang (2017) argue for entrepreneurial agency as *actualising* opportunity. Their repositioning is not just a compromise to resolve dilemmas and dichotomies of objectivity and subjectivity; of causation or effectuation, empiricist or idealist, or even the ontologies of positivism and interpretivism. Indeed, later Ramoglou and Tsang (2018) they suggest this transcends the discovery-creation debate. For us, it repositions entrepreneurial actions as the agency to make possibilities happen. This also highlights the need to place **processes** - like connecting, converting, combining, and making change – as a driving force of this repositioning.

Wiklund et al (2019) believe we should recognise the role of entrepreneurship as a potential force for good, rapid political changes, the persistent debate on sources of and solutions to inequality, need for evidence-based policy, industry and technological changes, climate change, changing socio-economic goals. Like us, they propose a fresh agenda, moving outside narrow measures of performance, taking fuller account of all entrepreneurial costs and consequences, different and broader samples of entrepreneurship including 'underdogs'. This, they argue, will open up scholarship and make it more relevant and respond to the increasing emphasis on social and emotional, and not just economic, well-

being. Welter et al (2017) propose revisiting reasons, values and purposes rather than our fascination with outcomes. We agree, and, inspired by this and similar work, include explorations of **purpose** and **principle** in this essay.

Dimov et al (2020) describe how entrepreneurship scholarship has become disconnected, detached, from entrepreneuring. They see a gulf as academics ponder and theorise about what entrepreneurs 'will do', *predicting*, compared to entrepreneurs deciding what they 'should do', or perhaps even what they 'can do'. Dimov et al (2020) identify this as a scholarship problem, a misalignment between theorising and practice. One practical solution is to get closer to practitioners with better theories of entrepreneurship as practice (Gartner et al, 2016; De Clercq and Vornov, 2009; Champenois et al, 2020). Dimov et al (2020) explain how we can only identify entrepreneurs through the contextualised account of meanings we attribute to their actions. These contextualised meanings are how we understand our phenomena. We join these scholars, and others, in arguing that the trajectory of orthodox entrepreneurship research has decontextualized the meaning of entrepreneuring, reifying it as an enrichment and status strategy for the elite. Like Welter et al (2017), we celebrate the everydayness and heterogeneity of entrepreneurship. They comment on how technology and the Silicon Valley form of entrepreneurship has seemed to dominate the sphere and how we are mesmerised with growth. Our entrepreneurial gaze has focused on what Aldrich and Ruef (2018) call black swans, the very exceptional gazelles and unicorns of Silicon Valley, rather than the typical and everyday prosaic entrepreneurship (Steyaert, 2004). This reification of black swans detracts from the typical and denigrates everyday entrepreneuring. A recurring unifying theme in recent heterodox scholarship is the pressing need to reconsider which **peoples** our work is in service to.

It seems there is a rising groundswell of concern about how we currently conceptualise entrepreneurship. To bring these strands together, and examine their consequences and implications as a coherent totality, in the context of present day challenges, is our aim. To achieve this goal, we use a simple framing of the argument around the repositioning of process, places, peoples, purpose and principles. Given the

imbricated nature of these elements, the framing does not inhibit ongoing consideration of the overlaps and linkages between them. Those seeking deeper, more philosophical narrative threads might note that our discussion of principles draws on axiology, or ethics. Analysis of purpose is explicitly teleological in nature. Considerations of the nature of entrepreneurship within peoples, places and processes are implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, ontological. Debates of the scope, the reach of the places we inhabit, and their origins and progression, have strong traces of cosmology. Where we reflect on our intellectual landscape, as a corollary of the social landscapes we are making a turn to, considerable use is made of the epistemology of entrepreneurship. However, our aim has been to keep a light hand and a tight rein on the more formal philosophizing<sup>2</sup>, so as to sustain the flow, development and accessibility of the essay.

### 3. Process – What is Entrepreneurship?

To be an *entrepreneurship* researcher asks us to stand in the flux of in-between, to make critical sense of the changes flowing through the interstitial spaces of the entrepreneur. Chia (1999) describes ‘in-between’ as liminality and central to the metaphysics of change, i.e. *becoming*. The new ideas, strategies and organisational forms that characterise entrepreneurship require re-combinations or re-creating. Accordingly, entrepreneurial ontology is connectedness; the warps and wefts of our worlds are re-stitched with new threads as the old dissolve, unravel or fall apart. Moreover, a liminal position is better placed for connecting the in-between. Anderson (2005) explains liminality is a transformative stage where a thing is in process of becoming something else. Indeed, Garcia-Lorenzo et al (2018) suggest liminality defines the practice of entrepreneuring.

We suggest that liminality is the *entrepreneurial space*; the positioning and condition in which entrepreneurship works (Gross and Geiger, 2017). This recognition helps understanding entrepreneurship as a mechanism for, and of, change. Entrepreneuring creates change by connecting

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<sup>2</sup> We thank our two anonymous referees especially for their advice on restructuring our manuscript into a more consistent essay form.



things, ideas, people and processes (Anderson et al, 2012) across this liminal space. Prashantham and Floyd (2019) call this transitioning. We believe this creates intriguing problems for studying enterprise and calls for post-positivist methodologies to capture the interactions across the many dimensions of entrepreneurship (Leitch et al, 2010; Karatas-Ozkan et al, 2014).

This is because liminality, in-betweenness, describes this entrepreneurial space well, but the milieu of change offers few conceptual anchor points. Yet because the practice of entrepreneurship is connecting different things, combining, entrepreneuring as practice is surely boundary spanning (Schierjot et al, 2018). Nonetheless, these boundaries are not barriers, but instead offer fluid and unfixed borders; Steyaert (2003) calls them frontiers. Moreover, theoretical borders are constructed by us; academics decree whether ours is a social or economic phenomenon and how many variable constitute entrepreneuring. Furthermore, entrepreneurs are such only because they entrepreneure, not because of who they are (Gartner, 1988; Ramoglou et al, 2020). As Schumpeter succinctly explained, 'The carrying out of new combinations we call "enterprise" (or entrepreneurship); the individuals whose function it is to carry them out we call "entrepreneurs"' (1934, p. 74). Indeed, in entrepreneuring, objects and subjects can merge because entrepreneurship is a transformative process. This means we cannot reach out and pluck entrepreneurship from a shelf; we can only know it in relation to change. To complicate things further, entrepreneurship is a product of self and the circumstances (Anderson, 2000) in which it emerges (Markman and Baron, 2003). It is both product and process and contextually shaped (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017), arises in so many different contexts (Welter, 2011), some glamorous and hi-tech, others mundane and prosaic. Indeed, we acknowledge this in our categorical labelling; female entrepreneurship, necessity entrepreneurship, even social or rural. However, these are superficial and may owe more to analytical convenience than conceptual integrity (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019).

In 1985 Drucker (vii) propounded that the entrepreneurial economy was the most *hopeful* event in recent social and economic history. Yet today, our place, and the places of the entrepreneurs we study *and*

educate, are being challenged by unprecedented social and natural crises. Drucker (2014) told us there is no such thing as a resource until man finds a use for something in nature and thus endows it with economic value. Until then, every plant is a weed and every mineral just another rock. They have no value as simply a plant. This is creative destruction, but does our cosmology pay attention to the destruction? Surely, entrepreneurial creative *reconstruction* might offer a better maxim for sustainability *and* progress. Exploitation becomes coordination; consumption shifts from depletion to circular; Schumpeter's recombinations *re-use* and *re-source*.

#### **4. Places – Wither Entrepreneurship?**

We respond to shared *feeling*, shared *sensing* that something is amiss in our entrepreneurial world. Entrepreneurship stands at the heart of these challenges, and we can no longer indulge scholarly myopia because of the accelerating power of our concept. Entrepreneurship is now institutionalised as the universal silver bullet policy of the global development industry - consider how many papers and policies begin by telling us about the critical role of entrepreneurship. Moreover, elite entrepreneurs have become celebrities (Anderson and Warren, 2011) boasting influence well beyond their domains. Princes, Presidents and Politicians all claim the halo of our enterprise culture (Perren and Dannreuther, 2013). Entrepreneurship is no longer an emergent subfield, fighting for legitimacy (Kuratko and Morris, 2018). Entrepreneurship is thrust centre stage into a starring role; a role *we* should be writing, not reading from an obsolete script.

There is something essentially different about entrepreneurship as a scholarly phenomenon (Zahra and Dess, 2001) and different from other social sciences (Bygrave, 1993, Venkataraman, 2019, Sarasvathy and Venkataraman, 2011). We make a case for a more complete and more inclusive "cosmos"; arguing that we may be mesmerized, transfixed in a hegemony of high growth economic discourse (Delmar et al, 2003). Unenlightened, perhaps even ignorant of valuable alternatives?

As process, entrepreneurship is enacted in contexts as diverse as humanity and practised within social sites of human interaction (Steyaert and Katz, 2004). It happens in the everyday micro-practices of people's lives as they connect (Dodd et al, 2016). It materialises as exchanges within fields and institutions, communities, ventures, sectors, clusters, networks, localities, regions, or states (Welter et al, 2019). Our context is human society, and their places "complex sites of enculturated social engagement, where creative collective organizing (or 'entrepreneurialing') is enacted through networks of relationships" (Drakopoulou Dodd, 2014, p 167). All of these places, and spaces, and times, experience entrepreneurial new forms. All, too, have something interesting to teach us about entrepreneurship.

Paradoxically, the richest contexts for research could be the poorest in terms of other resources (Ukanwa et al, 2018). There are 44,000,000 informal, marginal self-employed in India (Emova, 2019); yet typically we hear about India's 30 *Unicorns*. Consider the likely richness, diversity and ingenuity of these 'marginal' entrepreneurial millions. Should we continue to treat them as 'the other', (Xiong et al, 2018; Bruton et al, 2013) dismissing them as only necessity entrepreneurs? Moreover, in-betweenness resonates in the periphery, a place which is always distant from the centre (Anderson, 2000), since it is in "the frontier zone, the middle, the dynamic place between institutions, where heterogeneity and connections can arise in some freedom from institutional constraints" (Drakopoulou Dodd, 2014, 168). These resource-scarce environments may offer unique knowledge of entrepreneurship (Sutter et al, 2019).

Entrepreneurship is embedded within social sites, as are the entrepreneurs who perform it (Jack et al, 2008). Social sites are fields of interaction where meaning and being are co-created (Drakopoulou-Dodd and Anderson, 2007). They are co-constructions; embedding means we respond to institutions because institutions themselves are manifestations of meaning systems (Kalden et al, 2017). These structure entrepreneurial agency (Battilana, 2006). Baumol's classic 1990 showed how institutions shape enterprise, but our literature offers many examples that relate the diversity of entrepreneurship to institutional embedding (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Estrin et al, 2013; Bjørnskov and Foss, 2016). From

the perspective of cosmology, we can see how institutional values and the values employed, make and shape our perceptions of the very nature of enterprising.

We argue that if institutions are socially constructed, they form and are formed by ideology, an ideology centred on values. Yet, we challenge an ideology preoccupied with the 'froth' of spectacular entrepreneurial ventures. Have we become fixated on technological disrupters; have those unicorns enchanted us, blinding us to the everyday, modest changemakers? Bill et al (2010; 172), 'The scripted spectacle of entrepreneurship represents an imagery that spectators are attracted to. We want superhuman entrepreneurs to save us (Sørensen, 2008).' We hear this same heroic script resonating in entrepreneurial discourse (Nicholson and Anderson, 2005). Yet it neglects the typical and every-day and is ignorant of the ferment of productive micro-entrepreneurship simmering away at the base of this pyramid. This top slicing of our cosmology is oblivious to the sustainability of frugal re-sourcing, doing more with less, in enterprising micro-practices.

We suggest that this truncation of our cosmology has been caused by the dominance, nay domination, of an economic ideology prioritising wealth creation and consumption (Anderson, 2015). Resources are simply inputs for the entrepreneurial machine and have value only in being consumed. If we tolerate the conception that resources, including people and places, are only valuable as resources-for-use, raw material for exploitation and consumption, we collude in their depletion. If our cosmology recognises that entrepreneurship *renews* places and people (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2018), that entrepreneurial energy *revitalises* and can *resource*, we *recapture* the entrepreneurial promise that tomorrow can be better than today (Anderson et al, 2019). There is a terrible irony in the recent fad for entrepreneurial ecosystems, listing the economic and social institutions supporting entrepreneurship (Brown and Mason, 2018). The ecologies of Gaia remind us that real, natural ecosystems, not selective analogies, will always continue, but could exclude humanity if we continue to deplete our biosphere. Our cosmology incorporates the natural contexts in which resourcing plays a critical role.

It is conceptually and morally mistaken to reduce our biosphere to an entrepreneurial external; a free good that could cost the earth. This reductionist cosmology of resource-as-use-value permeates the 'entrepreneurship industry'. It 'Trump'-ets conspicuous consumption and sees poverty as a lack of entrepreneurship. Yet we know that entrepreneuring can, and does, harness change making power for good (Haugh, 2007). Can we move up from this narrow cosmology to become inclusive? Can we escape the high growth and high consumption fetish to prioritise, "water to dandle me, grass to grow for me, trees to talk to me, sky to sing to me, birds" (MacNeice, 1964, ed. Auden, pp74-5)?

Adamantly, we are not simply proposing returning to the caves, or even brown rice and paper shoes, although all these too may be encompassed within this vision. Instead, we insist that entrepreneurial growth can be benign. Entrepreneurship can responsibly produce and consume the good things we enjoy if we extend our cosmology to things that matter. A re-sourcing cosmology expands the range of things as being in our cosmos. It develops fundamental premises, widens boundaries, opens frontiers. It views these not only as resources, but as agents of our well-being in their own right; possibly more valuable than the economic capital for which they were sacrificed. The peoples of the periphery and the in-between suggest themselves strongly as research collaborators and subjects/objects, as we reposition.

### **5. Peoples – Whose Entrepreneurship?**

Have we been distracted by institutional pressures, the media's amplification of entre-tainment, and turned away from the process of emergence, the dance, to look instead only at the institutionally prescribed dancer? We reject the codification and reproduction of such a unitary, de-contextualised, reified, phenomenon: "the entrepreneur". There are as many entrepreneurs as there are dancers, and far more interesting dances than the elite's choreographed pirouettes.

We have already suggested, indeed, that the peoples of the margins not only have a greater need for entrepreneuring, given their resource paucity, but also perhaps a more intrinsic *connection* with the

process. Consider the *entrepreneuredness* (potential for change) of the *other*, as of the margins; the migrant, the firm that is also family, the ethnic, the micro, the high tech geek, the Puritan, the woman, the adult with ADHD, even Kets de Vreis' "personality at the crossroads". In each example we see liminality, edging dominant fields and probably characterised by tensions and instability. These are people on the edges, socially, economically, racially, ethnically, psychologically, cognitively. Moreover, these zones are where the in-between is most accessible; this entrepreneurial space is ripe for change.

On the margins entrepreneurs can see the excesses, wastes and constraints of the centre. For those with no resources, or access to very, very few resources, the discarded products of the mainstream offer a lifeline, where they are made available, visible and accessible to the margins. This is not to glorify marginal entrepreneurship: there is little glory in the rubbish tip scavenging of children. However, on a brutally pragmatic level, it is very clear that elites (including ourselves) consistently undervalue and discard an obscene quantity of useful re-sources, "harvested" from the biosphere (Firth and McElwee, 2009). It is the people of the margins, often through sheer necessity and lack of access to any other re-sources, who re-purpose, re-claim and re-value these assets. The role of such everyday entrepreneurs in sustaining the re-sources of the biosphere is valuable; re-allocating, effectual bricolage makes anew from almost nothing. There is a sustainability lesson in this frugal, local, small scale circularity.

Yet as the *other*, everyday entrepreneurs are disabled from fully enacting the field's habitus (Anderson and Miller, 2003). Described differently, incomers not raised in the habitus of a given field will lack social, symbolic, economic or cultural capital (Battalini, 2006). Yet becoming an elite *entrepreneurial other* reconfigures marginality to advantage; a connecting link of disparate parts (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013). This social strategy adopts and enacts entrepreneurs' role identity (Leitch and Harrison, 2016), moving from marginal to legitimate (Haugh and Talwar, 2016). This is the empowerment in entrepreneurship and

is the same process we saw used by a President, a Prince and Politicians <sup>3</sup>. It creates an economic value in otherness; but offers psychological ontological security and seems to lend authority (Anderson and Warren, 2011).

Nonetheless, this repositioning places changemaking by peoples, together, at its centre. This social process view of changemaking allows us to see entrepreneurship as socially enacted, and how social processes create economic outcomes. Clearly, this is valuable, but what do values, and value, mean for our repositioning of entrepreneurship? We will argue that values underpin enterprise, but uncritical assumptions may undermine the value.

## **6. Principles – Values in Entrepreneurship**

The entrepreneurship academy is now a high growth, institutionally influential, large scale sector. It is particularly attractive to the media, uncritically and hagiographically legitimising entrepreneurship. Indeed, entrepreneurship is globally invoked as a policy imperative, almost an entrepreneurship hegemony (Tedmanson et al, 2012). Yet there seems a conspicuous absence of values in these declarations of the value of entrepreneurship. This is not to declare a moral void in entrepreneuring; only narrow, economic instrumental versions lack a moral dimension (Machan, 1999). There is much evidence of ethical behaviour standards built into social constructions of entrepreneurship (Brenkert, 2009), of a socialised sense of responsibility (McKeever et al, 2015), of moral legitimacy in practice (Kibler and Kautonen, 2016; Clark and Holt, 2010). Indeed, the social values in social enterprise practices speak for themselves. Yet we see risks in unreflectively assuming moral imperatives and ethical behaviour. There is a danger of empty virtue signalling in these rhetorics, but more importantly, we may underestimate the power of moral agency in entrepreneuring. Consequently, axiology is a fundamental component and we can learn about values and how they are engaged: principles matter, intellectually as much as morally.

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<sup>3</sup> “I am not yet born; O hear me, Let not the man who is beast or who thinks he is God come near me.” (*MacNeice, 1964, ed. Auden, pp74-5*)

Our argument is the mismatch between what is presented as being valuable in entrepreneurship and the values that propel entrepreneurial efforts. The archetypal endeavour and the heroic entrepreneur are deemed valuable because of high growth. Yet the hero is usually myth and high growth is a rare event (Anderson and Ullah, 2014). Nonetheless, this discourse of high growth presents only the value of consuming resources to achieve high growth. Whilst some might see this constant consumption as having worked well for centuries, for some, it is now clearly unsustainable (De Clerc and Voronov, 2011). We believe the values, and value, of entrepreneurship can move from the hedonism of growth by consumption, to a conservation ethic (Parrish, 2010). Entrepreneurial values, repositioned to reflect everyday entrepreneurship, could steer us in the right direction. Philosophically, we are proposing something close to the virtue ethics of Aristotle (Crockett, 2005). We propose that entrepreneurs can do the right things *because* they are right (*arête*), and not as simply a means to other ends. They are able to do so because they have practical wisdom (*phronesis* - Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014). It is important that they are so because entrepreneurs will change things. Our purpose, and theirs, is to try to change things for the better. We do this by expanding our cosmos to include the flies as well as the elephants.

Consider the values, the ethics that seem to underpin entrepreneurship as practiced, everyday, rather than those celebrated in “entrepreneurial porn” (Aarons-Mele, 2014: see also Anderson and Smith, 2007). We stress that we are not proposing wishy-washy and uninformed idealism. Instead, we point to how businesses are already socially embedded and socially enacted (Brenkert, 2009). Societies, communities, institutions and peoples impose an ethical framework on practices (McKeever et al, 2014). Entrepreneurs are not simply growth maximisers (Clarke, Holt, and Blundel, 2014), they connect with people, and are embedded in places and institutions, along with their customers and suppliers (Dunham, 2010). Aside the myths, we know that most entrepreneuring is practiced within a moral framework that values others. In short, we offer *practical* ethics rather than abstract, divorced and offerings disconnected



from practice (Nordstrom et al, 2020). We call for greater embeddedness of studies of value, within scholarship, and for deeper focus on this pressing topic in its own right.

What if we replace the heroism of high consumption for high growth with a folk hero of frugal production? What then if we applaud how she reuses resources? What if we celebrate the altruism inherent in entrepreneurship as a social endeavour carrying broader benefits? What if we turn to appreciate local, social and environmental responsibility? These values exist and are already employed in much entrepreneuring; they surface in the everydayness of typical small business. Yet we neglect them, preferring the glamorous hero. If these values become our symbolic helmsman, we begin to cherish entrepreneurship as a benign engine of change. This the role of entrepreneurial values in the good society (Brenkert, 1999).

We must beware of creating new monolithic myths, of course, or assuming blanket ethical probity to the self-employed and economically self-sufficient. To avoid falling into the same meta-narrative trap, twice, we must better account for our own values too, our influence and responsibilities. As academics, we are entrusted to critically appraise and inform. We have been shy of assuming this moral mantle; how many of our classes, or our papers, integrate entrepreneurial ethics into our work (Lourenço et al, 2013)? Yet the dangers of not doing so, of presenting the impression that this is not needed, should have been evident to us long ago with the early rumblings of enterprise culture hegemony (Jones and Spicer, 2005). We set the institutional norms for enterprise education (Jack and Anderson, 1999): we shape the voice, the thoughts and the words of the next generation of entrepreneurs. Our institutions legitimate and help craft the public understanding of what entrepreneurship is, or could be, or should be (Gibb, 2002). Nobody else made us teach business plans, pitching and high growth: we did it to ourselves. It is *our* choice what to include on our syllabi. Integrating ethical and sustainable entrepreneurship is imperative.

From a practical perspective, values on the margins can inform us (Baker and Nelson, 2005). As Dimov et al put it, “we need to talk to entrepreneurs to get at and understand their reasons” (2020; 9). There are methodological implications to “placing potentialized context at the heart of our scholarship, like Johannisson” (Drakopoulou Dodd, 2014 and Fletcher 2011, 68; Steyaert 2011; Steyaert and Landstrom 2011; Steyaert, Hjorth, and Gartner 2011). One approach is to engage in collaborative, co-created, or transformative entrepreneurship scholarship, in full partnership with entrepreneurs, so that “entrepreneurship scholarship will be sensitive to the practical decision-making perspectives of entrepreneurs by making it in integral part of research practice” (Dimov et al, 2020).

We are starting to beg the question here of what entrepreneurship research is *for*. What is our purpose? In MacNeice’s words, what is the “white light in the back of my mind to guide me” (1964, ed. Auden, pp74-5)? Before beginning to pull our threads together, we first reconsider our *raison d’etre*.

### **7. Purpose – What are we for?**

What is our purpose? What are we *for*? Towards what ends is entrepreneurship research directed? Which direction should our new paths follow? Teleology, the philosophy of purpose and direction, is pressingly relevant for us. The world around us has changed, is in multiple crises, but its view of what entrepreneurship is *for* has not. The institutionalised assumptions of the mainstream about us seem increasingly dissonant, even distant from our moral purpose. And yet, as we find ourselves at the very centre of the geopolitical, environmental and socio-economic storm, we experience the emergence of renewed passion, almost a collective *beruf*, to reposition entrepreneurship’s purpose<sup>4</sup>.

Many of our deans, principals, government ministers, chambers of commerce, entrepreneurship associations, students (and their parents), arguably perceive our purpose to be the creation of more high

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<sup>4</sup> MacNeice speaks, perhaps, for many of us too in seeking “ strength against those who would freeze my humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton, would make me a cog in a machine, a thing with one face, a thing” (164, pp74-75).

growth, high technology entrepreneurs. Their teleology of entrepreneurship shapes and institutionalises that within our departments. Yet we rarely consider the nature of this, nor the degree to which it is commensurable with our espoused values. Nor do we consider our own role in shaping these perceptions. We have become the very problem we were meant to address.

Earlier we castigated entrepreneurial titanic growth ambitions, short term opportunism, and a narrow, over-individualised, focus on the wrong (mainly economic) metrics. Yet, seen from the outside, have we not behaved like those very entrepreneurs? We have led the charge, for more than three decades now, for the spreading of entrepreneurship education throughout universities, faculties, schools, communities and ecosystems. We have helped organise and promote awards, competitions, workshops and events. There are sometimes more start-up events than start-ups<sup>5</sup>. We too have become part of the global industry celebrating growth through consumption; sharing the habitus, without ever really questioning the rules of this game we have co-created, or our role. We have sought consensus, and worked hard to become a respectable discipline, to be welcomed and rewarded by our academic institutions. We have fitted in, far more than we have stood out.

We started so small, and so fragile, and yet (like the very unicorns we deride) we have become so large, so visible. We have eaten at the same tables; applauded the same awards; shared our knowledge – our *knowledge* – on the same panels. We have done everything to facilitate and celebrate growth rather than development. *Mea culpa*: “forgive me for the sins that in me the world shall commit... my death when they live me” (Macneice, 1964, pp 74-5). How could we have missed this teleological irony? This alone underlines why we are so badly in need of some serious repositioning for entrepreneuring. By legitimating the culture of entrepreneurship-as-endless-growth, we underwrite and encourage the fundamental belief that this is the way man should aspire, that this is the most desirable life path to

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<sup>5</sup> This excellent line has been scavenged from the wit of Alexis Komselis, former student, friend, colleague and co-author, now Director of AHEAD, at Alba Graduate Business School. It has been much borrowed, and always credited, with thanks.

follow. We have helped shape the cultural capital, the ways of behaving, being and belonging. In our classrooms, (and in other departments, with our inexorable pursuit of “enterprise-for-all”), we have gladly integrated business plan competitions, pitching contests, hackathons, dragons dens and shark tanks. Yet all are predicated upon a particular purpose for entrepreneurship scholarship. We carry out teleological labour for the status quo, underwriting their purpose and direction. In return, we have received economic, social and symbolic capital. We have become better known and more celebrated. The entrepreneur has risen to the literal heights of modern society and in economic “policy”, our discipline has prospered. Yet is that our purpose? Where is the critique, the diversity, the consideration of whether our *own* growth as a field is sustainable? Where are our attempts to empower the margins of our own academic field?

At the very least, we should think about this, and what we could be doing differently. How can we rebuild ourselves upwards from our repositioned purpose and principles, towards the peoples, places and processes which have emerged above? We shall argue below that this re-positioning is just that, a transdisciplinary re-turn to diversity and connections at the margins, the joins, the rich shores of the academy’s fields.

We have argued that the conceptual space of entrepreneurship is the ‘in between’, the liminal habitus between the opportunity and its enactment, in the gaps between and within institutional structures (Steyaert 2005). Redman (1993: 87) uses ‘speilraum’, or room to play, for the imaginative space within which scholars think and work, the space needed by scientific discovery ‘for growth and creativity’. Our *speilraum* (Steyaert 2005:7) is thus ‘the creative space of living’, that is ‘always in the middle’, eternally a ‘meanwhile’ and always in motion.

As scholars of the in-between, our own heritage is profoundly and historically in-between disciplines, connecting them, bridging them, dividing them. What seems to have been the first Research Center for

Entrepreneurship Studies (founded in Harvard, in the late 1940s), contained anthropologists, business historians, economists, sociologists and scholars of cultural studies (Swedberg, 1991: 172). These transdisciplinary origins have been sometimes seen as treasure troves of intellectual resources, in the richer realms adjacent to our in-between states, giving rise to the pot pourri that is entrepreneurship (Low, 2001). Our transdisciplinarity has been seen as simply too large and diverse for unified comprehensive theories to be built which can cross these borders (Amit et al, 1993, Davidsson, 2003). Breaking down the barriers between the human sciences is notoriously difficult (Curran, 1986). Gartner, especially, has been exercised by the size of this disciplinary barrier:

“There is, simply, no theoretical way to connect all of these disparate research interests together (p. 30).....Is there an elephant in current entrepreneurship scholarship? Can the study of the parts of entrepreneurship scholarship lead to a comprehensive theory in entrepreneurship? No. (p.34)” (2001: 30, 34).

Reframing this argument from the stance of the in-between allows us a different approach to our academic cosmos. Our place must surely be on the thresholds, the shores, the in-between places of academia, offering spaces of connection along margins; academic edges are transdisciplinary thinking-spaces, of their very nature. We are not looking for new ways to “tell” the elephant- let us enact the jungle. We should connect complexities, raiding resources, spanning the boundaries - or, perhaps, the structural holes – including those between disciplines. Enacting the jungle is to contextualise practices, to see the connections between the butterfly and the elephant, to see entrepreneurship as a magnificent change making process.

Such an approach de-centres the fraught and thus far unsuccessful hunt for one single over-arching theory, paradigm or definition of entrepreneurship as a *business* process (Bygrave and Hofer, 1991, Filion, 1998, Brazeal and Herbert, 1999, Shane and Venkataraman, 2000, Gartner, 2001, Phan, 2004). Rather, it

recognises that we are embroiled in the highly dynamic and complex ecosystems of the in-between, and the social sites of interaction, the “local” fields, which the in-between simultaneously separates and connects. This is far too transdimensional a complexity for ideas from a single social science to hold all the answers. In support of this stance, we turn to two of the greats of entrepreneurship theory, who made the case for discipline-spanning multi-form theories almost a century ago by, Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter. Social scientists in the German-speaking world had been engaged in a vicious struggle since the 1880s over whether abstract theoretical approaches, or those derived and presented on the basis of historical stories, should count as serious work. This *methodenstreit* seemed narrow-minded and counterproductive to the two scholars, who were part of a movement in the early years of last century to build a new kind of social science theory, “sozialökonomik”, which synthesized both approaches, adopted methodologies from each as required by the objectives and subject of the analysis in hand, and was willing to risk interdisciplinary work. Indeed, as Schumpeter wrote: “Science as whole has never attained a logically consistent architecture; it is a tropical forest, not a building erected according to a blueprint” (*History*, p 10)

We see the intellectual in-between *just* as we see the practice in-between. Moving into the space between intellectual borders, and thriving in the rich coastal waters between, allows us to perceive these borders as social constructions which can be overcome, passed, pushed at, challenged and played with: ‘better boundary-spanning and extension than boundary maintenance’ (Hardy and Clegg, 1997: S14). Steyaert (2005:7) argues for a frontier discourse which would “keep entrepreneurship what it is: a fertile middle space, a little chaotic and unfocused arena, a heterotopic space for varied thinking, a space that can connect to many forms of theoretical thinking and where many thinkers can connect to, a “true” inter-discipline”. A critical respect for theoretical plurality is part of what McCloskey terms *Sprachethik*, where “open, reasonable, fair, patient...conversation” (1994, p304) is conjoined with “openness to a range of methods, disciplines, and influences, accepting that no theory can be regarded as true in any absolute sense” (Dow, in McCloskey, 1994, p99– 100).

A reflexive field, grounded in the lebenswelt of its subjects, demands an epistemology which is consonant with this setting and its social constructions (Skalveniti and Steyaert, 2020). A pragmatic bricolage approach to theorizing, which moves beyond the borders of tradition creatively and innovatively, is especially appropriate for entrepreneurship scholars. Yet the past twenty years of entrepreneurship research have seen a positivist epistemology dominate the field's empirical output (McDonald *et al.* 2005). In response, many scholars have argued for a more phenomenological approach, as well as in favour of transdisciplinary pluralism, the existence side-by-side of multiple approaches, each valued for their unique potential (Chandler and Lyon, 2001; Grant and Perren, 2002, Coviello and Jones, 2004). Reflexivity, a truly deep engagement with ourselves as constitutive of environment, as well as constituted by it, has never been more essential (Skalveniti and Steyaert, 2020).

#### **Discussion: A Short Travel Guide to the In-Between**

A repositioning of entrepreneurship scholarship is essential, if we are to fulfil our purpose, enact our principles, and engage fully with the peoples, places and processes of entrepreneuring's in-between ecosystems, and the places where they meet. We have argued for embracing the biosphere, and exploring the in-between. We confirm the need for our research to champion everyday entrepreneurs, and to challenge dominant ideal types. Amongst the values which must now become paramount within our work, our arguments propose and support an ethics of creative and circular frugality. To achieve these consistent and coherent aims, it is time for entrepreneurship to re-position as a connective, heterotopic, engaged and transdisciplinary ecotone; rich, diverse, and embedded in the in-between.

Before concluding, we share a "new travel guide" to illustrate and inspire, showcasing scholarship of such in-between ecotones, where, we have argued, our re-positioning is most at home, empirically and intellectually. Our rough guide also draws "attention to the potential effects of narratives, collective memories, and the built environment on the diversity of ... entrepreneurial places" (Welter and Baker,

2020, p15). Imagine a travel guide of the in-between, a Baedeker of the liminal zone, its peoples, places, purposes, principles and processes. Here, we play a little with that idea. We “draw briefly and selectively on ideas from a quirky set of” examples to highlight some approaches we might also experiment with, as we reposition entrepreneuring research the edgy liminal ecotones <sup>6</sup> (Welter and Baker, 2020, p15).

Repositioning studies of place requires, we have suggested, embracing the biosphere by, at least ensuring our models and theories take good account of the natural environment, as well as the built, in this most human of epochs, the Anthropocene (Heikkurinen et al, 2019). By happy coincidence, institutional forces are also pushing for our research and teaching to embrace and embed the United Nations’ Strategic Development Goals (SDGs). Working to make these tractable within entrepreneurship is surely a major priority. So too is considering the fullness of what are intended to be indivisible goals: including deep consideration of, for example, land, sea, energy, education, and culture. It is noteworthy that the International Council for Small Business has recently launched an online certificate in the SDGs, for example (<https://icsbglobal.org/sdgs>, October 2020). Perhaps too, a more humble appreciation of entrepreneurship as embedded within larger contexts will allow us to widen and deepen our use of the ecosystem metaphor, recognising the values of symbiosis, of creating as well as destroying resources, of nurturing, sustaining, migrating, seasonality, locality, frugality, and co-operation (Kuckertz, 2019).

Taking the ecosystem metaphor seriously requires “involving stakeholders deeply and considering their heterogeneity of interests and power”, which “is likely to result in more practicable insights, especially for policy makers” (Kuckertz, 2019, p5). As Kuckertz notes, concluding his interesting thought experiment into managing entrepreneurial ecosystems: (EEs) this “is not about substituting the proverbial invisible hand with a guiding hand... it would be imperative for actors who accept responsibility for an EE to instead **build platforms on which leading actors in particular could exchange their ideas and goals**” (2019, p5,

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<sup>6</sup> We thank the SI Editors, and two anonymous reviewers, for the invitation to showcase some examples of research which already enacts this proposed re-positioning.



our emphasis). This is a serious research challenge, demanding of us new, transformative, reflexive and interactive foundations for ecosystem approaches.

Equally, the natural ecosystem, whether as metaphor or applied anthropological truth, is infinitely diverse, inherently heterogenous, and rich in the diversity which fuels entrepreneurial bricolage. Of its nature, a greater engagement with the full panoply of locally available endowments and relationships – in a sustainable fashion - is also likely to invite transdisciplinary work with environmentalists, historians, geographers, artists and anthropologists. Along this line, our arguments around place led us back to the ecosystems of the in-between, as our intellectual and empirical home. We have recently become intrigued with the work of coastal scholars, and historians of the shore, who study the complex and rich ecotone at the edges of sea and land, where so many of the population now live, for almost every continent outside Africa (Gillis, 2012, p1). Such scholars demonstrate “that homo sapiens are best described as an edge species that has consistently thrived in the coastal ecotone where the ecosystems of land and sea meet” (Gillis, 2012, p4). An ecotone is a place where two ecosystems meet, overlap and interact, and they have been amongst the most munificent for all species, including man, since life on land first emerged there. As metaphor, liminal field context, and emblematic place of interchange and trade, coastal edges strike us as of special potential to our repositioning.

Championing the everyday entrepreneur of the edges - as scholars, reviewers and editors - repositions how we view the people of entrepreneurship. Moving to the rich ecotones of the socially and geographically in-between - and away from the elite centre - may be more challenging, and sometimes riskier, work. It is also, though, a very promising re-positioning, and a turn to the margins is fundamental to our argument. This stance also suggests intersectional approaches to studying multiple marginalities; the doubly and triply peripheral, doing daily entrepreneurship along more than one edge. Recent courageous examples of such work include studies of entrepreneurial identity and habitus set in Jordan’s

camps, amongst “emerging among Syrian refugees based on embodied survivalist depositions and a destabilized habitus” (Refai et al, 2018, p257).

We concur fully in this turn away from elite ideal types, but note that this does not remove the moral and intellectual need for serious studies of media, political, educational and commercial enactments of the elite trope. This is not least because the language and dominant narratives of entrepreneurship have still to take seriously Gartner’s call to arms of 25 years ago: “The choice of words we use to define entrepreneurship sets the boundaries for how we think about and study it. Language governs thought and action. The vocabulary used to talk about entrepreneurship is critical to the development of a theory about this phenomenon” (Gartner, 1993, p232; ).

Our thinking is shaped by our language, and our language is shaped by our habitus. The clear underlying root metaphors which underpin entrepreneurship scholarship are not benign (Lundberg et al, 2019, Clarke et al, 2012). The dramatic growth narrative crowds out peripheral journeys, connectings, undertakings, migrations to a new niche, settling through local adaptation. *Entrepreneurship* has become reified; a global meme which underwrites the status quo. To reposition our purpose and our principles, some urgent collective labour is demanded of our language, too.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship is about creativity, risk-taking, adaptation, flexibility, unorthodox perception and most of all, change. Entrepreneurship scholarship has taken on some part of the world-view of entrepreneurs, and this is entirely appropriate. A purpose, and a practice, well-grounded in the lived-world of its subjects is better suited to engage with them effectively than one which is not (Sklavaniti and Steyaeart, 2020). This is the antithesis of dogma, rigidity, the status quo, and Low (2001:23) is surely right to argue that ‘we must not become so exclusionary and paradigm driven that we kill the energy that has made the

field so exciting'. Our purpose now must surely be to re-position as a connective, heterotopic, engaged, transdisciplinary field of the in-between ecotones, and their peoples.

Entrepreneurs carry a substantial moral burden because they make our tomorrows (Anderson et al, 2006). Yet we must now recognise our moral imperatives of knowing *how* they do so. We have refuted and rejected the flawed, reductionist ideology of the hero of high growth and high consumption of resources. We argued for a more inclusive and much wider cosmology. Sustainability is only possible with *re-sourcing*, the frugal stewardship of resources rather than consuming them. Role models exist in the margins of our societies and economies, we think it is time to recentre their wisdom and practices. We saw values as an entrepreneurial motivation and want to realign this with what society, ideology and practitioners deem valuable. We propose a practice ethical framework which we saw as practical and deeply grounded. We do not offer a purse lipped disapproval, or even a hippy disdain of material benefits. On the contrary, we are enthusiastic, but critical disciples of entrepreneurial benefits. We see our role as first understanding, then disseminating knowledge for and about entrepreneurship. But as academic disciples, our task is to influence, even steer, informed scholarship and entrepreneurial practice. To do this well in these changing times, we propose this re-positioning to guide our discipline of entrepreneurial change making.

*Let them not make me a stone, and let them not spill me*

*otherwise kill me (Macneice)*

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