

**Entrepreneurship and the struggle over order and coherence:
a thematic reading of Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities***

Abstract

This paper is grounded in a thematic reading of Musil's (1933) novel *The Man Without Qualities*. Combining literary, social, and economic theory, the discipline-spanning novel engages with some of the central questions and conflicts of our age, such as the search for order and coherence, seeking to overcome the fragmentation of life. Specifically, we suggest that Musil refers to the advent of entrepreneurship and the 'enterprising spirit' as an example evocative of these pursuits, as well as their concomitant ambiguities and frictions. Our analysis therefore engages with the role of Austrian economic theory in consolidating entrepreneur/ship as an ideal socio-economic model and order. By discussing the complexities inscribed in seemingly unifying orders such as entrepreneurship, the paper contributes to critical and process entrepreneurship studies in MOS. It responds to calls for further literary, inter-disciplinary, and historical analyses in entrepreneurship research.

Keywords: ambiguities and frictions, Austrian economists, critical entrepreneurship studies, enterprising spirit, literature, Musil, order and coherence, process studies

Introduction

This paper is grounded in a thematic reading of Robert Musil's (1933/1997) novel *The Man Without Qualities*. Among the most significant novels of the 20th century (Schorske 1980), it portrays the fundamental socio-economic and political changes that the Austro-Hungarian Empire underwent prior to World War I. As a polymath, Musil combined literary, social and economic theory, and philosophy in his writings (Harrington 2002). While the importance of literature to a vivid portrayal of social and organisational phenomena has become increasingly recognised within the social sciences and management and organisational studies (MOS) (e.g., Otto et al. 2019; Rhodes and Brown 2005), Musil's writing is, however, still under-explored (Czarniawska and Joerges 1994) – in contrast to the work of Kafka, for example (Munro and Huber 2012; Ortmann and Schuller 2019). This persists despite Musil's work being characterised by a profound engagement with some of the defining social, moral, and philosophical questions of our age, and an attempt to reflect on concomitant ambivalences and conflicts (Harrington 2002). Against this backdrop, we argue that Musil's discipline-spanning literary writing provides a unique and rich resource for studying culture, organisation, as well as entrepreneurship.

More precisely, we suggest that *The Man Without Qualities* discusses, with reference to the phenomenon of entrepreneurship, the persistent, yet repeatedly unsuccessful search for order and coherence as a foundational conflict of society. Through a thematic reading of the novel, acknowledging that literary classics have no singular meaning (Śliwa et al. 2012), we specifically seek to analyse how Musil engaged with the historical advent of entrepreneurship in the *Austrian School of Economics* (Mises 1942/2007; Schumpeter 1911/1934), and how he portrayed entrepreneurship as a contested, unifying order. This order tends to infuse all areas of life and operate on different levels: On a micro-level, the entrepreneurial order, or in Musil's (1997, 439) terminology the 'enterprising spirit', turns the figure of the entrepreneur into a

normative-ideal model for individual life. On a macro-level, entrepreneurship becomes a new ‘governmental framework’, guiding people’s conduct *and* fostering socio-economic progress at large (Bröckling 2016).

A reading of two of the novel’s main characters, the maverick Ulrich, who appears a ‘man without qualities’, and Arnheim, an entrepreneurial businessman who supposedly represents a ‘man with all qualities’ will allow us to engage with the construction of entrepreneur/ship as a universal ‘remedy’, alongside the ambiguities that underpin it (Hanlon 2014; Tedmanson et al. 2012). To further explore the latter, the reading of Musil’s novel was guided by the following questions: How is the emerging figure of the entrepreneur portrayed in ‘times of crisis and passage’? Which notions of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial functions are evoked? And what are the immanent frictions and struggles *with* entrepreneurship as an all-encompassing socio-economic order and activity?

Within this context, we propose that this paper mainly contributes to critical and processual entrepreneurship studies in MOS, with its shared interests in the complexities and frictions in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial practices (Olivier and Jacquemin 2016; Weiskopf and Steyaert 2009). The paper’s specific contributions are threefold: First, it responds to calls for further *literary-narrative analyses* in entrepreneurship research (Gartner 2007; Steyaert 2007b). Such analyses allow us to develop a subtler understanding of the multi-faceted ambiguities accompanying ‘total’ orders such as entrepreneurship. Second, its engagement with Musil’s genre-fluid work addresses the broader lack of *inter-disciplinary research* within entrepreneurship studies (Hjorth 2014). Performing an integrative function, Musil’s novel encourages a dialogue between literature and social and economic theory. As such, it is considered a valuable source that allows us to theorise on the complexities of entrepreneurship in critical-reflexive and creative ways (De Cock and Land 2005). Concomitantly, and third, our thematic reading of *The Man Without Qualities* contributes to still-rare *historical analyses* in

entrepreneurship research (Gill 2013). Specifically, it reveals the underexposed role of Austrian economic theory in engendering the historical emergence of both a particular subject ideal, the ‘entrepreneur of the self’ (du Gay et al. 1996), and a specific mentality of government, namely ‘entrepreneurial government’ (Osborne and Gaebler 1992).

The paper is structured as follows: Considering our concern with linking the historical roots of entrepreneurship to current debates in entrepreneurship studies, our literature review begins with a portrayal of the normative underpinnings of the Austrian School of Economics’ work. We then outline the three main traditions in entrepreneurship research, mainstream studies, critical studies, and creative-processual studies, whereby we place emphasis on the latter two. Thereafter, we characterise the nature of our approach to Musil’s work as a rich empirical and conceptual site, and further contextualise his literary writings. The analysis is split into two parts. The first part considers the perspective of Ulrich, and introduces the challenges and aspirations for order with which the faltering Austrian-Hungarian Empire was engaged. The second part focuses more specifically on the rise of entrepreneurship as a unifying individual and social remedy. The character of Arnheim is presented as an exemplary embodiment of the ‘enterprising spirit’, with the objective of evoking the limitations and contingencies of the search for total order and coherence. The discussion section reiterates the paper’s findings and contributions to critical and processual entrepreneurship studies in MOS.

The advent of entrepreneurship in Austrian economic theory

An engagement with the core premises underlying the Austrian School of Economics is essential, given our interest in the historical rise of entrepreneur/ship as a pervasive socio-economic order. Besides, it facilitates a more coherent situating of Musil’s work within its specific cultural and economic milieu. The origins of the Austrian School are often associated

with Carl Menger and his seminal work *Principles of Economics* (1871). Yet it is Joseph Schumpeter, Ludwig von Mises, Israel Kirzner, and Friedrich von Hayek who are considered the school's most prominent representatives. According to Hanlon (2014), their work is central to the consolidation of the 'entrepreneurial spirit' within capitalist economies.

The economists of the Austrian School were in particular interested in exploring the *macro-economic* functions of the entrepreneurial figure (Bröckling 2016). More specifically, they argued that there are four entrepreneurial functions in the market that contribute to social and economic progress and lead to the emergence of entrepreneurship as a universal model; the entrepreneur as *innovator, speculator, risk bearer, and coordinator* (Sombart 1909). These intersecting functions are outlined below, with an emphasis on the two entrepreneurial functions most often discussed in economic and social theory, innovation and speculation (Hanlon 2014).

The first entrepreneurial function, *innovation*, is commonly linked to the work of Schumpeter. In *Theory of Economic Development*, Schumpeter (1934, 81) portrays the entrepreneur as a 'special type' of person, that is driven by 'the desire for independence [and] success, and the joy of activity and creation' (Bröckling 2016, 71). As such, in contrast to the rational-bureaucratic manager, the entrepreneur is agile, dynamic, and creative. 'Leadership' capabilities are, furthermore, part of the 'super-normal qualities' (Schumpeter 1934, 82) that this type possesses. For Schumpeter, entrepreneurs have an intuitive 'way of looking at things', the capacity 'to go before the others' (128), and to 'not feel uncertainty and resistance as opposing grounds' (129). Hence, they are 'natural ruler types' (Hayek 1982, 76) with a 'will to power', to whom people ascribe attributes of 'authority, gravity and command' (Schumpeter 1934, 129).

As a leading figure, this entrepreneur does also not merely *imitate* within economic processes, but also *innovates* (Johnsen and Sørensen 2017). According to Schumpeter (1934, 132), the function of the entrepreneur is to 'revolutionise the pattern of production by exploiting an

invention' or 'create new ways of doing things' (Kirzner 1973, 79). Schumpeter's (1934, 81) 'innovator-entrepreneur', thus, 'creatively destructs' extant routines and habits, which promises to lead to economic development, the mobilisation of others, *and* social progress, thus underlining the wide-ranging scope of the entrepreneurial function. While profit is at the heart of any enterprise, entrepreneurship cannot be reduced to a purely economic operation. This, again, contributes to the elevated position of Schumpeter's innovator-entrepreneur. According to Bröckling (2016, 71), Schumpeter indeed 'lionises the entrepreneur into the hero' of advanced liberal societies (Rose 1996); an image still maintained by mainstream entrepreneurship studies (Lee and Tsang 2001).

The second entrepreneurial function that the Austrian economists address, *speculation*, is mainly associated with the work of Mises and his student Kirzner. In contrast with Schumpeter, Mises (1942/2007), Kirzner (1973), as well as Hayek (1982), place a stronger emphasis on the functioning of the market, considering it as an emerging 'medium of social integration' (Bröckling 2016, 68). Based on the assumption that the market is uncertain, widely self-regulating, and dynamic, Mises and his followers claim that 'speculative traits' (68) are a key entrepreneurial function. In *Human Action* (2007), Mises writes, 'every action refers to an unknown future. It is in this sense always a risky speculation' (106), adding that it is exactly this uncertainty which forms the basis of 'acquiring wealth' (253). Though 'genuine', 'born' entrepreneurs are capable of anticipating the 'uncertainty inherent in every action' (253); acute entrepreneurial 'alertness' (Kirzner 1973) allows them to effectively speculate and appropriate existing opportunities. This entrepreneurial function is, accordingly, one where 'opportunities and value are captured by the entrepreneur, rather than created by them' (Hanlon 2014, 178).

While Mises (2007, 255) speaks on the one hand of entrepreneurs' 'inborn qualities', he on the other hand emphasises (somewhat contradictorily) that everyone, including capitalists, landowners, workers, and consumers, *shall* become involved in entrepreneurial activities.

Mises thus implies that the entrepreneurial function is ‘not restricted to the activities of independent businesspeople’ (Bröckling 2016, 67); rather, in any ‘living economy every actor is always an entrepreneur and speculator’ (Mises 2007, 252) – a reference to the gradual rise of entrepreneur/ship as a universal order (Tedmanson et al. 2012). However, taking the claim that the entrepreneurial function is not the ‘feature of a special class of men’ (Mises 2007, 252) further, economists like Mises still argue that some men, so-called ‘super-entrepreneurs’, are *more* entrepreneurial than others. Such types ‘have more initiative, venturesomeness, and a quicker eye than the crowd’ (255). They are ‘super-alert acting men’ (253) and determined ‘pioneers of economic improvement’ (255). As such, they have a superior, *leading* function in the economy (see also Musil 1997). This takes us to the third entrepreneurial function, risk taking.

Frank Knight (1921/1964) takes the uncertainty of human action as a starting point for defining the entrepreneurial function of *risk and uncertainty bearing*. Knight claims that ‘pure uncertainty’, stemming from the market, is the source of profit. While it cannot be fully ‘insured’ against (Hayek 1982), real entrepreneurs find ways to ‘cope with it’ (Bröckling 2016, 72). Furthermore, they acknowledge that uncertainty bearing comes with special responsibilities. According to Knight (1964, 271), the essence of enterprise is in fact ‘the specialisation of the function of responsible direction of economic life’. Performing this function requires an acceptance that there are limits to uncertainty calculation and ‘risk management’. Hence, Knights’ entrepreneurial type embodies an awareness that ‘no enterprise can do without rational planning and control, but to be an entrepreneur means hazarding uncertainty again and again’ (Bröckling 2016, 73).

This leads us to the final macro-economic function attributed to entrepreneurship, *coordination*. For Mark Casson (1982), whose work is influenced by Schumpeter, Hayek, and Knight, the entrepreneur is primarily an ‘agent of change’ (24), interested in coordinating, modifying, and

optimising 'scarce resources' (23). With similarities to Schumpeter's innovator-entrepreneur, Casson portrays his entrepreneurial type as determined 'to swim against the current' (Bröckling 2016, 74; Ket de Vries 1996). In contrast to the rational bureaucrat, this entrepreneur has an imaginary *sense* for what correct entrepreneurial decisions may look like. They also get involved in 'contingency planning' (Bröckling 2016, 74), regardless of the impossibility of fully calculating the future of the market (Hayek 1982). Taken together, this fourth entrepreneurial function suggests that, *en route* to becoming a unifying order, entrepreneurship involves both foresight and creative imagination, as well as deliberate yet 'open-minded' planning and coordination.

Overall, it seems that in promoting different functions that entrepreneurs ought to fulfil, the representatives of the Austrian School of Economics have, despite being under-exposed in the field of entrepreneurship (Hanlon 2014), effectively contributed to the advent of entrepreneur/ship as a desirable socio-economic model. In fact, locating the four functions of the entrepreneur within the wider context of the political economy (Sombart 1909), turns entrepreneurship into a mobilising 'catalyst' and framework that guides individuals and the population as a whole (du Gay 2004). As suggested, scholars like Mises and Schumpeter foreground in their analyses how the entrepreneur would become a dominant type, and how entrepreneurship would accordingly turn into a universal 'style of life' (1934, 78). In this way, the economists deliver more than an explanation for the 'free market' and economic life. By 'correlating economic success with specific behaviour', they also prescribe 'the right way to lead a life' (Bröckling 2016, 75). As our literary-historical analysis of the rise of the 'enterprising spirit' will show, this is something that Musil, familiar with the work of the economists, had already taken into account. However, before presenting our reading of Musil's text, we will discuss below prevailing approaches to entrepreneurship in MOS.

Entrepreneurship traditions in MOS

Studies of entrepreneurship encompass various disciplinary approaches and methodologies and pursue diverse interests and objectives (Olivier and Jacquemin 2016). Despite the problems accompanying any categorisation, we argue though that the field consists of three main traditions: traditional-mainstream, critical, and processual traditions. They are introduced in what follows, whereby the discussion focuses on the work of critical and process-oriented scholars who aim to develop an ‘affirmative critique’ of entrepreneurship (Weiskopf and Steyaert 2009).

‘Who is the entrepreneur?’

Traditional-mainstream entrepreneurship studies have dominated the field since the 1980s, when ‘neoliberal’ governmental programmes and ‘enterprise discourse’ (du Gay 2004) became increasingly powerful, especially in the US and UK (Hanlon 2018). These studies focus on entrepreneurship as an unambiguous economic activity, striving for growth and ‘market success’ (Bröckling 2016, 43). Rather than engaging with the complexities and heterogeneity of entrepreneurship (Gill 2013), they promote entrepreneurs as universal models, thereby placing emphasis on the *individual* entrepreneur and their specific qualities, such as ‘risk-taking’ (Brockhaus 1980), ‘extroversion’ (Lee and Tsang 2001), and ‘self-reliance’ (Sexton and Bowman 1985). Typically, pursuing a neo-positivist, prescriptive viewpoint, mainstream studies empirically explore the question, ‘who is an entrepreneur?’ (Gartner 1988). In so doing, they mainly refer to Schumpeter (1934) and his idea of the entrepreneur as an innovator involved in acts of ‘creative destruction’. Thus, mainstream studies look for manifestations of differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs, and portray entrepreneurs as heroic characters ‘possessing’ ‘extremely important’ (Kets de Vries 1996, 856), ‘inborn qualities’

(Mises 2007, 255). Such qualities allow them to create value and resolve diverse socio-economic problems (Rindova et al. 2009).

It seems evident that the normative underpinnings of the Austrian School of Economics are infused in the notion of entrepreneur/ship, as pursued by mainstream studies. However, based on our reading of the economists' work, we argue that these studies do not thoroughly engage with the school's ideas. While the economists explore the different macro-economic functions of the entrepreneur, mainstream studies in MOS consider the entrepreneur in a rather isolated manner, outside of the socio-political context in which entrepreneurship operates. Acknowledging the contextual variations of entrepreneurial practices, our analysis of Musil's novel will show that this is concomitant with various shortcomings.

As suggested, the second tradition in the field of entrepreneurship is commonly referred to as the critical tradition (Weiskopf and Steyaert 2009). Given our interest in the complexities and ambiguities of all-encompassing orders like entrepreneurship, we discuss this tradition in more detail.

Critiquing enterprise and entrepreneurial government

Critical scholars challenge 'the construction of the contemporary capitalist enterprise as the "only possible" model for the generation of wealth in society' (Tedmanson et al. 2012, 536). In addition, they problematise the heroisation and mystification of the entrepreneurial figure (Johnsen and Sørensen 2017), reflected in the work of mainstream entrepreneurship scholars as well as Austrian economic theorists (Schumpeter 1934). Ogbor (2000), for instance, criticises the portrayal of successful entrepreneurs as male, economic actors 'with super-normal qualities' (607), which would reinforce 'dominant societal ideologies as bases of power (and) instruments of control' (605). Scholars like Gill (2013) echo this sentiment, arguing that most

entrepreneurship studies ‘presuppose the entrepreneur as white, masculine, and otherwise privileged, and marginalize the involvement of women and minority entrepreneurs’ (334). By this means, entrepreneurial discourses tend to obscure and support extant inequalities.

In light hereof, many critical scholars have called for an ‘*ideology-critique* of entrepreneurship discourses and praxis’ (Ogbor 2000, 609; Armstrong 2001), to deconstruct the one-sided idealisation of the entrepreneur, defined as prototypical “‘homo-economicus”, all aspirational and risk taking’ (Tedmanson et al. 2012, 531). Their main objective is thereby to ‘expose the powerful interconnections between the conceptual and political representations of entrepreneurship to reveal what is cynical and sinister behind the “smiling mask”’ (532). While we do not assume that it is possible to fully ‘unmask the entrepreneur’ (Jones and Spicer 2005) and the discourses of ‘enterprise’ and entrepreneurship, we are sympathetic to endeavours that engage with entrepreneurship’s ‘dark sides’ (Tedmanson et al. 2012) and intricacies.

Alongside authors demanding an ideological critique of entrepreneur/ship, there are critical scholars who are mainly inspired by neoliberal *governmentality studies*. Broadly drawing on the work of Foucault (2008), such research examines *how* entrepreneurship and the discourse of enterprise, understood as an all-pervasive economic rationality, govern new modes of existence and subjectivity (du Gay 2004; Rose 1998). Critical studies of enterprise discourse are considered important for the development of a complex portrayal of entrepreneurship. Yet, similar to mainstream studies, such scholarship rarely engages with the influence of historical schools of thought and, specifically, the ‘origins of entrepreneurship in the Austrian School of Economics’ (Hanlon 2014, 177). Hence, we largely support Gill’s (2013, 337) critique that, ‘although much commentary exists regarding neoliberal entrepreneurialism’, entrepreneurship research in MOS ‘tends to assume that this ideology is fairly new’.

That the relations between government, the economy, and different spheres of life are increasingly ‘saturated with reference to “enterprise”’ (du Gay 2004, 38) is, as we will see,

already implied in Musil's (1997) portrayal of entrepreneurship. Critical entrepreneurship and governmentality studies, however, associate the contested order of entrepreneurship and *entrepreneurial government* (Osborne and Gaebler 1992) primarily with the rise of neoliberal policies in 'advanced liberal democracies' (Rose 1996). These policies favour a new economy, in which the market turns into a 'permanent economic tribunal' (Foucault 2008, 340), that dynamically regulates the activities of individuals and the population as a whole (Weiskopf and Munro 2012; see also Becker 1976). In this regard, du Gay (2004, 38-39) notes that 'enterprise' refers to

[the] ways in which economic, political, social and personal vitality is considered best achieved by the generalization of a particular conception of the enterprise form to all forms of conduct – to the conduct of organizations previously seen as non-commercial [...] to the conduct of government and its agencies and to the conduct of individuals.

This account evokes what has been suggested by the Austrian economists (e.g., Mises 2007) and Musil's (1997) reading of them: that the 'enterprising spirit' (439) emerges as a unifying framework to transform and govern individuals, the economy, *and* society. Critical scholars further explicate in this context that 'entrepreneurial government' implies an increasing responsabilisation of individuals 'at all levels' (Donzelot and Gordon 2008, 59). Areas that were once understood as social and political are now re-positioned within the domain of self-management.

In view hereof, critical studies highlight that entrepreneurial government is intimately tied to the shaping of 'the individual, to a particular manner of living' (Read 2009, 27). Specifically, the former creates conditions that 'necessitate the production of a *homo economicus*, a historical form of *subjectivity* constituted as a free "atom" of self-interest' (Hamann 2009, 37). Within contemporary contexts, this form has been referred to as 'entrepreneur of the self' (du Gay et al. 1996), absorbing the 'ethics of enterprise' (Rose 1998), underpinned by performativity,

‘competitiveness, strength, vigour, boldness, and the urge to succeed’ (157). It seems manifest that a similar subject model, extending notions of the rational homo economicus, has previously been proposed by representatives of the Austrian School (Schumpeter 1934).

In advanced liberal societies, however, the individual is no longer positioned as a compliant, passive subject, but as an active, innovative, and self-governing ‘player in the economic field’ (Gill 2013, 336). As such, the individual is asked to strategically approach and cultivate their life and self as a specific type of ever-developable ‘enterprise unit’ (Weiskopf and Munro 2012, 293). Entrepreneurial government thereby allows for indirect forms of power and control, structuring fields of action and the autonomy of ‘empowered’ subjects (Rose and Miller 1992). It follows that entrepreneurial government does not consider freedom and autonomy as ‘the antithesis of political power’ (174), but a central form of it.

Against this background, we argue that critical studies, by evoking the ambiguities inherent in the pervasive discourse of enterprise and the socio-economic order of entrepreneurship, contribute to a more nuanced understanding of political *and* scholarly constructions of entrepreneur/ship. Our literary analysis seeks to further extend this perspective by specifically acknowledging the historical roots of entrepreneurship. Before elaborating on the convoluted ‘enterprising spirit’ articulated in Musil’s novel, we now introduce the third entrepreneurship tradition in MOS, ‘creative process studies’; a tradition that is not separate but attached to critical studies.

From economic enterprise and entrepreneurship to creative entrepreneuring

Much like critical studies, process studies problematise the emphasis on entrepreneurship as a purely *economic* function and question the *individualism* of traditional-mainstream studies, which widely disregard the particular socio-cultural context in which entrepreneurship emerges

and takes place (Gartner 1988). Process studies, however, direct more attention to the creative, experimental, and potentially transformative dimensions of entrepreneurship (Olivier and Jacquemin 2016). Instead of examining entrepreneur/ship as a given ‘entity’, scholars like Gartner (2007) and Hjorth (2014) foreground entrepreneurial practices and *processes*. These processes are conceptualised as ‘organisation-creation’ (98) or the ‘creation-of-organisation’ (Gartner 1988, 57), meaning that entrepreneurship is not individuated, but understood as a process of persistent, collective organising and (re)creating (Dey and Steyaert 2016).

Indeed, by rewriting entrepreneurship as *entrepreneurship*, Steyaert (2007, 734) argues that process scholars have ‘done everything to draw the attention away from the individual entrepreneur to make space for understanding the complexity of the entrepreneurial process’. This complexity has been explored through different ‘movements’ in process studies, the most prominent of which include: the ‘narrative and discursive’ movement (Hjorth and Steyaert 2004); the ‘social change’ movement (Steyaert and Hjorth 2006); and the ‘politics and aesthetics’ movement (Hjorth and Steyaert 2009). Our literary analysis especially resonates with the narrative movement. This movement calls for further engagement with fiction and stories, and evokes the growing interest in narratives and imaginaries to better understand how entrepreneurship *could* be ‘done as a creation process’ (Hjorth 2014, 98). As such, the focus is on how entrepreneurship portrays a process ‘in the making’ (99), rather than a ‘thing’ or ‘product’ (Steyaert 2007b).

Taken together, what all movements of this tradition share, is a greater interest in the *becoming* of entrepreneurship than its ‘being’ (Duymedjian et al. 2019). Hence, they approach entrepreneurship as a continuously emerging, socially-mediated process of creation, modification, and transformation of prevailing (entrepreneurial) norms and orders (Rindova et al. 2009). Tensions and dynamics inherent in such orders are thereby affirmed and considered productive; they may allow for novel organisation and order (Hjorth 2014). Process-oriented

studies accordingly strive to further an alternative, multi-faceted, and non-managerial perspective on entrepreneurship, which changes ubiquitous notions of ‘economic enterprise’ into an explorative practice of social and ‘creative entrepreneuring’ (Gartner 1988).

Through foregrounding the processual, creative-experimental and non-economic components of entrepreneurship and, furthermore, ‘attending to organisation in entrepreneurship’ (Hjorth 2014, 116), this third entrepreneurship tradition offers, in our view, important contributions to the field. In the spirit of the idea of critical affirmation (Weiskopf and Steyaert 2009), we hence position our literary-historical analysis in-between the process school, emphasising the role of imagination and a critical-reflexive ‘space for action’ (Olivier and Jacquemin 2016, 58) in entrepreneurship, and critical analyses which foreground entrepreneurship’s ‘dark sides’ and frictions. As suggested, entrepreneurship, while not being uniform or exclusive, presents a complex, all-pervasive order within contemporary economy. Our analysis of Musil’s novel will further elaborate on this order and related struggles over it. First, however, we outline our methodological approach.

Methodology

In this section, we reflect on the position of literary analyses in MOS and entrepreneurship studies and introduce our reading of *The Man Without Qualities*. We furthermore situate the novel within its historical, cultural context and highlight some distinct characteristics of Musil’s writing.

Reading a novel: the relationship between literature and social theory

Within MOS, there is a growing body of literature that explores the use of literary forms in organisational and social analysis (e.g., De Cock and Land 2005; Munro and Huber 2012). In

the field of entrepreneurship, literary analyses are still rare; yet, we note an increasing interest in how literature can be employed as a ‘source’ to further understandings of entrepreneurship (Hjorth 2014; Steyaert 2007b). In terms of how literary fiction has been approached methodologically, De Cock and Land (2005, 519) argue that three modes of engagement prevail in MOS:

The use of literary criticism as an inspiration for the development and reformation of the discipline [...]; the use of literary genres as alternative modes of representation for organizational knowledge; and the use of literature as a tool for explicating organizational theory.

A related typology has been developed by Rhodes and Brown (2005). They suggest that literary fiction can be approached as ‘a characteristic of research writing’, as ‘appropriate empirical material’, or ‘a legitimate mode for the writing of organizational research’ (469). Reflecting upon our analysis of Musil’s novel, we suggest that it is related to the second of these methodical concerns. However, similar to Śliwa et al. (2012), we not only consider the novel as ‘empirical material’ for studying social and organisational phenomena including entrepreneurship, but also as a *theoretical* source that allows us to conceptually enrich existing studies of entrepreneurship. A key reason for this positioning is that Musil’s work cannot be simply situated within the domain of fiction. In agreement with Harrington (2002, 59), we argue that Musil

[may] be read as an exemplary kind of *social theorist*, a philosopher and critic of European civilization who exploits the literary devices of irony, ambivalence and aesthetics in order to communicate a particular style of thinking about the social conditions, ideologies and contradictory identities of modernity that could not otherwise be expressed in the abstract discursive language of social science.

In fact, there is striking evidence in Musil's diaries and *The Man Without Qualities* that he not only engaged with other novelists and poets, but also various philosophers, sociologists, and economic theorists. We therefore argue that Musil's work is an exemplary illustration that literature and social theory 'are not mutually exclusive but interdependent' (Harrington 2002, 60). Indeed, his writing can be approached as a 'source of sociological thought, equal in its claim to convey *knowledge* about society to the writings of sociological thinkers, yet different in its *style of communicating*' (60). This style includes literary modes like 'ironic reflexive questioning', 'aesthetic figurative communication' (60), 'essayistic narrating', and social 'imagination' (Gartner 2007).

Against this backdrop, we suggest that academic literature is not superior to literary fiction. In accordance with Phillips (1995, 627), we challenge the boundaries 'between the "fictions" of writers and the "facts" of social scientists', and foreground the idea that social scientists *and* writers of fiction seek to understand and interpret social life in all its complexities. We accordingly support a dialogical relationship between literature and the sciences, in which both act as mediums of 'inspiration and insight' (De Cock and Land 2005, 518). In the present instance, Musil's discipline-spanning novel inspired us to engage with the Austrian School of Economics and relate it to extant studies of entrepreneurship within MOS. In this way, Musil's writing allowed us to make fruitful connections between different scholarly traditions and to further theorise on the complex construct of entrepreneurship.

Given the monumental scope and multi-faceted narrative of Musil's novel, it is, however, important to acknowledge that the work undermines a univocal reading, i.e. the novel offers no 'definitive meaning' (Harrington 2002, 63). Indeed, we appreciate that it can be read and interpreted from various (disciplinary) positions. Our analysis is merely based on a 'thematic reading' (Śliwa et al. 2012) of the novel. Such a reading frames the 'convoluted narrative twists' (861), that present a vital aspect of literature, in a particular way. As previously mentioned, our

reading has been informed by an interest in whether Musil's portrayal of the seemingly unifying enterprising spirit can be seen as an exemplary manifestation of the contested societal search for order and coherence – and if so, how. As such, our analysis has focused on the intricacies inscribed in Musil's depiction of the rise of the entrepreneurial spirit.

For our study, we analysed the first and second volumes of *The Man Without Qualities*, amounting to over 1,000 pages. The following questions guided our thematic reading: Which socio-cultural aspirations and conflicts underpin 'times of passage'? How is the emerging figure of the entrepreneur characterised? Which notion of entrepreneurship is promoted, and what entrepreneurial functions are revealed? What are the ambiguities and frictions of entrepreneurship as an all-pervasive socio-economic order and activity? And, which novel ideas about entrepreneurship are evoked? Before we present our analysis, let us briefly contextualise Musil's work in its specific milieu.

Contextualisation: Robert Musil's The Man Without Qualities

From 1903 until his death in 1942, Musil never stopped expanding and revising *The Man Without Qualities*, ultimately leaving it unfinished. This revisionary practice resonates with the 'deep resistance to "the sense of an ending"' (Harrington 2002, 65), attributed to the Austrian writer. The novel's scope, which captures the 'dying moments' of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is remarkable, and needs to be considered within the context of Musil's intellectual affinities. Musil belonged to a group of leading intellectuals in the 'Viennese milieu' of the time, including writers like Broch, Zweig, Mann, Hofmannsthal, and Kafka (Amiridis 2010). He was, further, familiar with the work of philosophers such as Spinoza and Nietzsche, economists like Schumpeter, Sombart, and Mises, and sociologists like Weber and Simmel (Harrington 2002).

With regard to the particular socio-economic and political milieu in which Musil's work is situated, we note that the genre-crossing novel reflects its own *Zeitgeist* and yet challenges the strict boundaries of its temporal, geographical, and cultural locations (Schorske 1980). Musil's work, in fact, transcends homogenous, linear conceptions of time, and reminds us that history can be (re)written differently. Musil (1997) furthermore remarks that the 'spirit' of a period may be less specific than claimed, and that 'its value does not lie in its rarity' (418). Given this background, we suggest that the novel engages during a time of passage and crisis with some of the fundamental ontological, cultural, and ethico-moral questions prompted by the modern age. As such, the novel has not lost relevance.

More specifically, *The Man Without Qualities* offers vivid insights into the frictional conditions of life. With his critical-ironic, essayistic writing style and his commitment to the principles of contingency, openness and multi-perspectivity, Musil, in effect, 'unsettles' ostensible coherences and dualisms, e.g., between order and dis-order, rationality and irrationality, and (non-entrepreneurial) thinking and (entrepreneurial) action; instead, he highlights the relationality of any oppositional order (Hönig 2002; Knights 1997). By refusing any final closure of storylines and characters, Musil's work, overall, foregrounds the 'in between' and the 'to come', which encourages reflections on how to think differently about socio-cultural phenomena, like entrepreneur/ship (Hjorth 2014). Though, some authors may consider the open-ended, cyclical outlook and the lack of a 'dominant action-led narrative' (Harrington 2002, 67) in *The Man Without Qualities* a limitation; others, meanwhile, appreciate the latter and speak of 'surprising glimpses of postmodern views' (Czwarniawska and Joerges 1994, 258) in Musil's writing.

Below, we elaborate on the emergence of the 'enterprising spirit' (Musil 1997, 439). As suggested, Musil's novel provides one of the first critical narratives to address, with reference to the Austrian economists, entrepreneurship's promises to integrate different social spheres. It

presents, as such, a rich literary-historical source for entrepreneurship studies seeking to challenge the unifying order of entrepreneurship. The first section of the analysis introduces the changing socio-political landscape prior to WWI and offers a portrayal of *Ulrich*, the ‘man without qualities’. Ulrich provides the ironic, deconstructive lens through which we read the novel and witness the rise of entrepreneurship. The second section focuses on the evoked images of the entrepreneurial type and entrepreneurial functions, and concomitant frictions. Central here is an examination of the figure of *Arnheim*, a well-regarded businessman.

Analysis

The demise of ‘Kakania’ and the appearance of the ‘man without qualities’

The year is 1913 and we find ourselves in Vienna, the capital of ‘Kakania’, and a reflection of Musil’s ‘satire on the rotting Austro-Hungarian Empire from the abbreviation k.&k. (*kaiserlich-königlich*)’ (Harrington 2002, 68). In view of the empire’s demise, Musil (1997) speaks of a ‘declining culture’ (438) and ‘time of passage’ (232), in which an anti-monarchic, nationalist spirit can be discerned. The period is further characterised by turmoil in the realms of economics – with the free-market maxim evolving – as well as technology, culture, and morality, all of which contributes to the perception that ‘everything is being shaken up’ (652). Some of the central tensions addressed include: tensions between elite and ordinary citizens and between state representatives and business men; tensions between individualism and collectivism and between socialism and capitalism; and tensions between rationalism and irrationality and between materialism and ideas.

We soon learn from Musil’s *alter ego* Ulrichⁱ that these tensions cannot be easily resolved. He repeatedly reminds us that ‘each idea is paired with its opposite’ (405), and that there is no

‘unity without contradictions’ (312). While Ulrich notes the wish for order and unity among most people of Kakania, he highlights that ‘no century will succeed to design the perfect, total systems of order’ (411). Musil, additionally, insinuates the blurring of boundaries between different social realms, with economic enterprise and rationality emerging as new regulative principles (see also Mises 2007). However, he suggests that the outcome of the changes and conflicts in Kakania is rather open: ‘the world can be changed in all directions at any moment’ (Musil 1997, 295), as contingency and indeterminacy ‘is in the world’s nature’ (295).

Such views prompt that Musil furthers an ‘ontology of becoming’ (Chia 1996), underpinning individual and social life (Weiskopf and Steyaert 2009). This is also reflected in the notion of the subject that Musil evokes. An account by Ulrich is illustrative thereof:

Wouldn’t it be more original to try to live not as a definite person in a definite world where only a few buttons need adjusting, but to behave from the start as someone born to change surrounded by a world created to change? (Musil 1997, 295)

Ulrich essentially refuses to think of himself as a stable person ‘possessing’ specific qualities. To the contrary, he is a ‘man without qualities’ and, as such, in a persistent state of becoming. For Ulrich, this is also accompanied by a refusal of universal knowledge and morality claims and binary oppositions between, e.g., the real and imaginary, ‘intellectual rigor and emotional life’ (534), or ‘mathematics’ and mysticism. Overall, Ulrich ‘suspects that the given order of things is not as solid as it pretends to be; no thing, no self, no principle, is safe’ (269), and instead undergoes ‘ceaseless transformation’ (269); something that also applies to entrepreneur/ship, as will be seen.

Besides, Ulrich discerns that he may not be the only man without qualities. Indeed, such persons appear to be an increasingly wide-spread cultural phenomenon (Corino 2003): ‘there is no longer a whole man confronting a whole world, only a human something moving about’ (Musil 1997, 234), suggesting that ‘the unfocused type of person had begun to assert itself’ (269). Yet,

Ulrich does not feel constrained by the fragmentation of his own self and the lack of ‘wholeness’ in the world. Considering life’s different spheres and orders as being ‘full of cracks’ (719) allows him to experiment with and (re)invent them. To explore related possibilities, Ulrich takes a ‘vacation from life’, renouncing his half-hearted attempts to achieve something in the traditional-professional sense. The ‘achievement morality’ (803), fostered by the emerging ‘enterprising spirit’, is not his.

However, most citizens of Kakania struggle to affirm the enduring ‘state of transition’ to which they are exposed. They therefore await the arrival of a ‘messiah’ with a ‘strong hand’ (1097), to take responsibility and ‘return form’ to ‘formless life’ (971). This figure ‘was not yet in sight’ (437) but, as will be shown, characters like the entrepreneur Arnheim, embodying ‘willpower’ (1097) and promising to bring back order, represent it perfectly (Schumpeter 1934; critically Johnsen and Sørensen 2017). While Ulrich is critical of calls for the ‘saviour’, he acknowledges that ‘the age before the Great War was a messianic age’ (Musil 1997, 690), clearing the way for problematic promises and truths.

The setting in which the above-described conflicts manifest is the so-called *parallel campaign*, whose members are entrusted with organising the festivities for Emperor Franz Joseph’s 70th throne anniversary. The committee’s meetings take place in the house of Ermelinda Tuzzi, whom Musil ironically calls Diotima. Married to an Imperial Officer, Diotima is a lady of ‘ineffable spiritual grace’ (460) and intellect. Along with the committee’s other members, she seeks the ‘big idea’. The committee receives much attention, not only from its elite members – like the entrepreneur Arnheim, with whom Diotima falls in love – but also from the public. Everyone sets their hopes on the campaign, which ought to ensure that Kakania regains its political, cultural, and intellectual-spiritual power. Though, Diotima and her companions soon find themselves confronted with a myriad of aspirations that ‘consisted of nothing but contradictions’ (405). Whereas Ulrich warns Diotima early on of the collapse of any grand

endeavour to restore order, she only realises over time the unlikeliness of finding the big idea. For Diotima, the idea of Kakania ‘was synonymous with that of world peace’ (492). However, the council is unprotected from destructive influences, including nationalist movements. Running counter to Diotima’s ‘spiritual leadership’ (1125), such movements call for action and the ‘great man’.

With his interest in ideas rather than ‘reality’, and the ‘soul’ rather than ‘precise facts’, Ulrich is juxtaposed against such a figure. Specifically, he refuses ‘the single-minded will, the directed drives of ambition’ (273) evolving in an era dripping with the ‘spirit of action’ (845), noting that there is ‘no sense in our life as a whole, neither is there such a thing as progress as a whole’ (528). If anything, Ulrich’s aspirations are infused with what he ‘called essayism, the sense of possibility, and imaginative’ (646). As such, Ulrich seems to stand in contrast to the entrepreneur Arnheim, who brings with him the will and qualities of a ‘great man of action’. Ideas and potentialities are not sufficient for Arnheim. As an ideal of an entrepreneur – from an economic entrepreneurial perspective – he wants to see the former ‘captured’ and realised (Kirzner 1973). While most people admire Arnheim for his wide-ranging competences, Ulrich is sceptical of Arnheim’s universal, perfect outlook. For Ulrich, Arnheim’s ‘combination of intellect, business, good living and learning was insufferable’ (Musil 1997, 188). However, Diotima rebukes Ulrich as follows:

Arnheim is an outstanding contemporary, who needs to be in touch with present-day realities. While you’re taking a leap into the impossible. He is all affirmation and perfect balance. He strives for unity, intent to his fingertips upon achieving some clear decision; you oppose him with your formless outlook. He has a feeling for everything. [...] You act as though the world were about to begin tomorrow. (Musil 1997, 513)

Diotima’s critique exemplifies some of the ostensible differences between Ulrich, the man without qualities, and Arnheim, the entrepreneur with all qualities. It seems clear, though, that

Ulrich's scepticism of Arnheim is reciprocal. Critical of Ulrich's undetermined, non-calculative aspirations and interest in an 'experimental way' (693) of living, Arnheim refers to Ulrich in the context of the 'failure of a brilliant man to recognize his own advantage and to adjust his mind to the great opportunities that would bring him status' (589). Nevertheless, Arnheim somehow envies the autonomy and creativity of his opponent. Ulrich seems to naturally go beyond reason and expose his emotions and soul to the unknown, with the intent of thinking, perceiving, and organising differently. Recalling the notion of entrepreneur/ship promoted by process studies (Hjorth 2014), one is tempted, against this background, to argue that Ulrich does not present the *complete* opposite of the entrepreneur, but an alternative type thereof.

Inspired by Musil's critical engagement with the advent of entrepreneurship as a unifying order and activity, this section has portrayed the emerging 'spirit of action' in the falling empire of Kakania. On this basis, we now further elaborate upon the figure of Arnheim, pointing towards the ambiguities and struggles that accompany the entrepreneurial ideal.

Entrepreneur/ship and the contested promise of order and 'wholeness'

Musil introduces Arnheim as a wealthy Prussian businessman and son of an innovative 'capitalist magnate'.ⁱⁱ Arnheim represents in the parallel campaign the entrepreneurial figure, who promises to establish concord and unity between its members, and is, as such, the campaign's 'really sensational element' (Musil 1997, 354): 'there was something dreamlike in his appearance, something of a businessman with golden angel's wings' (356).

Arnheim's presence stems from what Musil calls 'the Arnheim pattern' (203), which exemplifies his universal qualities. Firstly, Arnheim has an open outlook towards life, implying that he is equally at ease with the arts, philosophy, spirituality, and economics. Secondly, he is a man of science, situating his scholarly-intellectual projects within wider questions on the

human condition. Finally, he represents a new type of businessman, an 'agile' entrepreneur (du Gay et al. 1996), who conceives of his business pursuits as creative and strategic and seeks to make use of 'things as ideas, knowledge, talent, prudence' (Musil 1997, 456). That, Arnheim insists 'that the economy could be dealt only within the larger context of all vital problems, cultural, moral, intellectual, and even spiritual' (205); indeed, there is hardly anything in life which entrepreneurial activities are 'not somehow involved with' (291; Tedmanson et al. 2012).

Displaying creative-intuitive imagination and spiritual-visionary powers and, furthermore, anticipating future opportunities, in fact, suggests that Arnheim embodies the enterprising spirit, as promoted by representatives of the Austrian School of Economics (Mises 2007). However, Musil's portrayal of entrepreneur/ship seems more eclectic still – given, e.g., the suggestion that real entrepreneurial businessmen 'come to regard successful ideas as something that defies calculation, like the personal success of a politician, and [...] like the artist's too' (Musil 1997, 295). By expressing that entrepreneurial functions widely transcend the cold rationality of calculation ascribed to ordinary business, Musil highlights that entrepreneurship involves certain sublime, 'mystical aspects' (295; Jones and Spicer 2005).

We businessmen don't merely operate by calculation. We regard our really successful moves as a mystery. A man who doesn't care deeply about feeling, morality, religion, poetry, discipline, generosity will never make a businessman of real stature. True greatness has not a rational basis. (Musil 1997, 622-623)

This account from Arnheim suggests that rationalism and mysticism, traditionally conceived of as mutually exclusive spheres (Amiridis 2010; Weber 1978), are synthesised in entrepreneurial activities. After all, Arnheim trusts the 'feeling of love that had taught him the unity of all things' (Musil 1997, 422). That said, Arnheim seems to personify what Musil ironically refers to as the 'mystery of the whole' (203), entailing the harmonious convergence of all activities

and disciplines and the concomitant overcoming of friction (Czarniawska and Joerges 1994). As such, Arnheim seeks to bring ‘salvation’ in the form of unity, essentially meaning ‘the same thing as making one whole again’ (Musil 1997, 852). In contrast to most members of Kakania, Ulrich, the anti- or alternative entrepreneur, is however critical of the promise that ‘the world would be in order’ once the entrepreneur ‘gives it his due consideration’ (190). Whereas Ulrich affirms fragmentation and indeterminacy as inherent parts of socio-cultural conditions and orders, including entrepreneurship, men of action like Arnheim cannot acknowledge any incoherence.

However, in line with the ideal entrepreneurial type of Schumpeter (1934) and mainstream entrepreneurship studies (Lee and Tsang 2001), Musil (1997) at first glance allows Arnheim to function as a heroic figure, offering a ‘whole’ view of the world, due to the ‘super-normal qualities’ (82) ‘given only to the few who happen to have been born on the heights’ (456). In a few instances though, even Arnheim has to acknowledge that being propelled to a position where business, politics, science, arts, and spirituality are harmoniously balanced, is a mystery that does not only stem from *his* special entrepreneurial qualities, but also his family heritage:

My grandfather started by picking up garbage. With this, he laid the groundwork for the influence of the Arnheims. But even my father was a self-made man. In forty years [he] expanded the firm into a worldwide concern. He can see through the most tangled world affairs at a glance, and knows everything before anyone else. That’s the mystery of the vigorous and great life [of a businessman]! (Musil 1997, 290-291)

Admittedly, the garbage business seems mundane. Yet, the creative imagination and distinct ‘inner vision’ (212) of the Arnheims sees in it more than a simple business opportunity. For them, garbage collection creates the ‘dream and will to found a private kingdom’ (Schumpeter 1934, 93). In time, this leads Arnheim to present his kind as superior ‘leaders’, ‘capable of

combining individual achievements' (Musil 1997, 207) and, simultaneously, 'guid[ing] people from the highest standpoint' (207). Indeed, Arnheim assumes 'it's up to us men of big business to take over the leadership of the masses next time there's a turning point in history' (595).

Here, Musil allows us to witness a profound cultural, economic, and political reconfiguration, which constitutes the entrepreneurial type as a leading socio-economic figure, and entrepreneurship as a 'messianic' force, able to unify the contradictory aspirations of the 'old powers' (357). In the era to come, entrepreneurs thus turn into exemplary citizens *and* 'rulers' (Hayek 1982), who contribute to 'new prosperity' (Musil 1997, 207) and growth, while also acknowledging that 'power comes with responsibility' (510). This prompts Arnheim 'to see the regal man of business as the synthesis of change and permanence, power and civility, sensible risk-taking and strong-minded reliance on information, but essentially as the symbolic figure of a democracy-in-the making' (421).

This account refers to entrepreneurial activities, such as re-composing existing compositions, risk-taking, and coordination, as addressed by the Austrian economists (e.g., Knight 1964), and, simultaneously, moves beyond the economic function of entrepreneurship. By referring to a 'democracy-in-the-making', it specifically points to the role of entrepreneurship in shaping individuals' conduct, and society as a whole. Musil's work hence suggests that entrepreneurship emerges as a new governmental rationality; something that critical entrepreneurship scholars have suggested only recently (du Gay 2004).

Musil vividly illustrates how the emerging entrepreneurial 'spirit' operates and affects people, including, for instance, Count Leinsdorf, the 'paternal figure' of the parallel campaign. Like others, Leinsdorf is caught up in a period of crisis that exists between old and new political and economic orders. Though, as the story unfolds, the 'aristocratic socialist' (Musil 1997, 91) increasingly yields to the compelling 'flavour of a good business deal' (205):

When His Grace's business manager showed him how a certain deal could be made more profitably with a group of foreign speculators than in partnership with the local landed mobility, in most cases His Grace chose the former. Objective conditions have a rationale of their own, and this cannot be defied for sentimental reasons by the head of a huge economic enterprise, bearing the responsibility not only for himself but for countless other lives. (Musil 1997, 114)

However, at the very moment when Kakania's key figures begin to refer to themselves as 'heads of an enterprise' and immerse themselves in entrepreneurial functions like speculation (Kirzner 1967), Musil starts to evoke the frictions of all-encompassing orders like entrepreneurship; notably through Arnheim's opponent Ulrich, who deconstructs the 'mystery of the whole'.

For example, signs of entrepreneurship's ambiguity appear when Arnheim, in an attempt to 'complete' his universal character, seeks to seize the spiritual sphere. Sitting alone in his gallery which contains sculptures of saints, he contemplates upon 'how morality had once glowed with an ineffable fire, but now even a mind like his could do no more than stare into the burned-out clinkers' (Musil 1997, 200). Here, Arnheim seems overwhelmed by the powers of 'the kings and prophets' (595) of the 'old days', which 'formed a strange fringe of uneasiness around the otherwise complacent expanse of his thoughts' (200). In contrast to Ulrich, Arnheim struggles to accept a lack of willpower and control over the spiritual-mystical forces he wishes to consolidate. This encounter with 'something uncanny' (200), nonetheless, challenges the claim that entrepreneur/ship provides a legitimate answer to questions of unity and wholeness.

A related episode which questions entrepreneurship's promises of unification and order occurs when Arnheim reflects on the social-moral position that entrepreneurs occupy in relation to the aristocracy. Initially, he assumes that the aristocracy is similar to his 'class'. He notes, 'to assemble all those huge landed estates, [they] must have been no less sharp in their dealings

than today's men of business' (593). At a certain point, however, doubts arise. Arnheim starts to speculate about a mystical 'force in the earth', that gave the aristocracy 'the strength to which they owned their dignity, nobility' (593), and position of leader (Mises 2007). This reflection moves Arnheim to question the certainty of his individual achievements as an entrepreneur. As great as they *seem*, entrepreneurial activities, in fact, 'seldom arise in only one mind' (Musil 1997, 414), and are instead shaped by manifold, indeterminate 'forces' (Steyaert 2007).

Musil's critique of the grandness and coherence of entrepreneurial activities and orders continues through his 'unmasking' of the personal relationship between Arnheim and Diotima. While Musil initially allows the two to contemplate a romantic partnership which maintains an ethical-spiritual framework of exposure and self-overcoming, Arnheim's limitations come to the fore at the peak of their love: he soliloquises that 'he owed it to the firm' (Musil 1997, 547) not to marry 'the divorced wife of a middle-class government official' (547). While this previously seemed agreeable to a man of 'great soulfulness', such a move now becomes a matter of 'impossible transgression'. Arnheim remarks:

The cool rationality of money, immune to contamination, seemed an extraordinarily clear force compared with love. [...] Even in business, to pursue one's advantage at all costs is to risk getting nowhere. Keeping within one's limits is the secret of all phenomena, of power, happiness, faith. (Musil 1997, 426)

In comparison to Ulrich, Arnheim is not prepared to hazard the 'unknown adventure' (837). Indeed, emotion and love cause this 'man born to action on a grand scale' (414) 'considerable vexation' (415). Ultimately, the man with all qualities turns into a conflicted entrepreneurial businessman whose activities are largely directed at making 'culture, politics, and society serve business' (591). After all, within capitalist economy, reason, calculation, and measurement should be life's guiding principles:

When [Arnheim] had the urge to be as great and singlehearted as the heroic figures of the old, as untrammelled as only the true aristocrat can be, as religious as the quintessential nature of love demands, [...] an inner voice held him back. It was the voice of reason or the instinct of calculating and hoarding that stands everywhere in the way of life. (Musil 1997, 556)

By pointing to tensions between reason and rationality as well as feeling and intuition, Musil once again challenges unifying notions of the entrepreneurial function. Arnheim's claim that his soul is a 'capital' that cannot be 'sacrificed' is both de-mystifying and de-mystified (Johnsen and Sørensen 2017), as is his claim to incorporate the 'mystery of the whole' and 'restore order'. As a final ironic act, when the demise of Kakania is no longer avoidable, Ulrich comes to understand Arnheim's primary objective in relation to his involvement in the parallel campaign. It was neither for the sake of grand idea(l)s or soulfulness, nor for his love for Diotima; rather, Arnheim's aim was to 'acquire major portions of the Galician oil fields' (Musil 1997, 701), with the promise of equipping the Austro-Hungarian forces with arms, as his family owned an armour-plate works. With war on the way, this strategic move would certainly have proved lucrative. In light hereof, the following discussion reintroduces the main insights of the literary analysis and elaborates on its central contributions.

Discussion

Echoing Harrington (2002, 73), we have approached Musil's novel *The Man Without Qualities* as an endeavour 'to think through the ideals and contradictions' of our age 'in all their complexity and ambivalence'. Using the example of entrepreneurship, our thematic reading of the within MOS widely-neglected novel (Czarniawska and Joerges 1994) has explored some of these ideals, such as the search for meaning and coherence, with the aim of evoking the frictions

accompanying them. We argue that the paper's overall contributions are threefold and grounded in the discipline-crossing, historical, and literary alignment of our analysis.

First, we suggest that Musil, by integrating insights from the social sciences, economics, and philosophy into his writing, created an unparalleled oeuvre in terms of complexity, reflexivity, and diversity of perspective (Harrington 2002). It hence provides an extraordinarily rich source for the exploration of social and organisational phenomena like entrepreneurship. More specifically, *The Man Without Qualities* is one of the first writings offering an ironical critique of entrepreneurship and its early advocates in the Austrian School (Mises 2007; Schumpeter 1934). Inspired by this critique, we have linked the novel to economic theory and entrepreneurship studies, and thereby addressed what Hjorth (2014, 109) has called a 'lack of interdisciplinary research in entrepreneurship'.

Concomitantly, Musil's discipline-spanning novel encouraged us to further contextualise the advent of entrepreneurship and, specifically, direct attention to the role of the Austrian School of Economics in consolidating entrepreneurship as an ideal subject model and pervasive social order within capitalist economy (Bröckling 2016). Given that this role is not sufficiently addressed in entrepreneurship studies (Hanlon 2014), we consider the historical focus of our analysis an important second contribution, allowing us to theorise about the emergence of the enterprising spirit (Gill 2013).

Eventually, our thematic reading of Musil's novel intended to spark further interest in literary forms and contribute to narrative analyses of entrepreneurship (Gartner 2007; Steyaert 2007b). As mentioned earlier, we consider an engagement with writings like *The Man Without Qualities*, situated at the intersection of literature and social theory, no less relevant than an engagement with academic writing for developing our understanding of social constructs like entrepreneur/ship (De Cock and Land 2005). It allows for the (re)appearance of

entrepreneurship's complexities, polyphony, and 'vital, prosaic quality' (Olivier and Jacquemin 2016, 58), which often escape 'scientific' analyses.

With reference to the multi-faceted characters of Arnheim, the entrepreneurial businessman, and Ulrich, the 'anti-' or 'alternative entrepreneur', we reiterate below the analysis' core insights and, specifically, explicate how they enrich critical and process-oriented entrepreneurship research within MOS.

Problematizing the unifying 'enterprising spirit': Arnheim

The part of our literary-historical analysis that problematizes the character of Arnheim mainly expands upon critical studies of entrepreneurship. Arnheim seems to exemplarily embody the 'spirit of enterprise'. He is celebrated as an omni-competent man with all qualities, who is 'born to action'. As such, people view him as an emerging 'messiah', capable of assuming power and responsibility (Knight 1964) and responding to the demise of order and coherence. In times of transition and crisis, well-versed entrepreneurial businessmen like Arnheim are broadly turned into role models, adopting an elevated socio-economic position, from which they can 'direct a new era' (Mises 2007; Hayek 1982).

That, Musil evokes Arnheim as the 'protagonist of a novel epoch' possessing outstanding, integrative capabilities, giving him a widely mystical outlook (Johnsen and Sørensen 2017). This characterisation calls to mind the figure of the entrepreneur as portrayed by the economists of the Austrian School. Focusing on the *macroeconomic functions* of the entrepreneur, they claim that entrepreneurs are superior individuals with 'super-normal qualities' (Schumpeter 1934, 82) and 'the ability to generate and husband resources' (Tedmanson et al. 2012, 537). As noted elsewhere, mainstream entrepreneurship studies tend to reproduce such, supposedly

Schumpeterian, images of the grand individual entrepreneur creating wealth and growth (Kets de Vries 1996).

Musil's critical-ironical depiction of Arnheim, however, promotes a scepticism towards heroic, elitist, and individualistic economic notions of entrepreneurship. This depiction has encouraged us to engage closely with the scantily-evaluated premises of the Austrian economists. Our thematic reading specifically reveals how Arnheim embodies varied entrepreneurial functions: Arnheim's entrepreneurial activities combine the joy of (re)creation and development of inventions of others with a 'force of will' (Schumpeter 1934). His entrepreneurial 'alertness' and anticipation of promising ideas is thereby distinct (Kirzner 1973). He also reflects upon 'economic probability' and tries to be 'insured against damage' (Musil 1997, 442). In so doing, Arnheim combines intuition and courage with endeavours to calculate that which subverts arithmetic, rationality, and control (Knight 1964). Eventually, he engages in entrepreneurial activities foregrounding coordination and organisation (Casson 1982), with the intention of using every opportunity to make a 'good business deal'.

Arnheim's enactment of these entrepreneurial functions highlights, among other things, that he transcends the traditional notion of *homo economicus*, driven by a purely 'conscious rational mind' (Becker 1976). In fact, Arnheim first *seems* in contrast with the rational administrator, criticised by early entrepreneurship promoters like Schumpeter (1934). By emphasising that entrepreneur/ship cannot be reduced to the 'cool rationality' of economic ventures and that the contemporary businessman is more 'like the artist', Musil invokes a new image of the businessman; one that relates to the image fostered by the Austrian economists while, simultaneously, taking this further. Arnheim is an entrepreneur in all areas and, as such, creatively *and* strategically permeates idea(l)s from different social spheres, including culture, science, spirituality, and mysticism. Embodying a synthesis of all qualities, Arnheim also seems capable of overcoming any conflict and discord (Czarniawska and Joerges 1994).

In light of the above, we begin to comprehend the intricacies inscribed in the multi-faceted character of Arnheim. He exemplifies Musil's sophisticated approach to entrepreneurship, challenging not least 'Schumpeterian oppositions' between entrepreneurial intuition and creativity *and* cool, rational calculation. Considering that individuals are nowadays asked to become agile, innovative, and take on risk and uncertainty, *but also* 'possess minute self-control and clear-sighted planning, harmonising creative non-conformity and pedantic stinginess in one person' (Bröckling 2016, 76), we are compelled to accentuate the far-sighted outlook of Musil's work. The novel and our reading of it specifically allow us to develop subtler insights into the advent of contemporary subject ideals, including ubiquitous figures like the creative 'entrepreneur of the self' (du Gay et al. 1996), or the self-governed 'culturpreneur' (Loacker 2013).

However, the novel's explanatory power (Harrington 2002) is not simply grounded in Musil's critical engagement with the model of the individual entrepreneur. Musil's delineation of 'the Arnheims' as leading social figures further presents entrepreneurship as becoming a regulative framework, guiding people and their conduct. The latter is, in our reading, also contradictorily reflected in the work of the Austrian economists, who argue that the entrepreneurial function belongs to a superior, 'special class', *and* is simultaneously open to all (Mises 2007). As such, it ought to turn into a 'style of life' (Schumpeter 1934).

Exploring how entrepreneurship emerged as a governmental order is of particular relevance to critical entrepreneurship and governmentality studies (du Gay 2004; Hanlon 2018). Long before any other writer, Musil engaged with the evolution of entrepreneurship as an all-pervasive order and rationality. For Musil (1997), the 'enterprising spirit of the marketplace' (1095) conditions people's life on both a micro- and macro-level and, thereby, manifests how 'economic activity cannot be separated from other activities' (457; Tedmanson et al. 2012). Given the current depiction of entrepreneurship as a 'universal therapy' for everyone and

everything (Bröckling 2016), we hence argue that our analysis of Musil's novel fosters a vivid theorisation of the historical roots of 'entrepreneurial government' (Osborne and Gaebler 1992), and its effects on individuals and society. Below we recapitulate, with reference to Ulrich, the complexities and potentially productive struggles inherent to the entrepreneurial spirit and process.

Critically affirming the complexities of entrepreneurship: Ulrich

As the story unfolds, Arnheim's promises to restore order and 'make us whole again' are, as illustrated, deconstructed by Musil's alter ego Ulrich. Ulrich essentially 'unmasks' the unifying ambitions of entrepreneurship (Jones and Spicer 2005) and, thus, the 'mystery of the whole', understood as the harmonious union between business, intellect, aesthetics, and the soul (Czarniawska and Joerges 1994). Eventually, Arnheim emerges as a largely strategic businessman and conflictual 'windbag', who considers 'residual irrationality' a possible threat to his willpower. He therefore remains attached to the clear force of monetary-economic ventures, sacrificing his longing for the 'world of ideas' to reason and aspirations for control.

For Ulrich, Arnheim is, in fact, not a man 'possessing' all qualities, but a symbiosis, a 'collective national product' (Musil 1997, 468), whose prosperity is 'bound up with that of countless others' (468). With Ulrich suggesting that Arnheim's entrepreneurial activities and success are not the result of his *personal* attributes and 'pure will', the idea of entrepreneurship being a panacea, grounded in the achievements of the 'great man' (Lee and Tsang 2001), broadly fades away. This insight supports and contributes to processual entrepreneurship studies in MOS, challenging univocal accounts of the grand, individual entrepreneur (Steyaert 2007).

In comparison to Arnheim, Ulrich does not have a longing for wholeness and uniform 'totality'. Indeed, he considers aspirations to 'bring back form to formless life' dangerous and doomed to failure. Ulrich is deeply convinced that difference, heterogeneity and indeterminacy are at the heart of any being, living, and organising; not coherence, definite order and fixed identity (Knights 1997). While Ulrich acknowledges the 'search for meaning and identity' (Harrington 2002, 73) and 'sense of direction' in times of crisis and passage, he thus affirms that 'there can be no simple recourse' (73) or order, such as entrepreneurship, 'to patch up the holes in (our) lifeworlds' (83) and selves. As suggested, contingency and fragmentation are 'in the world's nature', and no system of order/ing can resolve its concomitant intricacies.

This appears central to furthering existing understandings of entrepreneurship. While Arnheim seeks to overcome any uncertainties and frictions by invoking the 'curative' spirit of entrepreneurship, Ulrich reflexively counters that such endeavours inevitably collapse. Moreover, he hints at the productive sides of such collapse, including the emergence of novel ideas, possibilities, and creative ventures (Hjorth 2014). Rather than looking for an ordered life subject to a utilitarian 'sense of reality', Ulrich is interested in explorative practices and an 'experimental life', which foster a 'sense of possibility', and thus imagination, potentiality and 'polyphonic transformation'. In contrast to Arnheim, Ulrich has the courage to question, transgress, and re-create seemingly given orders and conventions, like the action-led 'achievement morality'. Accordingly, we come to perceive Ulrich in a different light: he no longer represents the anti-entrepreneur, but emerges as an alternative, anti-heroic entrepreneur, interested in the 'what could be(come)', rather than the 'what is' (Chia 1996).

By suggesting that exploration, the imaginary, and (re)creation may present an immanent part of social, organisational, and entrepreneurial worlds, Musil's astute depiction of Ulrich re-invokes notions of entrepreneurship as proposed by process scholars (Dey and Steyaert 2016). Specifically, it recalls Hjorth's (2014) notion of organisation-creation, emphasising

entrepreneurship's role in effectively re-writing pervasive socio-economic norms and canons. In view hereof, we argue that our analysis of the character of Ulrich allows us to undermine narrow definitions of entrepreneurship as individual, economic business ventures, and instead illuminate a conceptual approach to entrepreneurship that evokes pluralism, contingent becoming and affirmative critique as constitutive aspects of *entrepreneuring* (Steyaert 2007b). Substantiating critical and processual entrepreneurship research, we posit that, in 'an age of irreducibly complexity and indeterminacy' (Harrington 2002, 60), struggles with and over entrepreneur/ship can induce both a critical-reflexive re-thinking *and* an experimental modification of established orders and practices of ordering.

Conclusion

This paper has conducted a thematic reading of Robert Musil's discipline-spanning novel *The Man Without Qualities*, which is still 'on the margins of scholarly discussion' (Harrington 2002, 59). Using the example of entrepreneurship, the novel critically-ironically elicits some of the core questions and intricacies that characterise the social and human condition, including the search for order, unity, and wholeness (Knights 1997). On this basis, we undertook a close reading of the seemingly unifying 'enterprising spirit' and order, while examining concomitant ambiguities and limitations. The analysis of Musil's work, specifically, allowed us to develop an understanding of the Austrian School of Economics' role in consolidating entrepreneurship as a pervasive, normative model for individual and socio-economic progress (Mises 2007; Schumpeter 1934), and to incorporate these insights into critical and process entrepreneurship studies in MOS (du Gay 2004; Tedmanson et al. 2012; Weiskopf and Steyaert 2009).

The overall contributions of our thematic reading of Musil's novel are threefold: Addressing the wide lack of historical analyses in entrepreneurship research (Gill 2013), and particularly,

analyses of the Austrian School of Economics (Hanlon 2014), our reading primarily elaborated upon the historical roots of entrepreneur/ship, and their persistent relevance in contemporary economy. In addition, it responded to calls for further literary-narrative studies of entrepreneurship (Gartner 2007). This enabled us to go beyond the abstractions and generalisations of traditional scholarly work and instead evoke the ‘particularisation, dramatisation’ (Harrington 2002, 62), and the complexities accompanying entrepreneurship. In this way, the literary analysis vivifies reflections about how to think and imagine entrepreneurship differently. The paper, eventually, acknowledged the lack of interdisciplinary entrepreneurship research (Hjorth 2014). Musil’s genre-crossing work presents a rich, insightful social-theoretic source and encouraged us, as such, to foster a multi-disciplinary, critical-reflexive dialogue between literature, entrepreneurship studies, MOS, and economic theory (Harrington 2002). This allowed us to extend and ‘complexify’ existing theorising about entrepreneur/ship.

However, we acknowledge that the monumental scope, the essayistic writing style, and the imaginary and conceptual polyphony of Musil’s work, revealing the convoluted ideals and conflicts of recurring times of passage, have more to offer than what our thematic reading could explore. Against this backdrop, we prompt further engagement with discipline-spanning literary works, like *The Man Without Qualities*. While we acknowledge the increasing interest in literary analyses within the field of entrepreneurship and MOS (e.g., Johnsen and Sørensen 2017; Steyaert 2007b), we note that most studies refer to literature and fiction to *exemplify* or alternatively represent entrepreneurial and organisational phenomena (Duymedjian et al. 2019). The writings of 20th-century polymaths like Musil, Blei, Broch, Schnitzler and Zweig (Schorske 1980), however, invite us to also approach literature as an illuminating site of *theory-making* (Śliwa et al. 2012). Hence, we encourage future work within critical, processual entrepreneurship research and beyond to explore literary classics that adopt a mediating role

between different disciplines, such as history, the arts, philosophy, and social and economic theory. This promises to further a profound, critical-affirmative understanding of the struggles, contingencies, and multiplicities irreducibly inscribed in social and entrepreneurial life and practice.

Notes

ⁱ In his diaries, Musil acknowledged a shifting character lacking coherence and purpose, who resembles Ulrich (Hönig 2002).

ⁱⁱ The businessman Walter Rathenau is the real character behind Arnheim. Rathenau was, like Arnheim, preoccupied with the relation between economics, science, art, and mysticism (Corino 2003).

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