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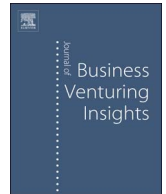
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Towards a mythic process philosophy of entrepreneurship

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A B S T R A C T

Drawing on the archetypal theory of the hero's journey, we present an analysis of Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey* to theorise on a primordial organisation of entrepreneurial processes. We conclude by discussing opportunities implied by a mythic-process approach in developing new meaning for the 'beginnings' and 'ends' in the process philosophy of entrepreneurship.

1. Introduction

A process philosophy of entrepreneurship is “a philosophical inquiry of the qualities of entrepreneuring, such as temporality, wholeness, openness, force and potentiality” which prefers a language of change and becoming over that of stability and being (Hjorth et al., 2015b: 608). Hence, process studies tend to view entrepreneurship as a creative, ongoing and unfinished narrative of increasing possibilities in life, thereby subjecting stability to imaginative abstraction (Gartner, 2007; Steyaert, 2007; Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009). Recent process research on entrepreneurship has also focused on the theme of journeys (McMullen and Dimov, 2013), emphasising the “transformative process by which desires become goals, actions, and systemic outcomes” (p. 1482). Such processes not only open up new contextual possibilities but also bring disclosure and make history (Spinosa et al., 1997).

In this paper, we build on the archetypal theory of the hero's journey (Campbell, 2008; Jung, 1991) to explain the entrepreneuring process as an ever-unfinished one of becoming but also as one which leads to the creation of an organisation. This allows us to shed new light on the mythic premises of regarding entrepreneurs as the epitome of economic growth (Deutschmann, 2001; Sørensen, 2008)—an economic saviour commonly portrayed as a heroic individual (McMullen, 2017). While the rational heroic myth of entrepreneurship has increasingly been criticised (Hjorth and Holt, 2016; Zilber, 2006), we aim to expand such debates by reflecting on the largely ignored area of mythology, specifically the distinct relation of the heroic entrepreneur to the transcendent principle of the general heroic archetype, which is common to all of humanity (Campbell, 2008). We argue that an appreciation of archetypal processes can offer new intellectual paths to understanding the heroic narrative of entrepreneurship as one of stability and change in simulacra (Vaara et al., 2016).

The process philosophy of entrepreneurship, as well as myths themselves, share a focus on pushing for the unattainable while seeking definite grounding in actually lived life (Hjorth, 2015a; Langley et al., 2013). Our proposed mythic philosophy seeks to strike a balance between these two goals by connecting the valuable insights of process philosophy to the primordial metaphysical framework of archetypes. By presenting a philosophical investigation into the opening scene of Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, we initiate an inquiry into the meaning of beginnings and ends in the process philosophy of entrepreneurship, and subsequently emphasise the value of a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between myth and entrepreneuring by seeing both as being metaphysically organised. In conclusion, we seek to encourage further processual thinking on the metaphysics of archetypes and entrepreneurship. This is vital if we are to transcend the looming nihilism of postmodern philosophy and redirect the

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focus on the transformative power of entrepreneurship away from political aspirations towards a more creative account of entrepreneurship.

2. Philosophical grounding

A process philosophy of entrepreneurship has its roots in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (Hjorth, 2015a; Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009). In his predictions of the fall of Christianity, Nietzsche recognised an unprecedented need for the individualisation of the human subject. The realisation of unceasing processes that guide life were to aid an individual in developing towards a higher state of being. Inspired by Nietzsche's notion of the *will to power* as the metaphysical energy that pushes life into motion, the process philosophy of entrepreneurship emphasises emancipation as its main goal (Jones and Spicer, 2009) and, therefore, focuses on the “social creation process that rigs action in fictional anticipation of actual actionable value potential” (Hjorth, 2015a, p. 42). It follows that the process approach concerns itself with the continuous change of life as it is lived, as a continuum of social, political, psychological and aesthetic narratives in which future organisation lies dormant.

This paper argues that mythology offers a way to complement postmodernist interpretations of Nietzsche in the context of entrepreneurship, especially by referring to Jung's understanding of Nietzsche's apparent mental disorder which, following Jung, offers a solid philosophical basis for seeking meaning in fluidity. According to Jung (1989), Nietzsche was right in constructing his own mythology in the place of Christianity in order to dispel the neurotic tendency of pure rationalism, but he was wrong to detach it from world mythology. For Jung (1989), a philosophy without an actual growth of personality would remain useless: instead, the most important steps in human progress would be made in the psychological domain rather than in the political domain. Through the fall of traditional religion the role of self-mythologising would become essential in transforming an individual's everyday life into transcendence. If this was not done consciously, humans would by their nature do it unconsciously and therefore suffer psychologically. A process philosophy that complements Nietzsche's notions with those of Jung does not seek to formulate a critique of entrepreneurship as a solely capitalistic myth (Ogbor, 2000) but, by connecting it to the heroic myths of world history, it does emphasise its actual transformative power.

Among Jung's (1981, 1991) key ideas for the achieving of transformation are what he terms *archetypes*. Abstractions of fixed psychic dynamics, these archetypes are empty slots into which cultural images are unconsciously inserted as differentiated versions of any particular archetype. In Jung's (1991) theory, human processes oscillate between unconscious archetypes which result in the repetition of similar motifs throughout history. Over time, myths have been formed from archetypes and serve humankind as symbolic gateways to the original state of humanity's existence. One of the most prominent archetypal myths is that of the hero, the religious saviour figure (Jung, 1981). Drawing from Jung, Joseph Campbell (2008) has suggested that all cultures have developed their own heroic myths, differentiated only by superficial features while their internal logic follows similar journeys into the unknown, thereby symbolically recreating the world through a personal journey of transformation. The archetypal heroic tale is told by Campbell (2008) in his *Hero's Journey* synthesis:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of the adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual reunion with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again – if the powers have remained unfriendly to him – his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir). (Campbell, 2008, p. 211)

Following this, the archetypal analysis of the heroic myth of entrepreneurship seeks to identify common ground shared with the heroic myths of actual religious saviours. Here, we wish to explore the actual life-transformative potential of ‘entrepreneurship’ (Weiskopf, 2007). While sharing many of the assumptions of entrepreneurial-process philosophy, and in particular the life-affirming principle of becoming (Hjorth et al., 2015b; Weiskopf, 2007), archetypal theory holds the metaphysical stability of archetypes to be the unattainable goal towards which entrepreneurship and philosophy are equally inclined (Hjorth, 2015a). To explain processes within archetypal metaphysics, a general narrative is needed (Langley et al., 2013). Throughout human history, this general (heroic) narrative has been mythical (Campbell, 2008).

3. Mythological analysis

Campbell's (2008) model of the hero's journey provides a tool for analysing heroic processes because it retains the peculiarity of specific events and their archetypal structure. By investigating the opening scene of Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which bears the title *Dawn of Man*, we seek to understand the entrepreneurial process that has organisational creation as its systemic outcome (Gartner, 1988; McMullen and Dimov, 2013). We suggest that the film communicates a heroic entrepreneurship

ideal as the driving force for social processes. Our main argument is that processes begin, and end, in organisation; and that the beginning marks the end for entrepreneuring heroics, and the end marks the beginning of myth creation.

In the *Dawn of Man* sequence, we are introduced to a herd of anthropoids, who struggle through life in the natural world on the shores of a pond that provides drinking water. Soon the herd is driven away from the precious water by aggressive rivals. The herd seeks shelter at another location, which grants protection but is less advantageous. Later, one of the apes digs for food amongst animal bones, suddenly to stop as if confronted by an epiphany, staring perplexedly at the cairn of bones. The ape picks up what might be a femur and launches into a personal performance of power by violently pounding skeletons into fragments. As Strauss' score *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* reaches for new, unseen heights, game starts to fall. The herd soon returns to the initial pond, where their rivals still reside. Armed with an innovation, the club, the leader (now adopting a noticeably more upright posture) confronts the usurper and easily beats it to death: the life-giving powers of the pond are redeemed for the benefit of society. An innovative product has been found and a leader is born; the herd evolves into a tribe, and ape becomes man. In an iconic cut, the leader throws the bone into the air, and the bone 'becomes' a spaceship.

In the beginning, there is organisation. Creation from a void is a deity's work, while mortals are embedded in a local setting from which to proceed. In the scene at hand, the focus is on the life-giving waters in the middle of the image above, which provide the water needed for life and which are a symbolic reference to the shared conditions of life. Life appears to be very simple, and we are unaware of the conditions that have led to this point. Yet, we may assume that the herd has formed over time through natural selection and family ties, and that the size of the pond limits the size of the community. No hero is to be identified, and there is little hint of myth or a sophisticated social order. This world is utterly conservative and entrepreneuring is at a minimum. Separate groups exist, but nothing hints at them conspiring to change the status quo: reality is shared and there is no urgent need for either innovation or new organisation. It is a beginning that in itself seems like an end, an unsurprising trajectory. Danger looms—since the journey must start from here, harmony must be ruptured so that an adventure can begin.

Stability is deceptive because life is in perpetual motion and settles into rhythmic processes of entrepreneurship. These recurring processes can be seen as socio-economic heroic journeys (Morong, 1994), as represented by the archetypal hero in symbolic form (Campbell, 2008; Jung, 1981). Imagination is aroused by archetypal myths, abridging highly abstract concepts to mundane life (Jung, 1991). It is from the well of imagination that entrepreneurial narratives find their application in proposing new value (Gartner, 2007; Hjorth et al., 2015b).

A rival herd forces the organisation to relocate; the adventure begins. An individual emerges from the mass as main usurper, and a hero must be born to recover the lost world. In Campbell's (2008) terms, the hero will cross the threshold of adventure into the creative sphere, a gateway that marks the problem for the hero to solve: to reclaim the life-giving waters by growing feet able to walk the path laid before them.

This path can only be walked creatively, for there are no signposts to be found in unknown territory—as entrepreneurs engage in organising activities that give “form to matter”, they actively make history instead of following a conventional and standardised path of conduct (Weiskopf, 2007, p. 151; Spinosa et al., 1997). While the study of entrepreneuring has focused on life-affirming politics and aesthetics in increasing opportunities in life (Steyaert, 2007; Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009), the heroic perspective seeks to identify the affirmation of being as an emanation (Campbell, 2008; Jung, 1981). In order to see entrepreneuring as a heroic act (McMullen, 2017; Sørensen, 2008), an investigation is needed that can break away from the much-needed yet ontologically nihilistic critiques of capitalism upon which process studies of entrepreneurship have hitherto focused.

A hero has been identified, one who has defeated the boundaries of ordinary life. In a moment of personal insight, the hero combines available resources in a creative way, thereby multiplying the opportunities available to the actor. The power of the club enables an efficiency in gathering nutrition hitherto undreamt of: the sudden ease of hunting fresh meat provides the herd with so much to eat that they not only grow stronger but can also afford leisure. With the new-found leisure time, a retaliatory strike to reclaim the life-giving waters can be launched. By discovering the boon, the elixir of life, the hero has been presented with a path to reclaiming the world (Campbell, 2008).

Entrepreneurship happens in-between: as a distancing from the norm, it recreates the space between what is and what could become (Hjorth, 2015a; Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009). By returning to the world, that is, by crossing the threshold of adventure in a glorious return (Campbell, 2008), the hero beats the usurper and reclaims the life-giving waters: the extraordinary keenness with which the hero has embraced the becomingness of the world enables the hero to discover a new, improved world and, thus, to make history (Spinosa et al., 1997).

The function of the mythic hero is a meaningful reconnection between the insignificance of the individual, who lives aimlessly and in flux, and the transcendent principle of the metaphysical organisation of archetypes through the immanent symbol (Jung, 1981). A mythic affirmation is a simultaneous realisation of the continuous change of life as it is lived and the definite metaphysical stability of the unattainable, wherein the natural affinities of philosophy and entrepreneurship consolidate (Hjorth, 2015a).

When the hero-entrepreneur defeats the usurper, the world is reclaimed and an organisation is created: the entrepreneurial cycle ends, and what was 'becoming' now stagnates into 'being'. Entrepreneurial action has peaked and the herd has taken on a new form—the form of human organisation. In the final picture above, the leader stands in a noticeably more upright position than the other individuals: the hero has defeated the enemy and become a tyrant. From the stories of the heroic moment in which the hero becomes what she is, future tales of creation can be espied, and new heroes will arise to challenge the status quo. Not only has the process given birth to an organisation, but also to a myth of technological innovation that drives the future: in the final scene, the hero throws the bone into the air, which then turns into a space-shuttle floating in space. (Figs. 1–4)

As the entrepreneuring process bears results (McMullen and Dimov, 2013), the mythological circle closes and consumer society “besmirches what it gnaws” (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 39): the end is a beginning for new imaginations of value. Once this point in a



Fig. 1. The organisation.

Source: Stanley Kubrick, dir. 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, Warner Bros. 1968.



Fig. 2. Call to Adventure.

Source: Stanley Kubrick, dir. 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, Warner Bros. 1968.



Fig. 3. Discovery of the Boon.

Source: Stanley Kubrick, dir. 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, Warner Bros. 1968.

specific journey is reached, entrepreneurship and creation inevitably become management and upkeep (Hjorth, 2015a). Then the managerial ethos takes over and tames the creative process through a symbolical representation of the heroic yet now-rational entrepreneur (Hjorth, 2007; Zilber, 2006).

In the contemporary world, much of the transformative power of entrepreneurship is turned into a mythic narrative of economic growth (Deutschmann, 2001). This mythicising recreates corporate hegemony and may entrench an unjust division of common assets (Jones and Murtola, 2012; Ogbor, 2000). However, control over culture needs not be presupposed to find a way out (Gabriel, 1995), for myth and entrepreneuring alike reach beyond politics in that they refer to the unconscious, which contains more than the drive for power (Jung, 1991). A focus on the archetypal structures shared by all heroic myths (Campbell, 2008), where the heroic entrepreneur represents the tendency for human beings to organise themselves, seeks new applications for entrepreneuring, that is, a reapplication of the myth rather than its discrediting. In our view, the transformative power of entrepreneuring can, and should, be redirected beyond enterprising and towards doing things in a different way (Hjorth and Holt, 2016). This does not entail the worship of money, efficiency and technology, but instead a constant realisation of the organising activity conducted by entrepreneurs within and outside



Fig. 4. Creation of a New Organisation.

Source: Stanley Kubrick, dir. 2001: A Space Odyssey, Warner Bros. 1968.

of capitalist settings (Rehn and Taalas, 2004).

4. Discussion

The process philosophy of entrepreneurship has shifted our focus from enterprising to proto-organisational dynamics that explore the fluidity of life as an imagined potential (Gartner, 2007; Hjorth et al., 2015b; Hjorth, 2015a; Steyaert, 2007). At the same time, entrepreneurship is a constant disclosure of new worlds as well as a history-making activity, thereby suggesting that entrepreneuring processes produce results subjected to management (Hjorth, 2007; Spinosa et al., 1997). In particular, our focus has been on how entrepreneuring begins and ends in organisation (Gartner, 1988; Steyaert, 2007). A fruitful way of analysing such a dynamic lies in focusing on entrepreneurial journeys (McMullen and Dimov, 2013), which the economic paradigm tends to render as an individualised heroic myth (McMullen, 2017). We have argued for a more nuanced understanding of heroic myths in entrepreneurship by focusing on archetypal theory (Campbell, 2008; Jung, 1981) as a way to move the theory of entrepreneuring away from capitalist and corporate enterprising, towards the more expansive potentiality of myth in the heroics of the entrepreneuring self (Jung, 1991; Ogbor, 2000; Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009).

Both the process philosophy of entrepreneurship and archetypal theory originates in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche (2005), whose influence is seen in recognising the dysfunctionality of a rationalist view of humanity, the need for myth in the growth of personality, and the search for change in the subject rather than in the political system (Jung, 1989). By analysing the opening scene of Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey from the archetypal perspective of the monomythical hero's journey (Campbell, 2008), we have identified organisational creation (Gartner, 1988) and myth creation as the main entrepreneuring activities that make history (Spinosa et al., 1997). In particular, we find Kubrick's opening scene to depict the birth of the rational, high-tech myth (Zilber, 2006) of an entrepreneuring hero who pushes towards the unattainable through their personal journey into the unknown.

Building on our analysis, we suggest that archetypal thinking helps to alleviate some of the metaphysical confusions surrounding the heroic entrepreneur (Sørensen, 2008) because it embraces the mythologisation rather than the rationalisation of entrepreneurship. The archetypal approach places much emphasis on the unconscious as an autonomous stratum of the psyche, both of which have an elementary stage in common, and seek to use myth in order to enable the subject to creatively transcend the normative ethos of the contemporary world. To transcend, life as 'becoming' needs to be experienced as one of constant flux, thus permitting detachment and transformation. It is in this way that process philosophy and archetypal theory complement each other: whereas the former points out the relativity of life, the latter provides a creative reference point in myth that can save us from the nihilism towards which absolute relativism is prone to lead.

5. Conclusions

Following our proposed mythic approach to process philosophy, we generate at least two contributions to the literature of entrepreneurship. First, we pave the way for a more specified relationship between the 'becoming' nature of entrepreneuring (Hjorth et al., 2015b; Steyaert, 2007; Weiskopf, 2007) and disclosing chronology (Langley et al., 2013; McMullen and Dimov, 2013; Spinosa et al., 1997). This allows us to understand entrepreneuring as a proto-organisational in-betweenness (Hjorth, 2015a; Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009) and as a heroic journey that ends in the creation of a new organisation (Gartner, 1988). As such, entrepreneuring as a journey of 'becoming' is a continuous move towards the unattainable where beginnings become ends, and ends become beginnings. Second, our archetypal interpretations sought to address the mythical premises of entrepreneurship by introducing new ways of seeing how entrepreneurship is shared in the collective unconscious as a heroic process of self-transformation (Jung, 1981). In this way we emphasise a more nuanced understanding of the mythical premises of entrepreneuring, especially in regard to the features it shares with actual religious saviours (Sørensen, 2008). However, we do appreciate the need to differentiate the rational myths constructed around entrepreneurship through the dominant economic paradigm (Zilber, 2006; Rehn et al., 2013; Deutschmann, 2001; Ogbor, 2000), precisely in order to transcend normative expectations and to embrace the mythic potential of entrepreneuring.

It is to be expected that, by building an appreciation of mythology in organising, a more holistic – social and psychological – understanding of entrepreneurship can be developed.

In light of the specific focus we have taken, we are well aware of the philosophical assumptions we have taken for granted in this paper; yet, we hope to invite more precise takes on the ontological and epistemological groundings of process philosophy and archetypal theory alike. We would also like to use this space to initiate the charting of those missing definitions which are necessary in order to build a proper understanding of the metaphysics of entrepreneurship processes.

Our proposed rationale of archetypal metaphysics which complement process philosophy calls for clarification in terms of how exactly the two fields of knowledge can find common ground for expression. It is our belief that archetypal theory, which suggests a metaphysical organisation that is entirely abstract and therefore unattainable, works as the transcendent principle towards which entrepreneurial processes move (Hjorth, 2015a). Ontologically, archetypal theory holds the unknown to be real, for its main interest lies in the analysis of the unconscious and its development towards consciousness thereof. Psychologically, then, it is suggested that an abstraction of stability is needed—attainable through mythical applications of paradox, narratives and fiction—in order to seek transformation of the self towards individuation (Jung, 1981). With this aim in mind, the process philosophy of entrepreneurship is confronted with the task of understanding the unconscious dynamics of myth in entrepreneurship. Moreover, we invite further inquiry towards other archetypes at work in entrepreneurship processes. In this context, initial steps into understanding the function of the shadow archetype in entrepreneurship (Jung, 1991) would be of particular interest. This could lead to a serious reconsideration of the assumed relationship between market capitalism and entrepreneurship (Rehn and Taalas, 2004) as well as technological innovation and entrepreneurship (Zilber, 2006). Identification of entrepreneurship in non-Western, non-capitalist contexts has much to tell us about the history of enterprising activity in the West, while simultaneously providing expansive frameworks for entrepreneurship—if we understand such activity as a transformative and disclosing journey (McMullen and Dimov, 2013; Spinosa et al., 1997).

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