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Department of Business Studies

# A Manifesto for Anarchist Entrepreneurship

Provocative Demands for Change  
and the Entrepreneur

Monika Wallmon

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### **Abstract**

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This manifesto takes a broad and critical approach to entrepreneurial research. The author consciously uses a provocative way of arguing for the importance of challenging received academic wisdom about entrepreneurship.

It is a manifesto that spells out why we should question the idea that entrepreneurship research is neutral. It is the academic's privilege to ask questions; hence the appeal here to critical theory, familiar from other traditions than business management, and a useful corrective when considering the dominant and hegemonic perspectives in entrepreneurship research.

The manifesto presents entrepreneurship as something that goes far beyond market-oriented business to an enterprising spirit that could keep society self-reflecting and self-critical by questioning what it takes for granted; mobilizing the entrepreneurial energies of those who voluntarily marginalize themselves—individuals and groups who are not afraid to stand out, channeling their self-confidence to defend values that contrast the dominant ones. They are to be found among performance artists practising social art, "extreme" entrepreneurs, and creative anarchists who take society itself as their target when trying to instigate change.

When the entrepreneurial focus is not the market per se, but rather the social norms and values in which economic activity is embedded, the entrepreneur's task becomes to challenge whatever is taken for granted—an incitement that is as much social as economic. Thus, the entrepreneur as a provocateur takes on the most established institutions, her only guiding principle being to question whatever principles that society unthinkingly espouses, whatever is taken for granted. Unlike market entrepreneurs, who appreciate institutions since they provide an otherwise unknowable environment with basic "rules of the game", provocative entrepreneurs question even the most formal, long-standing institutions. Their motivation is a generic obstinacy, and their vision is to be recognized for making people aware—and for their actions, even as they rub salt in society's wounds.

Entrepreneurship in the form it is presented in this manifesto asks the awkward question or presents the uncomfortable truth, forcing all to take a long hard look at themselves in a cold, self-critical light. The essays here cover a variety of forms of anarchist entrepreneurship—all with a strong driving spirit. The manifesto aims to stimulate entrepreneurs and researchers, as well as politicians and citizens, to engage, to initiate, and to act, all in the name of the society.

*Keywords:* Activism, Social Art, Social Change, Emancipation

*Monika Wallmon, Department of Business Studies, Box 513, Uppsala University, SE-75120 Uppsala, Sweden.*

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Dedicated to:

Everyone who wonders if I write about them.

I am.

A **manifesto** is a public declaration of principles and intentions,  
often political in nature, often determined by our view of the world.

# PROLOGUE

You are holding in your hands a ‘Manifesto for Anarchist Entrepreneurship’. It is addressed to all budding entrepreneurs. All actions have an enterprising potential - each and every action can be creative. This is a manifesto for those who are curious about life as a creative process.

Entrepreneurship is about communication, interactivity, creativity, immediacy, and spontaneity. It is social experiment, autonomy, and anarchy. Entrepreneurship is about taking your fate in your own hands. It is about creating new social forms – about creating a society that evolves and grows from the grass roots up.

Anyone can hear the call to be an entrepreneur – we all possess the qualities for entrepreneurship. No one is a professional – no one is an amateur. All are fellow creators. What the result of it all will be depends solely on what we undertake. What we, in our various constellations of relationships, think up.

Entrepreneurship is action, provocation, mischief, meddling, amusement, play, social compilation, and interpretation.

It is social criticism – in action! It is a wild leap in the dark of our minds; it is relentless upheaval.

And now we can begin! This is where the unpredictable begins! Anything is possible!



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## PART I: PREAMBLE



*Business economists fight tooth and nail to defend their version of entrepreneurship, and seem to want to have a monopoly, priority rights, on the term. No one else is allowed to cross the bridge. They own the term provided they are allowed to set the agenda and patrol the discourse.*

So wrote my good friend, the author and controversialist Lasse Ekstrand (2004:72).

And he has a point. The business economists' use of entrepreneurship suffers from evident limitations that lock their tottering edifice into a restrictive 'figure of thought'. Their terminology has a seldom fortunate, however unconscious, bias towards industrial production or manufactured goods, and not least towards selling and marketing, thanks to the abstruse 'figure of thought' that governs their thinking. This theory of entrepreneurship is the child of modern industrialism. Its heritage can be traced back to Adam Smith (1776), Frederick Taylor (1911), Henri Fayol (1937), and Max Weber (1905). As a result, entrepreneurship is thought of as something firmly relegated to the market economy discourse, and not belonging to society at large.<sup>1</sup> The term is immanent in nature – it remains obediently within the confines of the ordained economic and ideological systems. It is never critical, and utterly incapable of rising above existing circumstances.

Quite the reverse, the term merely serves as an affirmation, reproducing the capitalist market economy that – according to the French cultural critic and stylist, Georg Batailles (1949:28) – has only succeeded in spreading tawdriness and deprivation far and wide.

Given that the professor of business economics, Chris Steyaert (2000:1), has observed that, 'the 'narrow' agenda of entrepreneurship research is how it is influenced by policymakers', we should consider whether it is not the case that these established assumptions, or the market economy discourse if you will, limit human action and creative powers. Just how creative would we be in a world that looks only for usefulness and immediate results? Where 'growth companies' and 'growth industries' are our mantra? Does this discourse block creativity? Can entrepreneurship be more than a generator, a life-support system, of economic growth?

It is not only capitalist market models that limit our ability to understand entrepreneurship. In traditional business economics, the essence of

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<sup>1</sup> The controversial French philosopher and historian of ideas, Michel Foucault (1972), is the originator of the term 'discourse' in this sense. A discourse is a general term for a subconscious, 'regulated' combination of terms, theses, and theories that together make up an articulated notion. A discourse influences how we see and speak about phenomena. In Foucault's perspective, there are different forms of knowledge at the disposal of the powers-that-be that can be used to disciplinary ends, for example by decreeing what constitutes normality and what deviancy. It is in this way that established notions of what is normal or sensible play a part in the regulation of people's self-image and actions.

entrepreneurship is held to be the foundation of an organisation or business. But the word 'business' is inappropriately applied in this context. Although more recent entrepreneurship theory largely looks to both processes and change, it is only a mild exaggeration to say that it views businesses and organisations as something static. Under certain, limited circumstances one state of stasis can give way to another state of stasis. It is not to stretch a point to draw a parallel with the political economists' comparatively static analysis. An explanation for this might reasonably be sought in the adoption by business economists of the political economists' fondness of systems: a total, descriptive and explanatory model is retained that serves to emphasise the existing structure. This is also something of a paradox. System theory was originally developed by biologists as a tool to help explain 'organisation'; literally, the disposition of the organs. To put it differently, how do different organs in the same system relate and develop in conjunction with one another? In biology it can be a question of how the seed becomes a plant, or how a plant decays.

Here, in this manifesto, the emphasis is on entrepreneurship as an action rather than as a structure or a system. That such action is solely the result of the interaction of various descriptive categories of entrepreneurship does not change this focus. Entrepreneurship as a phenomenon can unquestionably exist without businesses in the business economic sense. Nor does it necessarily result in any such business.

Charles Spinosa, Fernando Flores, and Hubert Dreyfus (1997:34 ff), for example, have demonstrated the changing nature of entrepreneurship, and argue that entrepreneurship is a matter of changing history and creating social change. Social change is created by entrepreneurs disclosing, laying bare, the ways of life that are otherwise taken for granted. To the authors' way of thinking, entrepreneurship changes people's views of themselves, their bodies, and their lives. It is a process that originates in anomalies, and which certain strong individuals – entrepreneurs – set great store by, reconfiguring 'the style of a disclosive space' and accordingly the prevailing practices in a society. Despite the combined forces of history, discourse, and institution, people retain their ability to 'break out'. People are not only the prisoners of the past or of history. Intentionality, activity, and creativity continue to be significant.

People's ability to break with convention and go their own way should attract greater attention as something to be valued. Bengt Johannisson, Swedish professor of entrepreneurship (1996), believes that it is not meaningful to study whether external circumstances such as simplified regulations, lower taxes and social insurance contributions, access to expert advice, and the availability of a qualified workforce, have any influence on the entrepreneurial climate. Entrepreneurship as a phenomenon should not be reduced to underlying or intermediate variables. Our views on entrepreneurs should be more nuanced, and entrepreneurship as a

phenomenon should be recognised as far more complex than is commonly thought. Entrepreneurship ought instead to be seen as a creative process in which people are inspired by a desire to create.

If we liberate our creative forces from the shackles of economic growth, can we then improve the chances for our entrepreneurship's inherent ability to effect change? If that is indeed the case, we should accordingly focus on people's abilities to act and create freely; a creativity free from the demands of the discourses of economic growth that may, or may not, inhibit creativeness. In the absence of established terminology, I have elected to call it 'anarchist entrepreneurship'. To call it disorganised entrepreneurship would be inaccurate, since it is only a physical organisation in the business economic sense that is lacking. Successful enterprise, like all other creativity, must build on some form of organisation. Here it is a question of entrepreneurship as a project that lacks a supporting business organisation. Entrepreneurs do not act in any way that could be understood as organisational behaviour.

# MANIFESTO

My manifesto is intended to challenge the ambivalent attitude of ‘market economy entrepreneurship’ towards any enterprise that embodies creativity or imagination by arguing for the relevance of art and its attendant social relationships. The principal purpose of this manifesto is to increase understanding by asking questions about entrepreneurship. I will show that this form of entrepreneurship is far from simple. At first glance the task may well appear unlikely for a business economist. My interest is in identifying and charting the dilemma more than in answering a narrow, prearranged set of questions. That said, however, there are no watertight bulkheads between formulating and solving a dilemma. The act of formulating a problem often provides an indication of its possible solution.

Being phrased as a manifesto, this thesis does not amount to a manual for how to be a successful entrepreneur. Not to say that it has nothing to say on the matter. Indeed, it offers help in understanding of how promising milieux for entrepreneurship can be developed. Equally, it has not been written as a contribution to a debate – but very likely can be used as such.

Nor is its purpose to popularise what has already been said about entrepreneurship. Questions asked of a difficult and unfamiliar field do not lend themselves to easy answers, and any attempt only leads to important aspects being overlooked. The moment there is any question of describing the full complexity of abstruse theories that have been applied in practice, there is an unhappy tendency to fall back on something akin to baby talk. Yet resolutely oversimplified language is inadequate to the task of conveying complicated ideas. The people at the sharp end are not well served by such affected naivety. They are used to a complicated reality. Theoreticians should not be afraid of being theoretical; it is not the same thing as lacking a firm grasp on reality.

Furthermore, there is no ambition here to construct a ‘comprehensive’ model of entrepreneurship. The approach is to lay out a series of different fragments that may well increase understanding. It can thus be likened to a mosaic. Each individual piece says little on its own, but juxtaposed with the other pieces the full picture emerges. That said, despite my aim of capturing the full complexity of the issues, it should be added that the manifesto is couched in declarative rather than interrogative language in order to avoid becoming too arcane.

No 'problem' will be solved here. Instead, I attempt to show that the problem is insoluble, or rather is best formulated as a dilemma. It exists on an existential level where there are no real solutions to be had. Life resists being formulated as a series of equations. It can neither be falsified nor verified. It must be lived. The problem starts and ends with people. The problem exists in each and every one of us. We *are* the ultimate definition of the problem. The dilemma lives in us.

It was Friedrich Nietzsche (1878) who wrote that all thought is metaphorical. The metaphors or images both hamper us and liberate us. The hardest thing of all is to abandon an image that has us in its grip. A particular image of the world all too often holds us prisoner, preventing us from attaining a deeper understanding of the world. How do we become conscious of its counterpart, of the images that speak of a 'different' world? Where is the chink in the world's armour? Why does the world remain a fascinating mystery?

Entrepreneurial theory is often dry and formalistic. It makes few hearts beat faster. It often serves merely to corroborate much of what we already know about that particular world. A world whose depths are denied us. It is for this reason that pictures, or rather, contrasting pictures, are needed that speak of something else: pictures become the adventure. Where anything can happen. Pictures that liberate.

We know what it is like when we look more closely at the business economists' valiant attempts to theorise about human beings. A march past of labels: 'economic man' (John Kells Ingram, 1888); 'administrative man' (James G. March and Herbert Simon, 1958); 'the enterprising man' (Orvis Collins, David Moore, and Darab Unwalla, 1964). The object in business economics theory is a categorical modelling of the population that eliminates differences between individuals, suppressing radical differences in order for generalised theorising to be possible. As a scholarly project it seeks *generalisability*.

This is more than a touch curious. Perhaps it is the diktat of economists rather than psychologists that prevails when assumptions about people are formulated, not to mention what the implication of the widespread adoption of those assumptions might be. From Richard Cantillon (1755) right up to Louis Jacques Filion (1997), a great deal of ink has been spilled in the hunt for that discursive Holy Grail, the 'proper' entrepreneur.

Conservative or liberal economic theories look to a model in which people's impulses and needs can be combined in a normative market. Or should that be a metaphysical market? Economists speak of a market that no one can identify empirically, but strangely enough still exists for all that.

There is a preposterously large – and mounting – number of motives and qualities the 'entrepreneur' conjured up in the market discourse is expected to possess (see, for example, Table 1)

Table 1: Entrepreneurial qualities Source: Louis Jacques Filion (1997; quoted in Hans Landström, 1999)

<i>An innovator</i>
<i>A leader</i>
<i>A moderate risk-taker</i>
<i>Independent</i>
<i>Creative</i>
<i>Energetic</i>
<i>Persevering</i>
<i>Original</i>
<i>Optimistic</i>
<i>Result-oriented</i>
<i>Flexible</i>
<i>Resourceful</i>
<i>Has achievement motives (nACH)<sup>2</sup></i>
<i>Self-assured</i>
<i>Self-confident</i>
<i>Shows long-term commitment</i>
<i>Accepting of ambiguity and uncertainty</i>
<i>Enterprising</i>
<i>Quick to learn</i>
<i>Employs resources well</i>
<i>Sensitive to others</i>
<i>Aggressive</i>
<i>Trusting</i>
<i>Has money as the measure of success</i>

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<sup>2</sup> *nACH* or 'need for achievement'. Harvard professor David McClelland (1961) has posited that a population's degree of motivation or interest in achievement (*nACH*) is central to whether a country or region will develop and flourish.

The result is a very stereotyped image of the entrepreneur. We all possess entrepreneurial abilities, and our motives and personal qualities are not static – they change over time. As Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford (1950:6) wrote in one of the post-war period's most influential works of social science, *The authoritarian personality*, 'Personality is not to be hypostatized as an ultimate determinant. Far from being something which is given in the beginning, which remains fixed and acts upon the surrounding world, personality evolves under the impact of the social totality within which it occurs.'

Louis Jacques Filion's account leaves the vast majority of us excluded. Entrepreneurship, when it is used to generalise and bring out differences, *pace* Filion, is both an abstraction and a hypostatisation, and precludes all reflection on entrepreneurship. The crucial differences between people are completely ignored. Entrepreneurial theory does not allow for the unique or the distinctive. It formulates itself in general terms, and fears all that is exceptional.

In recent years entrepreneurial theory has on occasion been strikingly empirical, to the extent of being wholly focused on data collection, although it is in the self-defensive nature of the beast to claim that it is in fact about very different business. Researchers believe they are reasonably certain of what they are looking for in their studies. The data collection itself is thought unproblematic. In epistemological terms, insecurity is reduced. And the entrepreneurial ontology remains fixed. The entrepreneurial world is thought to be patently obvious. Academe trivialises itself.

There is something unsatisfactory, amiss even, about business economic theories. Where are the living people in these wretched and discouraging theories – the subjects, the committed actors? People who ponder, dream, weep, laugh, and follow their hearts? Where are *you*?

Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? These were the questions framed by the German philosopher, Ernst Bloch, who saw himself as a revolutionary romantic. He championed the principle of hope – truly an optimistic philosophy. Bloch was driven by the hope that humankind could be righted, rehabilitated, by philosophy. First there would have to be an end to 'domestication', the enslavement of humankind. We have nothing to lose but our chains; a better world is there for the taking. The inquiring mind with which we are born should never be curbed. It is in our nature to be ever dissatisfied; a quality, according to Bloch, that is not only productive but should be positively welcomed: 'From our earliest years we are searching. Are constantly craving, crying. Not having what we want.' Bloch practised what he preached. He lived in a state of constant uproar, ever ready to bid defiance when the situation became too oppressive. He relinquished his chair in philosophy at the university of Leipzig in East Germany – whose government had awarded him the Fatherland's Order of Merit for his intellectual efforts – and settled in West Germany, where he

held an honorary chair. It was from there he supported the militant student protests of 1968, and became a close friend of one of its legendary leaders, Rudi Dutschke.

Bloch was no fastidious systematiser. He was a champion of the immense scope of human potential; an advocate of the unfathomed, of the long hidden and unknown. He lectured in what for a professor of philosophy was an almost spiritual manner about ‘the surplus of the moral-mystical, existence-meaning in itself (1918:194)’. He was thinker whose attention was fixed on what might emerge from the as yet unwritten and undefined. He was not fazed by terms such as ‘nothing’, which the sociologist August Comte (1856) would have dismissed as ‘metaphysical’, as unscientific, as a meaningless term.<sup>3</sup> His verged on the poetic when he wrote, ‘Just as in all the objects of this world, in the ‘nothing’ around which they are made, that twilight, that latency, that essential amazement predominates’(Bloch, 1918:201).

Should we then abandon the idea of Utopia, Bloch asked pointedly in his book, *The spirit of utopia* (1918). Should we be forced to wake up from the dream of a more humane world? And that before we have even tried to create the world we have yet to experience, and which is thus quite possible to create, according to Bloch with his usual certainty.

‘All words, in the absence of action, are foolish and empty,’ wrote one of Sweden’s greatest prosaists, Willy Kyrklund (1964:17).

It is first in the act of creation that humans become human, and thus entrepreneurs.

If we choose to act, we also choose an entrepreneurial life. Consequently, the interesting question is not *who* is an entrepreneur, *pace* William Gartner (1989), but rather *what* leads us to display our entrepreneurial qualities and to pursue specific – entrepreneurial – interests at certain points of our lives;

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<sup>3</sup> August Comte was apparently the first to coin the expression ‘positivism’ in the middle of the nineteenth century. Blithely confident, he divined the coming of an enlightened age. Comte was a champion of empirically based knowledge of the kind to which so many twentieth-century scholars aspired. Right up to the present day. He would probably have not emerged unscathed from a confrontation with Ernst Bloch – and would have classified him as unscientific and irrational to boot. Bloch, after all, recommended a healthy scepticism towards narrow empiricism, towards whatever which we can observe. It is impossible to view people as sentient beings, according to Bloch (1938–1947), without considering what is possible, what people are capable of imagining using their unique ability to dream: ‘The existing world is the world of the past, and the despiritualized object of science, but human longing in both forms – as impatience and as waking dream – is the mainsail into another world. This intending toward a star, a joy, a truth to set against the empirical, beyond its satanic night and especially beyond its night of incognito, is the only way to find the truth; the question about us is the only problem’ (1918:206). Properly speaking, what is possible thus cannot be imagined away; it can only be denied or suppressed. ‘Facts’ hide reality as much as they reveal it.

to enter into a creative process, to choose to follow our own path. Our creative path – our life? It is when we observe, persevere, and make something of the anomalies, of the exceptions, and step off the path staked out for us that we demonstrate our entrepreneurial abilities and assume the mantle of our entrepreneurship.

‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways – the point however is to change it’, Karl Marx (1845) exhorted his readers. We must take the step from sage words to radical action. What is it that makes us hesitate, after all? What mental block crashes into place, leaving us passive and indifferent? In some respect nearly everyone is naïve, or so the German author, playwright, and philosopher, Friedrich von Schiller (1794) would have us believe. The result, the essentially naïve characteristic of welcoming openness, is essential if we are to continue to dare to believe in change: we need that never-flagging belief in our ability to change the grotesque apology for a society that reduces us to nonentities in one another’s eyes, and makes us shudder in horror.

How to argue against this without being forced to the bitter realisation that we are cynics? That we have shaken off our childishness and ‘understood’ that people remain who they are, and that the world has always been much the same, and will always be so? Yet such cynics are our worst enemies. Every day they surround us, disguised as parents, spouses, friends, colleagues, employers. They caution us not to be childish or immature. They admonish us to recollect ourselves and not be so unreasonable in our demands.

So much for our worst enemies – thronging about us, laying claim to us – against whom this manifesto is directed.

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP?

Hans Landström begins his book *Entreprenörskapets rötter*, ‘The roots of entrepreneurship’ (1999:24) by explaining that the word *entrepreneur* is noted in the *Dictionnaire de la langue française* as having been used for the first time in 1434, and as coming from the French verb *entreprendre*, ‘to undertake’. Entrepreneur was originally a mediaeval military term, the name of the commander of a band of mercenaries. And while mediaeval warfare is not really my province, both the French word and its German equivalent – *Unternehmer* – convey a sense of setting things in motion that still speaks volumes today.

I have noted the same theme in other authors’ work. ‘An entrepreneur is a person who *takes concrete action to create*’, writes Bengt Johannisson (1996:78). The action is concrete because it precedes the idea; the entrepreneur’s is experimentation at the sharp end. Johannisson writes of an entrepreneurship that is linked to individuals’ ability to envisage and act in collaboration. Institutions and formal organisations serve only to hinder, or just possibly to stimulate and strengthen, entrepreneurial projects. What is unique about entrepreneurship as a creative process is that individuals employ all their human skills to put each action and event to best use in their entrepreneurial projects.

I can see it before my eyes. Entrepreneurship, in all its preliminary, provisional, and tentative forms, waiting to be discovered and brought to – impromptu – fruition. The fruit of a shared social imagination, which admits of no other limits than those it itself imposes. A social imagination whose instruments are social capital, and interpersonal motivation and cross-fertilisation. An imagination that produces social innovations the likes of which the world has yet to see.

But a significant proportion of entrepreneurial research pays little attention to creativity in any active sense. In this, the dominant line of research, there is much use of definitions of entrepreneurship as a form of discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities. In the single most used definition, coined by the American gurus Scott Shane and Sankaran Venkataraman (2000:218), entrepreneurship is said to be:

*The scholarly examination of how, by whom, and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and exploited. Consequently, the field involves the study of sources of*

*opportunities; the processes of discovery, evaluation, and the exploitation of opportunities; and the set of individuals who discover, evaluate and exploit them. (Venkataraman, 1997)*

Shane and Venkataraman assume that not only the opportunities but also the technical solutions already exist ‘out there’, waiting for someone to ‘see’ them. This conceptual distinction is typical of the ‘objective’ view of the entrepreneurial process, in which opportunities are thought to exist separate from individuals. Proponents of this objective view – and here by way of examples we can look to the American researchers Connie Marie Gaglio and Jerry Katz (2001), or the Austrian economist Israel Kirzner (1997) – assume that, irrespective of an individual’s perception of the situation, it is the concrete, physical environment that has the substantial impact on individual outcomes. An opportunity is something that exists ‘out there’ on its own, in an objective form, independent of the individual.

By contrast, a moment’s introspection is enough for most of us to realise that the process of recognising an opportunity when it presents itself is far from straightforward for any individual who has a range of options. Controversially, Scott Shane (2003; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000) has argued that it is not the subject that the object that has precedence; not the idea but ‘the reality’. Briefly, the crux of my argument is the diametric opposite: that the subject instead has precedence, and that the world in its outward objectivity is engaged in an boundless subjectivisation process. Human thought, what the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel (1807) termed subjective *Geist*, ‘spirit’, is recognised here as a precondition for the world’s rational fulfilment. What happens when we think, or experience the world around us in any way, is that an identity is established between our thought and ‘the other’. We rate the other as subordinate to our subjective intent, but prefer to disregard the fact that this ordering is merely our own subjective construction. Reality, as it is perceived, is not objective but ‘socially constructed’, to echo two of Alfred Schütz’s most notable pupils, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), while it is ambiguous because it relies on simultaneously opposing interpretations, adds the American psychologist Kenneth Gergen (1999).

It follows that the process of recognising opportunity is not about ‘seeing’; it is about ‘creativity’. Opportunities are an outcome of the creative activities of individuals, an argument put, for example, by William Gartner, Nancy Carter, and Gerald Hills (2003) in *The Language of Opportunity*.

The emphasis of this manifesto is on entrepreneurship’s creative and innovative dimension. A dimension that is not limited to discovering opportunities and exploiting them. We will learn more about it if we focus on the active, creative dimension of entrepreneurship, and rely on the likes of Daniel Hjorth and Bengt Johannisson’s (1998:87) somewhat older definition of the term:

*Entrepreneurship means questioning what is already established and creating new patterns in the market, with the economic and social risks this entails.*

This view certainly has much to commend it. For one thing, I agree with Hjorth and Johannisson that entrepreneurship means questioning conventions and creating new patterns. The entrepreneurs of this manifesto can be likened to anarchists who make established institutions the targets of their actions. The sole conformable element in ‘my’ entrepreneurs’ actions is their questioning of conformity. In contrast to the popular image of entrepreneurs, they do not view institutions, once established, as fixed, but set out to manipulate them, and even reject them outright. All in order to create more scope for their own ideas. To this extent, the entrepreneurs are ‘anarchist’ in their actions. They are driven on by a general defiance, confident that all members of society ought to be aware, concerned, and outraged, that they ought not unthinkingly to accept their abuse at the hands of the powers-that-be and their lackeys.

The concern here is non-commercial entrepreneurship: a form of entrepreneurship that transcends systems and changes structures; that finds expression in febrile planning and project design. We are all entrepreneurs. No one should stand on the sidelines and idly watch what is going on. Entrepreneurship does not distinguish between enthusing others and being enthused; it cannot tell them apart. It is an open invitation, and all creative initiatives are welcome. Here I cannot agree with Hjorth and Johannisson’s rider to their definition, ‘*with the economic and social risks that this entails*’; and with this I have arrived at a working definition of entrepreneurship:

*Entrepreneurship is to question society and to create new patterns.*

Now, dear reader, it might be as well to pause for a moment to absorb the full import of this definition – and to start framing counter-arguments or questions – before continuing to its elaboration below.

## Anarchism and entrepreneurship

The moment we view entrepreneurship as non-commercial, we draw attention to how entrepreneurship as a human phenomenon can help us find our lives’ innermost meaning, liberating us from tradition, convention, and the habits of generations. Look at entrepreneurship divorced from the market discourse, and we can also see its implications for the liberation of society as a whole, for all its groups. In so doing we can see that entrepreneurship can be significant not only for individuals’ emancipation and the realisation of

their deepest wishes, but also for the well-being of the nation; it is significant on both the micro and macro levels.

Historically, entrepreneurship both in research and in practice has often been associated with processes that, initiated by the great and the good, have shielded and sometimes even re-established threatened social structures. Yet, like the entrepreneurship associated with individual (business) concerns intent on forcing the pace of change in an otherwise balanced market, anarchist entrepreneurship can be seen as a force that invokes a new order in which there are (as yet) no spoken needs, and harmony prevails. This is the task I ascribe to the brand of entrepreneurship that carries the promise of a public good that existing structures cannot match.

This is the outline of an alternative to the established image of entrepreneurs as innovators and creative organisers. Here the provocative side of being an entrepreneur is much in evidence. Until now, entrepreneurs as provocateurs have played only the most marginal of roles in the discourse of social development, but here I will give them the lead. Strong individuals, who defy social conventions by refusing to believe they should do the same thing as everyone else, who are prepared to be somebody, who elude the snares of social regulation; yes, provocative entrepreneurs arouse conflicting emotions when they burst into the social arena. We Swedes are appalled, amazed, and admiring.

The American psychiatrist Leonard Duhl (1993:55) puts it thus:

*Entrepreneurs work as irritants in fixed systems. ... Their role is to stir the pot. ... Entrepreneurs stimulate human energies that create change, and although many of these are creative and positive, other energies – greed, fear, territoriality – can also be activated. Once this is clearly understood, these forces can be used skilfully. It hampers change to label certain group or individuals as enemies whose energies need to be suppressed or bypassed.*

It is this deviation from the well-worn paths that distinguish the innovative entrepreneur, bent on toppling discourses and instigating radical change. Deviation is the trigger for entrepreneurship to create new paths.

The economist Joseph Schumpeter (1934), recognised by the academic establishment as one of the founding fathers of entrepreneurship research and viewed as a guru by many, borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche to introduce the concept of ‘creative destruction’ to economics, a process also described by the early anarchists such as the Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin (1882) as well as our old friend Karl Marx (1845). It is the modes of inquiry and analytical progression epitomised in the works of the canonical authors that has fuelled ‘my’ form of entrepreneurship as one of new methods of innovation.

Bakunin (1882) constantly urged his followers to rebel against the accepted norms and dictates of society, and to pursue their concept of the ideal state. Schumpeter (1934), while not an anarchist, firmly believed that entrepreneurs helped to improve society by using their creative and innovative abilities to disrupt current thinking – echoing Bakunin’s anarchists in their creative destruction of existing economic patterns. Schumpeter’s claim that an entrepreneur is someone who reforms or revolutionises – someone who gets things done – is a view accepted by most academics today. He also portrays entrepreneurs as people who, in fighting to achieve their dreams, are often ridiculed and even opposed by society.

Schumpeter (1934), while convinced that entrepreneurs help improve society, was of the opinion that only a handful would meet his entrepreneurial criteria; indeed, he was certain that the confidence to act beyond the range of the familiar and to overcome all resistance requires an aptitude possessed by only a small fraction of the population. Meanwhile, Bakunin (quoted in Maximoff, 1953:164) anticipated Schumpeter’s sentiments by almost a century:

*The great majority of human individuals, not only among the ignorant masses but among the civilized and privileged classes as well, do not will and do not think any differently from what the world around them wills and thinks. No doubt they believe that they do their own thinking and willing, but in reality they only reproduce slavishly, by rote, with insignificant and scarcely perceptible modifications, the thoughts and wishes of other people. This slavishness, this routine, the never-failing source of commonplaces, this lack of rebellion in the will and the lack of initiative in the thoughts of individuals, are the principal causes of the dismaying slowness of the development of humanity.*

Entrepreneurs are often looked upon as being the few men and women who have the insight, the ability, and the motivation to reform or revolutionise business markets, practices, and beliefs; the people who stand out from the crowd; the independent thinkers who are not afraid to rebel against others’ ideas. In the back of our collective minds there is fairly clear image of ‘paradisaical’ state with a lone hero riding into the sunset. The great man fixation of entrepreneurial literature is in no greater evidence than in its hagiographic treatment in biographies: Henry Ford (2008), Bill Gates (1998), Ingvar Kamprad (1999), Donald Trump (2004), and other quasi-superhuman ‘heroes’. The solitary entrepreneur is a relic of an older ‘figure of thought’, to borrow Johan Asplund’s (1991) expression, that continues to inform the structure of recent work on entrepreneurship. The entrepreneur as hero flourishes as a subtext, his solitary career there to be read between the lines.

It is not to overstate my case to say that business economists ‘create’ entrepreneurs simply by calling them such; by invoking the name, as those

'hermeneuticians of suspicion' Michel Foucault (1966) and Louis Althusser (1971) would have it. With the literature's uncritical, sometimes even devote, approach, it continues to be more a rhapsodic invocation of entrepreneurship than an analysis. Readers are denied the opportunity to assess matters critically, or to come to their own conclusions. Iconolatry blocks the way.

This is more than a little odd. If nothing else, it is a threat to entrepreneurship theory, with its brittle market terminology and miserable opinion of human nature. What is it that prevents people from turning to one another? Entrepreneurs are not lone wolves, and they are far from the heroic types so often conjured up in business economics literature.

Entrepreneurship theory has gone too far in its efforts to establish a simplified and generalised terminology. People, individuals, are far too complicated for it to be feasible, let alone reasonable, to pigeonhole them as, say, rational-economic types or self-actualisers. People are inherently complicated. This complexity finds its clearest expression in interpersonal relationships. As the famed psychologist Sigmund Freud put it in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), people come into existence through relationships – relationships are the cradle of the ego. A baby is born into a social context and comes into existence through its relationships, first and foremost with its mother. Or as the radical wordsmith Bob Hansson (2001) writes in the preface to one of his collections of poems: 'There is always a person beside you. Always. ... You don't create in a void.'

Entrepreneurs play a social and collective role out to their fingertips, and cannot do otherwise. Creativity, in the words of Daniel Ericsson in his thesis *Kreativitetsmysteriet*, 'The mystery of creativity' (2003:295),

*does not come from 'within', 'outside', or 'above'. The basis of creativity ... is instead to be found in people's different identities, and consists in and of their retrospective, on-going social interaction processes.*

Entrepreneurship is a social and thoroughly interactive project that rests, *nota bene*, on voluntariness, and the dedication that only voluntariness brings. This is a project that cannot be instigated or directed from above, dictated or planned, streamlined or steered by an authoritarian hand. It grows from below; it is the sum of its diverse, supposedly sprawling, attitude-changing, idea-stimulating actions.

To put it differently, the entrepreneurial project stands and falls with the people involved. 'Entrepreneurship' is nothing if not this. It has no independent existence. So much the worse, then, that it is the image of capitalistic entrepreneurship that captivates us. This is an image that must be relinquished.

In this manifesto, entrepreneurship is pictured as the spice of life, jolting people awake from their blind acceptance. All entrepreneurship is born out

of creative tension and generates creative tension in turn, and from that narrative pours the energy needed for change. Society's entrepreneurs, who with their provocations are the instigators and maintainers of a state of tension that extends beyond the market to society at large, with its cultural embeddedness and disciplinary institutions, keeps society – and themselves – alert. They reveal what does not work in the welfare edifice, and transform failings into opportunities. That entrepreneurship is about *doing* is something most can agree on; entrepreneurs create something new, occasionally by demolishing something old.

In Sweden, a new academic current emphasises entrepreneurs who are not driven by profit, business interests, or by the chance to solve problems that are beyond the power of the state sector (see, for example, recent doctoral theses by Malin Gawell, 2006; Karin Berglund, 2007; and Elisabeth Jansson, 2008). Instead, certain entrepreneurs are said to possess an innate drive of a more social or societal character; one such example is the 'anarchist fellowship' described here. They are often characterised by their willingness to develop and trade cultural capital, and to do so without recourse to economies other than in the word's widest meaning – that of being sparing with resources. These entrepreneurs challenge current norms while at the same time creating a new understanding of the issues involved or of new working methods.

These entrepreneurial projects can rarely be fully appreciated in a traditional economic terms. Instead, they are better appreciated in the light of social capital, entrepreneurial spirit, and a newfound estimation of the resources generated. Our current understanding of how such assets are engineered is thin. Many, however, set great store by this kind of pioneering spirit. The term 'economy' in anarchist entrepreneurship stretches beyond business economic models and terminology.

Society's many institutions have spun a tight web of norms and regulations, some well documented, others unspoken, which enfold all who are citizens. Yet it is not self-evident that altruism and high democratic ambitions lead inexorably to economically, socially, and culturally sustainable societies. Entrepreneurs of a different metal than those envisaged in entrepreneurship theory are needed to demonstrate the inherent weaknesses in the beneficial care that follows us from cradle to grave, but that lures us into inattentiveness and passivity towards changes in our surroundings. We are too ready to be lulled into a sense of security, believing in benign institutions or companies capable of surmounting every challenge.

What are needed are powers of initiative and organisation sufficient to protest against an all too uncritical view of society. What is needed is the brand of entrepreneurship that takes upon itself to question everything that is too convenient, too credible.

As we are faced with an aggressively commercialised modern order, replete with segregation, internecine struggles, and rampant imperialism, that endlessly spreads terror and brutality, and reduces people to the level of at best consumers of ‘experiences’ and at worst victims, this is a task that should not be postponed a moment longer.

What is not to loathe about this non-society of ours, a non-society that forbids people to be creative?

# FREE THE CREATIVE INDIVIDUAL!

Creativity is not about the ability to think ‘better’, ‘correctly’, or ‘differently’. It is better seen as an existential phenomenon. Ultimately, it is about a chance to be ourselves (Lasse Ekstrand, 1988); to be ourselves and to feel our own strength; the rebellious power of the imagination: our uninhibited and uncensored ideas.

It is the creative way of looking at things, more than anything else, that makes us feel that life is worth living. Life can immediately be interpreted in terms of opportunities and individual growth. In terms of openings. Taking a creative view of the world is to say no to all the truths served up; no to accepting the familiar. The creative no. It is to be constantly alert to new challenges and adventures. The creative way never lets the outer world ‘stagnate’. There is always the world to explain, to marvel at, to try out our curiosity on. We are no longer the prisoners of everyday life, confined to repeating the familiar. The opposite of this is a relationship with our surroundings characterised by complacency and passivity; the world in all respects viewed only as something with which we must comply.

It is our own creativity, the product of our own hands, that I am concerned with here: the means by which we discover and affirm ourselves. The creativity I write of springs from a free and disobedient attitude to the world. Our artistic works, our actions, are a ringing protest. We break free. We rejoice in our burgeoning rebellion.

Max Horkheimer (1972) tells us;

*‘Although most people never overcome the habit of berating the world for their difficulties, those who are too weak to make a stand against reality have no choice but to obliterate themselves by identifying with it. They are never rationally reconciled to civilization. Instead, they bow to it, secretly accepting the identity of reason and domination, of civilization and the ideal, however much they may shrug their shoulders. Well-informed cynicism is only another mode of conformity. These people willingly embrace or force themselves to accept the rule of the stronger as the eternal norm. Their whole life is a continuous effort to suppress and abase nature, inwardly or outwardly, and to identify themselves with its more powerful surrogates –the race, fatherland, leader, cliques, and tradition. For them, all these words mean the same thing – the irresistible reality that must be honored and obeyed. However, their own natural impulses, those antagonistic to the various demands of civilization, lead a devious undercover life within them.’*

The emancipation project is each individual's own particular responsibility. No one else can do it for us. It cannot be delegated. We must 'save' ourselves. We carry our own fate in our own hands. We alone are responsible for what becomes of our lives. We cannot shift the blame from ourselves to 'structures' or 'bad luck'. We cannot depend on politicians or experts – professional proxies.

Karl Marx (1845) famously maintained that life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. Here this is turned upside down. Emancipation must start in our heads and our hearts. Within us there is a constant 'civil war' that rages between acquiescence and revolt. The struggle – 'the class struggle', as Marx would have preferred it – is a subjective free-for-all, no more, no less. Either we give up and subside into indifference and ennui – or we are set alight. The German polyartist, Joseph Beuys (1993), in his every move warned us of the quietly suffocating existence of the living dead; something to which Lasse Ekstrand and I return in two of the manifesto's essays. We do not need to die a slow living death so long before our time.

Emancipation exists primarily on the mental plane. It is an emancipation of the mind. Its path is smoothed, albeit under circumstances that are difficult, if not unbearable, for many, by the radical social changes following in the wake of the industrial dismantling of Western economies, with the associated trends of lower levels of employment and the flight of jobs to low-wage countries. In this respect, reality is the best teacher. Individuals can no longer shut their eyes to what is happening around them. Anyone can be affected, everyone is vulnerable: many are 'left over'; are not 'sought-after'. Yet a transformation of the mind does not automatically follow a transformation of society. Consciousness lags behind, insight is slow.

## The Art of Courage

For me, art is a space in our social existence where anything and everything that otherwise is unwarranted has a guaranteed place. The result is that whatever is not useful, whatever is the antithesis of the widely accepted, whatever is asocial or antisocial even, is particularly interesting. Art in this sense is an expression of whatever individuals or society would prefer to exclude from their world, but that remains there nevertheless. Art offers no new ideas about how to generate new markets to exploit, for it dwells on the problems rather than the solutions. Interesting art challenges the ideological mechanisms that produce such suggestions.

How can art speak a radically different language of experience? How can it represent quantitative differences? How can art conjure up the image of emancipation, create a need for emancipation that reaches down to the roots of human existence?

As Herbert Marcuse (1977:IX), tired of imitative art's unhealthy influence on those who passively consume it, wrote once:

*By virtue of its aesthetic form, art is largely autonomous vis a vis the given social relations. In its autonomy, art both protests these relations, and, at the same time, transcends them. Thereby art subverts the dominant consciousness, the ordinary experience.[...] A work of art can be called revolutionary if, by virtue of the aesthetic transformation, it represents, in the exemplary fate of individuals, the prevailing unfreedom and the rebelling forces, thus breaking through the mystified (and petrified) social reality, and opening the horizon of change (liberation).*

It is not enough to have a broad, social perspective on entrepreneurship in order to capture its 'shocking' quality as I would wish. Who ultimately are we, the individuals who will build anarchist entrepreneurship? What first drives us to take the initiative? Why can we not refrain from doing so, if we take it to extreme lengths? It all comes down to people: what we are like, and the crucial choices we take in this short life of ours.

What choices? Well, we choose living death or life; indifference or passion; numbness or ardour; resignation or enthusiasm; hackneyed ideas or compelling ideas. To be led by others, subordinate to those whose motives we can never fully know; or to be our own dynamic entrepreneurs – artists of life, producers of our own dreams. We alone are responsible for the creation of meaning in life.

To be an entrepreneur is to do much more than to 'found a company' and be 'in full control'. It is to transcend boundaries; it is to spawn projects that are 'hard to judge' and 'hard to evaluate' – 'free'. Crucial, in other words, when there is a tendency amongst those who provide project funding to preselect on the basis of certain politically correct criteria and ever narrowing terms of reference.

Obvious perhaps, but worth saying nevertheless: industrialism is one of the wheels in our heads, to borrow a phrase from the anarchist Max Stirner (1844), and when the factories fall silent – as fall silent they will – and industrial society fades into the past, there will be in all likelihood a crying need for the far-sighted, driven, and inventive entrepreneurs of this world, able to develop mentality-changing projects; able to challenge and outmanoeuvre rigid 'figures of thought'; able to break the rusty shackles on our minds.

A writer I keep returning to, my good friend the sociologist Lasse Ekstrand (1994:54), has said that the greatest test is yet to come. Certainly entrepreneurship is different way of thinking about the economy and society without landing ourselves with state capitalism and a bureaucratic administrative inferno. True, no one today can predict what it might mean in future, what the implications might be. Yet if we do *not* think along different lines we will be hauled off, stunned prisoners on the bus to our own

Auschwitz. The reappearance of the death camps – museums and tourist ‘attractions’ for now – could be the horrific consequence of our failure to prevent the rise of ‘two-thirds society’, as the French philosopher, André Gorz (1989), moved by the hard facts in a number of countries including his homeland, warns in his book *Critique of economic reason*. Two-thirds of the working population are active members of the workforce, one-third remain permanently excluded. There are even those, like Lasse Ekstrand (1996) in his book *Arbetets död och medborgarlön*, ‘The end of work and basic income’, who outline a nightmare scenario of a coming ‘one-fifth society’. Expressions such as ‘one-third’ and ‘one-fifth’ are used to capture a strongly stratified society in which a growing proportion of the population are excluded – primarily from the radically changing labour market. They are marginalised, and many are ‘losers’. They never make their way back into working life, in all its unpredictability. The wheels keep grinding despite shrinking numbers of manufacturers. Automisation and computerisation have reduced the demand for labour. Fewer people can produce more. Ever fewer people are ‘needed’, scarcely even as consumers in an ever more specialised supply-side economy. According to the logic of late capitalism, there are quite simply too many people. Not all of them are needed to keep production going. Not unless the predominant trend – *Silent takeover: global capitalism and the death of democracy*, as the young Cambridge professor, Noreena Herz (2001), tellingly entitled her European bestseller – is broken.

When it comes down to it, do we have any choice? No! is my spontaneous response. After all, what might our alternatives be? If we are prepared to take this to its furthest, most radical extreme, what then? We cannot choose *not* to be existential entrepreneurs; we cannot let entrepreneurship recede into our everyday lives, if we are to avoid an interminable living death, to avoid reducing life to nothing more than a series of preliminaries, a grey waiting room.

Humankind has lived through some dark periods in history, but our own period has no parallel. Ours is the first period in history in which all the horrors have been utterly unnecessary. Our is the first to possess the technology and the other resources necessary to guarantee food, shelter, education, and a meaningful life for every human on earth, however rapid population growth may be. But the ideas and well-tried technologies that could solve even the worst of today’s problems are met with stubborn disinterest. We have not only become brutalised, we are impotent.

What is it that prevents our creative impulses from flowering into the great achievements, the marvels, of our day? It is high time we ransacked our consciences. Why do so many of us deny our own innate greatness, choosing instead a lesser life of subservience – bowed down, defensive – rather than openly rising to the challenge? Why do so many young people in particular choose extrovert or self-consuming destruction? What are the forces that rein in social entrepreneurship? What helps the sententious,

argumentative, and often self-important super-ego to hold back the passionately creative, burning, ‘improbable’ ego? When and where, in the crushing moment of negation, are passion and creativity undone? How to ‘foster’ the thrilling substance of a creative moment? The creativity we so easily miss, with our careful cultivated inability to use all our senses to live for the moment, however unpromising.

Postmodern social entrepreneurs – anarchist entrepreneurs, the ones I believe and hope will inherit the earth – work with social arts, produce social art, and are social, interactive artists. They belong to the future, and the future begins today! Do you dare to imagine those inherited scales falling from your eyes, revealing a society of social art? A society of which we can only glimpse the contours, dimly, in the imaginings of our bolder peers? Can you hear the sounds, the laughter of the future’s spectacular ingenuity?

Both art and entrepreneurship can be understood variants of the art of living, something that in turn can be seen as a continuous effort to realise ourselves as an ever incomplete work of art; life seen as a work of art, which it is an art in itself to create (Lasse Ekstrand, 2004; Elisabeth Jansson, 2008; Yvonne Savy, 2000). Art, like entrepreneurship, is thus central to life and, as a form of artistic action, by extension to society as a whole.

It makes very little sense to relinquish entrepreneurship to the business economists of this world.

When all is said and done, entrepreneurship in the self-challenging sense used in this manifesto is a question of courage. *The courage to create* (1975) by the therapist Rollo May is a book still well worth reading. We need the courage to choose the realisation of artistic ability as our way in life, regardless of the precipitous darkness that looms in the ego’s forever-introspective search. ‘*Angst essen Seele auf*’, as Lasse Ekstrand has often warned me, ‘fear devours the soul’, a phrase borrowed from the hyper-productive demon director, Rainer Werner Fassbinder.<sup>4</sup> Terrified people are not creative; they cannot be. Fear stills all creative energy.

No good society was ever built on fear. Fear must thus be destroyed if postmodern society is ever to be more than a theory, a vision. To live creatively – to be capable of forcing ourselves to sublimate and symbolise, convey, move, write, paint, install, sculpt, ‘flash mob’ – is the best way to handle unremitting existential fear.

In postmodern society we all will play a part, one and all. This is the seed of potential in each of us; a potential that will not be denied. All people are presumptive entrepreneurs. Yet our stifling social institutions, such as school and the workplace, and, perhaps above all, our own inner resistance, our own socially produced inhibitions, prevent the realisation of entrepreneurship.

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<sup>4</sup> Fassbinder is the coldest of directors. His cinematography is often glacial in the extreme, and you are left wondering whether the film will ever end; when the moment will come when you can decently get up and leave.

Instead of a life of creativity and discovery, a life of compliance and self-denial. And that in a non-society little more than a gigantic labour camp, a brutal factory. Humankind a cog rather than a free agent.

# THE METHODOLOGY OF THE TANGIBLE

To be radical is to go to the bottom of things. This was how the young Karl Marx (1845) saw it – that Hegel in a beard, racked by guilt at having to use Western thought to criticise the very thing he loved and could not imagine out of existence. Radicalism is by nature extremist; an extremism of the mind. Expectations increase. If we go to the bottom of things, we see everything in new, harsh light, and it is only that perspective that can give us the full, unsparring picture. From the bottom we see the truth. I also read Marx's call as a seminal description of the role of intellectuals; intellectuals should avoid becoming ideological, the source of a false consciousness.

All entrepreneurship is to some extent ephemeral in meaning. It promises something it cannot keep. It sets the idea of entrepreneurship into a rigid mould. Whenever creativity is dimmed, entrepreneurship is dead, uninteresting. How best to depict this active, fleeting meaning? How to convey the transience of entrepreneurship without losing sight of its revolutionary potential? How to fuse nonsense with pure originality in a single, intense moment that breathes new life into everyone who has the luck to be present?

And where best to deal out this entrepreneurial kick on the shins?

It is my hope that this manifesto will serve as a conscious provocation – indeed, provocation is used in this text as a method. The books listed in the bibliography constitute my empirical material. Although the books are apparently presented *en masse*, and my approach may thus appear unnecessarily sweeping and imprecise, I would still argue that it is still open to the reader to examine the content of my provocation. The provocation is thus not only a speculative arrangement, a wild intellectual salvo. It can be empirically tested – or, to be accurate, it is sufficiently empirically testable – given time to consult the literature fully.

What position to adopt if our ambition is broader, deeper insight? Our starting point should be to view entrepreneurship as primarily a human creation; an 'instrument' used to achieve a broadly defined state. This hesitant, seeking approach depends in every important respect on entrepreneurship's secondary importance compared with existence itself. Entrepreneurship as a phenomenon is linked with the term 'meaning'. By human standards, entrepreneurship always has meaning in one sense or

another. We create ourselves through our actions. It becomes a question of entrepreneurship seen in terms of understanding: of what different forms of entrepreneurship mean for different, committed individuals.

Drawing upon the writings of both the Frankfurt School (Theodor Adorno, 1966; Walter Benjamin 1969 et al.) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1946; 1968), for whom works of art embody a subversive and emancipatory potential by virtue of their ability to ‘open’ the established reality and negate reified consciousness, I argue that in the present socio-historical climate – swamped with images and information intended to regiment our social understanding in such a way as to reify a global corporate capitalist economic and social order – any works expressing a creative imagination preserve the potential for social change. I contend that the disciplinary myopia that systematically avoids any encounter with meaning, any encounter with the expressive qualities of art, and instead seeks out practical, pragmatic problems, serves only to produce and reproduce existing conditions that thwart the possibility of revolutionary social change – hindering anarchist entrepreneurship.

Jean-Paul Sartre, the grand old man of modern existentialism, advocates what Lasse Ekstrand (1988) has termed *the methodology of the tangible*. Sartre (1962:13) challenges us to take an interest in ‘real people, in their work and privations’. This interest in living people’s projects must have true depth and *real* engagement. Existential explorations must necessarily be heuristic (Sartre 1962:112), and their starting points are non-abstract models. These can never replace real people. In other words, there is not only the real world to explain, but equally a world of the possible waiting to be discovered or created. It is humans themselves who are the basis of this. Not as passive objects of learning. No, they are the ‘practical organism producing knowledge as a moment of praxis’ (1962:153). Any existential exploration is closely linked to whatever is palpable in the researcher’s own life. The relationship with whatever is studied is no me–it relationship.

According to Sartre (1946), it is only through our actions that we exist and live. Sartre starts from the idea that there is no such thing as a genuinely human spirit, be it scientific or divine. It is when we exist freely, make choices, and act accordingly, that our being is created. A life given over to thought and speculation is to Sartre’s mind a form of self-delusion. Instead we should set out to create our lives by being active and choosing the paths that we wish to create for ourselves – and others. ‘Economic’ and ‘rational man’ can safely encounter ‘passionate man’. After all, it was Sartre (1962:31) who wrote: ‘There is no reality except in action’. He advocated courageous action seeking to triumph over the abyss. We *are* the project, the transcendent, according to Sartre. It is in our very being to project and transcend. Our lives’ projects and transcendence are what we are in essence. One is never free of one’s ‘situation’, Sartre tells us, though one is always free to deny (‘negate’) that situation and try to change it. To be human, to be

conscious, is to be free to imagine, free to choose, and responsible for one's lot in life. It is this project that defines the individual, the project that is something more than pure will. It is thus not enough to will something to happen, we must also act. We must be made aware of what it is we are doing. That is existentialism's project, its import.

Sartre (1962:119) establishes the ground rules that we should never violate: Human existence precedes essence ... people first exist and confront themselves, emerge in the world, and then define themselves, their essence. You have only to add that the world is man that man's depth is the world, therefore, that the depth comes into the world by man. In terms of the manifesto in hand, we can say that there is no 'truth' or 'meaning' beyond Sartre's ground rules. There is no entrepreneurship beyond Sartre's individual. Not really.

In Sartrean spirit, I problematise both the term entrepreneurship and its construal. We can ask individuals about their goals or intentions, but we run into difficulties if we try to tackle entrepreneurship in the same way. Entrepreneurship has no goals of its own. It is not a speaking subject. It is individuals who have goals; individuals who are subjects. And our concern here is with active subjects. The world is the individuals' world. The driving force behind the action arises in a series of extra-organisational settings. We cannot choose to ignore whatever is difficult; whatever conveys meaning and significance; whatever sheds light on different phenomena; or indeed whatever perplexes, or makes us want to know more, to dig deeper, without forcing us back in desperation on the unambiguous, on whatever excludes or restricts. The empirical studies that follow, in which 'empirical' has not been trivialised or narrowed to extinction, are unconventional in character. The method is heuristic, as Sartre said. It aspires to discover and lay bare reality, in all its diversity and complications. Apparent unambiguity is less in evidence. The scholarly project is raised to the level of an adventure. In principle, anything can happen in the participants' eyes. Of the adventure itself we know very little in advance. The methodology of the tangible offers us 'methods' that enable us to take stock of people's individual situations. To catch them in the thick of their life projects, their lives.

I seek the person behind the entrepreneur: the authentic human element; the interpersonal relationships; the footprints in the sand; the messages written in the dust; the faint breath on the mirror; the dawning of subjective existence, the search for self; the unpleasant and unthinking gestures of a psyche in revolt. My matter is the human individual, sovereign, irreplaceable. And while I have chosen to start from methodological zero, my approach is not ethnographical or, to put it differently, organisationally phenomenological. I choose to side with the human element in the entrepreneurial process, and do not hesitate to do so.

Ignore any doubts, even if my entrepreneurship theory can be thought naïve or romantic, if for no other reason that it is quite possible to argue the

reverse – that the established entrepreneurship theory is romantic in its own way, with its theoretical claims and expected implications – although I will not go into detail here, and will let my call for a keenly critical reading suffice. I am not bothered if it is thought an indignant, uncompromising, and, in a strictly academic sense, impossible theory. ‘Impossible’ perhaps because of its immense pathos, above all else, but also in the traditional meaning of impenetrable. I would even go so far as to claim that its unmethodical approach is its strength. In scholarly terms, it is what makes it interesting, as it rises above such dualisms as quantitative and qualitative method, or discovery versus proof; the dualisms of a scholarly theory and method devoid of meaning. Or comfort.

It is the complex, playful, creative, and, in certain crucial situations, angst-ridden individual who is my ‘test subject’, my principal interest. My perspective is extremely individualistic, and is informed by my conviction that the individual is always rational on an existential level. Rationally irrational. Individuals cannot be ‘observed’ or studied ‘from the outside’; they are not open to practical scholarly examination. I have not measured attitudes, conducted interviews, circulated questionnaires, or tested crude psychological hypotheses. Instead I have listened out for the existentially rational individuals who can be heard struggling to cast off their organisational trappings, and have asked what the meaning in their lives might be. The individual wants to become visible. The individual, to borrow a phrase from the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, wants ‘*Dasein*’, existence.<sup>5</sup>

Confused? How best to proceed? I commend a close reading of the – numerous – masters. Besides Marx, who is indispensable, it is well worth acquainting yourself with the work of Theodor Adorno, one of the men behind the Frankfurt School. Adorno maintained that thought is movement:

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<sup>5</sup> The key term in Martin Heidegger’s (1927) philosophy is *Dasein*, literally ‘being-there’ or ‘there-being’, usually rendered in English as ‘presence’ or ‘existence’. Presence here refers to the presence of everything, a collective existence, in which mankind is also included. But mankind is not only in existence, but also *Dasein*, indicating the distinction between mere existence and human existence: *Dasein* is existent. Heidegger wishes to displace, or even eliminate, the subject from its dominant relational position in everyday language; matters that were otherwise discussed with psychological–anthropological language and are now described in ontological terms. When it comes to *Angst*, ‘anxiety’ – a term Heidegger borrowed from Søren Kierkegaard (1844), albeit reconstrued – it is noted that ‘anxiety alarms’. Unlike terms such as ‘fear’ or ‘dread’, which have definite objects, ‘anxiety’ is non-specific. Alarm–anxiety thus makes manifest *das Nichts*, ‘Nothingness’, in an immediate and intuitive manner. Anxiety is thus no ‘thought-object’, but more of an underlying tone, an elusive feeling of homelessness. If we deny this feeling and seek to evade anxiety, we give ourselves up to decadence, submit to mere existence, and become one in the crowd or, as Heidegger would have it, *das Mann*, the neutral masses, ‘They’.

never a finished product or system, always a critical, 'negative' movement that should never stagnate. Thought should never be reduced to a 'method'. What the upshot of this might be in practical terms is not easy to say, and nor did Adorno want it to be. Indeed, he made a point of it. Time and again his readers try to get a handle on him; time and again they fail. Yet it is inspiring to meet with such stiff intellectual resistance as Adorno offers.

# CRITICAL THEORY – A SCHOLARLY APPROACH

Critical thought is usually said to be central to all academic endeavour, but is a term more often invoked than understood. A great deal of research is limited in its critical ambitions and concentrates on a lack of rationality in the way social institutions function: their general failings or problematic relationships are dissected and documented. However, what I in this manifesto term critical research goes much further in its critical ambitions, guided by a sophisticated frame of reference with which to implement it.

Those familiar with the traditions of critical theory will recognise essentially two ‘emergent’ schools of social inquiry in this manifesto: the neo-Marxist tradition of critical theory associated most closely with the works of Max Horkheimer (1937), Theodor Adorno (1974), Jürgen Habermas (1985), and Herbert Marcuse (1969); and the genealogical writings of Michel Foucault (1972). I have been influenced by both of these perspectives in different ways and to different degrees. From critical theory, I draw a forceful critique of the positivist conception of science and instrumental rationality, informed especially by Adorno’s concept of negative dialectics (1966), which posits an unstable, contradictory relationship between concepts and objects; Foucault, meanwhile, invites me to explore the ways in which discourses are implicated in power relationships, and how power and knowledge serve as dialectically reinitiating practices that regulate what is considered reasonable and true.

By putting my faith in these eminent dead white men I can confidently assert that critical research rises above the simplest form of criticism; by exploring hypotheses and deeper social formulations, it sets out to do more than scratch the surface of the sources of discontent and customary contradictions. Max Horkheimer (1972) puts it succinctly when he argues that critical theory, and indeed critical research, is never satisfied with merely increasing knowledge (see also Henry Giroux, 1997; Ira Shor, 1996). By criticism is meant the study of social institutions, ideologies, discourses, and forms of consciousness in terms of representation and dominance; the critic considers whether, and if so how, they have circumscribed human imagination, autonomy, and choice. All attention is focused on the hypotheses and notions that are taken for granted.

## The critical tradition

Witness jazz-hating Theodor Adorno – since childhood called ‘Teddie’ by his close friends – in a photograph taken in 1923 with Walter Benjamin and other radicals of the day, the proud intelligentsia of the Left.<sup>6</sup> The people in the photograph positively reek of self-assurance. Intellectually they do not have to bow to anyone, and they know it. A collection of famous intellectual names a scant ten years before the terror began in earnest: all the authors in the photo lived to see their books burned in the square before the Berlin State Opera in May 1933. Thrown into the flames by murderous fanatics who had never so much as glanced inside, and would scarcely have thought of doing so. ‘A real German is no intellectual,’ the Nazis brayed.

It is one of the ironies of fate that Hitler and Nazism contributed to the revitalisation of American scientific theory, philosophy, literature, and art, thanks to what amounted to the forced emigration of German-speaking intellectuals. In the 1930s the members of the Frankfurt School, originators of critical theory, fled to the US. The Frankfurt School’s politically oriented scholarship was such that it was branded by the Nazis as openly subversive.

The institute for social research at the university of Frankfurt am Main, the home of what would later become known as the Frankfurt School – or as they themselves preferred, ‘The school of the critical theory of society’ – was founded in 1923 following discussions between Felix Weil, Friedrich Pollock, and Max Horkheimer.<sup>7</sup> They had a shared interest in the then fairly ill defined field of social research. They also shared a Marxist outlook – important sources of inspiration were Karl Marx (1845), Max Weber (1905), Immanuel Kant (1781), Friedrich Hegel (1807), and Sigmund Freud (1921).

Amongst the enduring achievements of the Frankfurt School is their analysis of reason in a technological society, and the warning note they sounded that reason would shrink to an instrumental, purposive rationality, subordinate to economic determinism. Any elaboration on these positions will require close ideological criticism, an eye to history and emancipation, and scope for ‘critically unfettered thought’.

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<sup>6</sup> If all that is known of Adorno’s cultural criticism and general aesthetics is that he had little time for jazz, the photograph becomes an account of the defence of high culture against popular culture. In the posthumous and incomplete *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970), Adorno uses his aesthetic theory to demonstrate the existence of a social content in all art, even the most advanced and farthest removed from society and its concerns. It is common to read Adorno as saying that ultimately there is no other critical agency than art itself. ‘Art’s expression is the societal anti-thesis of society’ (1970:19).

<sup>7</sup> There is a tunnel linking the Functionalist building in Frankfurt where the institute was housed after 1930 and Sigurd Hoel’s *Theatercafé*.

## A master at drawing a distinction

To my mind, critical theory can best be defined as texts whose paradigm combines the struggle against oppression with a fearless search for new avenues of social change. Whenever I read critical theory, whenever I am confronted with the struggles of others attempting to find a voice and instigate change, even as they deconstruct oppressive forces, I do not just read. I drink it in, wallow in it, let it seep into my pores. I feel the supportive presence of the critical theorists beside me as I navigate the world, offering me their experience and wisdom. These theorists are the people who more than any other have helped me to remain hopeful.

It is in my encounter with the voices of critical theory that I have learned to hope for change, to believe that it is actually possible, that the struggle is worthwhile, and that justice is attainable. The resonant voices of critical theory have helped me come alive. Their experience salves my intellectual wounds; their wisdom spurs me on in the struggle for justice. Their example convinces me that the effort is worthwhile. In short, I believe that critical theory has the power to preserve sanity, to deeply transform any of its readers.

Critical research is intended to overturn existing social realities and, to borrow from the eminent Swedish sociologist, Johan Asplund (1979), to speed our emancipation from the ingrained ‘figures of thought’ that so overshadow us, preventing us from freely taking our own decisions. The focus is more on questioning than on confirming established norms; more on disturbing than transmitting traditions and conventions; more on exposing than preserving; more on encouraging fruitful differences of opinion than superficial agreement. The purpose in all this is to advance emancipation, to encourage people to reconsider, and to analyse oppressive ideas and identities both emotionally and cognitively.

The crucial point is to critically examine and question phenomena – ‘figures of thought’ – that are generally held to be self-evident. In order to do so, we need to find methods that will shed light on accepted truths, theories, and institutionalising trends from a fresh perspective. In truth, it is a shift in perspective that is needed. We need to exert ourselves to find alternative ways of viewing the world.

Figures of thought amount to involuntary modes of thought that direct our thinking and, indirectly, our actions. Figures of thought are not readily accessible, for they are not at the forefront of our minds. They are not readily exposed to critical examination. They function as invisible, inner mechanisms that shepherd our thoughts. The problem is that the way we think about certain phenomena – ‘society’, for example – is generally viewed as something natural, almost a given. We convince ourselves that things cannot be any other way. Social conditions are never problematised. We immerse ourselves in the narrow confines of our thoughts. When

someone takes a swing at our figures of thought, we leap to defend ourselves. It can provoke real anxiety to be confronted with reservations about how we think, for casting such doubts creates existential insecurity. We do not want to be unsettled in our delusions.

It is a characteristic of these figures of thought, these modes that determine how we think and even more how we do *not* think, that they are inaccessible. They constitute a kind of hidden director, operating on a subconscious level. Much is required to tease them out into the open, and to replace them with other mental instructions.

This kind of mental enslavement is not so very different from the discourse envisaged by Michel Foucault (1972), for whom discourse is a blanket term for a subconscious, ‘regulated’ amalgam of terms, theses, and theories that together make up an articulated notion about something or someone. A discourse, writes Asplund (1979), conveys one or more figures of thought.

In other words, figures of thought are invisible, inner catches. A very simplified example of how we can be locked into our figures of thought is offered by the famous duck–hare figure (Figure 1) made famous by the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953).



Figure 1: The duck–hare (adapted from Wittgenstein, 1953)

The figure – a series of pen strokes – is the material for two different figures, a hare (looking to the right) and a duck (looking to the left). If we are locked into one figure of thought, we can only see the hare or the duck, but not both.

A figure of thought, like a discourse, is in itself ‘invisible’. It exists in the fact that it speaks to us, but we find it difficult to unearth its inner structure. What we have to go on are hints, vague warning signs. A figure of thought is there, but at the same time is not. It is not an identifiable empirical entity. This brings to mind Friedrich Engels, Marx’s intellectual companion, who wrote in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1886) of the ‘inner, hidden laws’ that must be discovered. Stephen Toulmin (1961), the British philosopher and theorist of science, puts it in a similar way, suggesting that the phenomena we unthinkingly assume to be self-evident are always seen from a perspective that is encumbered with its own ideas and preconceptions.

The upshot is that people can only view phenomena in a manner with which they are already familiar. Their minds have inner catches. How then to find them? How to reflect, criticise, and react sincerely? How to overthrow conventions and break down boundaries in order to start afresh? Once drawn, such a distinction should ideally offer increased scope for action. The sheer strength of the contrast is a necessary factor. It should be able to reveal all that has been hidden in the dominant outlook. It ought to have a provocative character, fully able to challenge established notions.

## Theory as provocation

Sometimes when I read the founders of critical theory, such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1947) or Herbert Marcuse (1964), I find myself wishing I could be included. They have a forthright style and an attractive self-assurance, so confident are they of their place in public debate in general and in the boundless project in which citizenship is forged in particular. Their lucid insights into the social apparatus' technological and administrative control of its members' thoughts, feelings, and self-images are a mark of the intellectual social scientists' contribution in increasing individual autonomy. Their own ambitions, their personal social circumstances, are spelled out in a brisk examination of the obstacles in their path. The result of what amounts to an intellectual trauma is that the subject is so shaken that the ego-administration's grip loosens. Their 'research strategy' is thus strikingly free from the dead hand of conventional scholarly language, with its supposed neutrality – and its often predictable, conservative, and dull results.

The stirring style that distinguishes many works of critical theory can be illustrated by the following quote from Theodor Adorno (1974:183):

*From the domestic servants and governesses tormenting upper-class children to show them what life is like, by way of the teachers from Westerwald extirpating in them, along with the use of foreign words, all joy in language, and then the officials and employees leaving them to stand in queues, the non-commissioned officers treading on them, there is a straight line to Gestapo tortures and the bureaucrats of the gas-chambers*

Which approach to choose? Conventional common sense, which may well appear neutral and objective but is often conservative in effect? Or de-familiarisation, which means viewing everything taken for granted, instead of natural and self-evident, as strange, exotic, and changeable? The point of critical research is to make the all too familiar strange again; to see it with wide-open eyes (Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, i.e. alienation effect).

The critical theory tradition would argue that this is best achieved by asking the questions that a variety of elite groups would rather see unanswered (or are at any rate uninterested in), but that in terms of these groups' unfair advantage seem urgent. Another, often overlapping criterion is to ask the questions that challenge common sense. The point is to contribute to a way of thinking that is radically different from the one so prevalent today. Thus the one thing to avoid doing is to adapt to conventional ideas.<sup>8</sup>

Critical theory sets out to stimulate radically different thinking. Its starting point is an existing notion – a frame of reference, a theory, an ideology, a social practice – that is judged to have a dominant and problematic effect, partly because it is so widespread, partly because it curbs the chance to establish independent, ethically founded positions and outstrip authority. Parallel with the business of identifying the existing notion, an alternative theoretical notion of its counterpart must be developed. This is often done tacitly.

By showing how social constructions (cf. Peter Berger & Thomas Luckmann, 1966; Kenneth Gergen, 1999) can benefit certain interests, while alternative constructions of reality are obscured or underrated, the dominant relationships between them are cancelled out, and the conflicts between the different interests are opened to wide-ranging discussion. Critical research, in seeking dissension, looks for patterns of discussion that can help establish a more open consensus. Attention is firmly focused on different forms of false consciousness, systematically distorted communication, routines, normalisation, and consent that generate special interests and prevent people from truly understanding, expressing, or acting in accordance with their own interests. As Mats Alvesson, a professor of business economics, and Stanley Deetz, a professor of communication (2000:41) have written: 'Critical theory demonstrates an outspoken commitment to values. It brings a mistrustful and

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<sup>8</sup> An elegant example of this is provided by Johan Asplund (1970:121), quoted in Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldböck (2000:132), who objects to the widespread belief that utility maximisation is normal and rational, which leaves any number of exceptions that require explanation, given that it is thought irrational not to try to maximise profits. 'Here one might conveniently ask oneself: Why the hell? Why can't it be assumed just as naturally that people don't try to maximise their profits? And if somebody does go in for maximising his profit – surely this can be regarded as a phenomenon?' Compare this with the American political economist and sociologist, Thorstein Veblen, who wrote in his principal work, *The theory of the leisure class* of 1899, that it is utterly unreasonable to see man as, 'a lightning calculator of pleasures and pains, who oscillates like a homogenous globule of desire of happiness under the impulse of stimuli that shift him about the area, but leave him intact'.

therapeutic, but also an activist, tone to the discourse. The ambition is to help people to take better action.<sup>7</sup>

Theory, to the critical theorists' way of thinking, is about how we think about the world, and not its abstract representation. The important theories that have shaped how we think and define the issues of social science are strikingly short on actual data, as the American psychologist Kenneth Gergen (1982) has shown. The clearest example is presented by Sigmund Freud's works (cf. Freud, 1915). They offer convincing ideas about vital issues in our lives that often question both common assumptions and dominant values. It should not come as any surprise that the work of Thomas Kuhn (1962) has shown that the same is true in the natural sciences.

There are good reasons why certain theories are accepted and others not, but it is rarely a matter of fact. The prevalence of some theories is best explained in terms of cycles of popularity, indifference, careerism, or social and economic circumstances. Theory and research are emotionally charged. Broad factors such as the general spirit of the age do not only influence theories' impact and popularity, but also their content.

A theory's abstraction from its lived context is crucial to critical reflection. In his inaugural address of 1931, *Die gegenwärtige Lage der sozialphilosophie und Aufgaben eines Instituts für Sozialforschung*, Max Horkheimer (1931:44) sets out his programme for multidisciplinary social research,<sup>9</sup> drawing on psychology and sociology to help pose socio-philosophical questions:

*Which connections can be demonstrated between the economic role of a specific social group in a specific era in specific countries, the transformation of the psychic structure of its individual members, and the ideas and institutions as a whole that influence them and that they created?*

## Political assumptions and ideological criticism

In all research, philosophical, theoretical, and political assumptions are central, even if they are tacit, marginalised, or denied. Nor in any kind of research is it possible to avoid political and ethical issues. Our primary choices concern not theory and values per se, but rather which – and whose – theories and values to consider. Critical research brings these issues to the fore, and treats them as crucial to both reflection and creativity.

Critical researchers generally view social institutions as historical constructs, the result of struggle and ultimately domination, a dominance that often hides meaningful conflicts. Social institutions are largely

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<sup>9</sup> The Austrian historian and economist, Carl Grünberg (1861–1940), was the first head of the institute. Friedrich Pollock took over in the interim between Grünberg's stroke in 1928 and Max Horkheimer's appointment.

described as political milieux, with the result that general theories of society are ascribed an important role.

Critical research can be best understood in the context of individual empowerment. Any inquiry that aspires to be *critical* must necessarily confront the injustice of the society in question. Research thus becomes an exercise in transformation, unembarrassed by any *political* label and unafraid to invoke an emancipatory consciousness. Where traditional researchers cleave to neutrality, critical researchers regularly pronounce their partisanship, all in the name of a better world. Where traditional researchers see it as their task to describe, interpret, or reanimate a slice of reality, critical researchers view their work as a first step towards political action.

The moving spirit of critical research is to draw attention to the ways in which we are manipulated and objectified, reduced to the status of passive conformists to the social status quo. At one and the same time, critical theory holds us to be partial and potentially autonomous; to be capable of self-examination and critical analysis; to be able to spell out, and prioritise, our needs and desires; and to relate in a mature fashion with our fellows and with future generations. Potential autonomy has little to do with individualistic self-sufficiency, and even less with the individualism of consumer society, in which the way individuals buy, own, and consume goods or services is seen as an expression of 'individuality'. Autonomy is about defying such individualistic ideals as typically mask the conformism that an explicit consumption mentality entails. Autonomy means attempting to establish a degree of distance between our own standpoints and the generally accepted standards for how our private lives should be led (which should be compared with a similar argument put forward by the prominent German philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960), whose prime concerns were sociality and dialogue).

As the theoretician Nicolas Smith (2005:45) has pointed out in one of his more disparaging moments, 'critical theorists have at least one thing in common: hope for a better world.' Yet critical research intent on our liberation from repressive institutions and ideologies does indeed contribute to a better life. I hold fast to the idea that people have the potential to become more autonomous from any number of authorities, more capable of insight, than was the case in the past and is the case today. I can only echo the socialist economist and philosopher, Cornelius Castoriadis (1992:289):

*Research can give input to the formation of a reflexive and deliberative instance, that is, of true subjectivity, which frees the radical imagination of the singular human being as a source of creation and alteration and allows this being to attain an effective freedom.*

In combination with a reflective consciousness and a sternly critical stance, this amounts to a useful scholarly approach. Perhaps it can hold out against

all manner of reductionism? ‘The unreflected life is not worth living’, wrote Bertrand Russell in *History of Western Philosophy* (1946:313)

Critical theory holds modern man to be manipulated, objectified, passive, and conformist in the face of both the machinery of society and the dominant forms of rationality. Its adherents believe that a narrow, instrumental form of rationality has gained the upper hand. The optimisation of means and the prioritisation of objective-based systems of action – institutions intended to solve limited problems and generate resources heedless of the wider political context – dominates modern, capitalist society.

In one of the classics of critical theory, Jürgen Habermas (1971) argues that expert knowledge and social engineering, backed up by a narrowly positivistic view of science, are ultimately responsible for solving more and more social problems, while political and ethical discussions have become less prominent. People’s ability to take an independent political and ethical stance has been weakened. Technology, science, and administration have to an increasing extent taken over, and politics is rapidly becoming a matter of administering the social apparatus. It is in this way that science and technology serve as ‘ideologies’, he argues. Political relationships and decisions are thus swathed in technocratic ideology, in which those problems and possible solutions that are most suitable according to limited, goal-oriented logic take over.<sup>10</sup>

Categories such as ‘efficiency’, ‘usefulness’, and ‘suitability’ or values such as ‘productive’ and ‘valuable’ have undeniably had great significance for the maintenance of the status quo, as Max Horkheimer (1937) notes. According to the critical theorists, the problem arises in highly dubious categories that are anything but dependable scientific premises. Critical theory itself, however, is at one with revolutionary struggle. The cornerstone of critical theory is ideological criticism. Modern dialectical philosophy takes the view that an individual’s free development is reliant on fair conditions in society. The critique of the political economy demonstrates how dominant economic terms are modified, superseded even, by their opposites: free trade comes at the price of inequality; open economies become monopolies; conditions conducive to productive work are distorted to suffocate production; the replication of one particular way of life becomes a lasting blight on entire nations.

One of the most famous of European sociologists, Zygmunt Bauman, makes the case in his prize-winning book, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), that the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz is the ultimate

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<sup>10</sup> A rationalisation of the system – and the tendency for economics, administration, law, and social engineering to make inroads into more and more sectors of society – can in Habermas’s view (1984) be counteracted by a rationalisation of values, by which he means the circumstances of meaning, patterns of interpretation, construction of norms, and ‘social interaction instigated from below’ are to an ever greater extent characterised by mature reflection and critical analysis.

consequence of the modern, instrumental, rational spirit. Auschwitz is the product of a modern sensibility, and cannot be imagined in its absence. Auschwitz is modern rationality's organisational theory put in practice. Modernism as a grand narrative found its terrible, but logical and inescapable, end.

A brief digression to illustrate Bauman's point. I remember some fourteen years ago sitting in one of the very first lectures I ever attended. It was part of a university course on 'Organisation A'. The lecturer, a gifted speaker, put a picture on the overhead projector. It was an aerial photograph of what appeared to be a factory complex. "This is the ultimate organisation," said our lecturer, suddenly grim, adding 'look it up, page 16 of the set book.' I did as bid, and yes, I could see what he meant. It was indeed 'the ultimate organisation'. The aerial photograph on the overhead matched the flow chart in the book to a T; the buildings were placed in exactly the right relation to one another. The lecturer stepped up to the whiteboard and wrote 'Treblinka'. Total silence. The lecture hall froze. How could this – an extermination camp – be the ultimate organisation? It cannot possibly be the ultimate organisation, yet that is what the book says it is. It was at that moment that my interest in the eternal questions of human existence, and human existence in organisations, was kicked into life.

Entrepreneurship theory has lost sight of the existential individual, and in its earliest stages is content to formulate normative, often structurally functionalistic or behavioural, models of businesses or entrepreneurs and how they function. These models are generally thought to provide an apolitical or neutral perspective, whatever the enterprise, and to be fit to guide entrepreneurs and decision makers in their work. Critical theory starts out to break with this somewhat technocratic view, and to bring in other perspectives on entrepreneurship. Far from being a value-neutral instrument of social development and welfare, entrepreneurship is a series of arenas where power, social dominance and subordination are manifested, and the exploitation of different resources is staged.

## Methodological implications

Critical theory is markedly theoretical, even meta-theoretical, and its level of abstraction is often remote from the questions, terms, and interpretations that characterise empirical research. We can go so far as to say that critical theory's insights as they stand cannot be applied in empirical research.

Its different lines of questioning – paradigmatic as much as societal – and broad approach, combined with a willingness to experiment with modes of expression, means that reliance on the scholarly method of the conventional kind is diminished. Critical theory combines sociology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and aesthetics in a unique brand of social science research. It

rejects traditional notions of science. Against the neutral, objective researcher who follows well-established methodological rules to gain knowledge about a narrow range of verifiable connections, Max Horkheimer (1937) sets the socially and politically committed, independent, critical intellectual.

That science is a productive force, and that productive forces are confounded by the conditions of production, is the stuff of traditional Marxist thinking (Marx, 1853). It is an idea that leaves science more sinned against than sinning. Yet, as Max Horkheimer (1933) notes, the very moment that science's place in the general scheme of labour is seen as its most important attribute, and society as a whole is not thought to demonstrate any other virtue than its very totality, the idea that science is more victim than architect of evil is suddenly seen in a new, subtle light. Science drifts into a context that is malevolent, and both society and critical theory are confronted by it in its entirety.

Too great a faith in procedures, techniques, and rules is more likely to impoverish any intellectual contribution – which becomes too narrow and careful – than to produce important knowledge. Critical theory supplies empirical research with some necessary leavening for its mass of supposedly neutral descriptions of existing phenomena and the endless reproduction of its expected, institutionalised dominance. It is important that all research is reflexive. Research ought to build on an awareness that it is one with its political context, and should contribute to our understanding of the same. The reliance on rules, procedures, and techniques envisaged in the ideal of the bureaucratic scientific method – common to much business economics and entrepreneurship theory – does not mean that neutrality will be the result. Instead, we risk reproducing and strengthening a technocratic mindset, one in which social engineering, expert opinions, and instrumental rationality dominate.

Critical theory places such qualities as a questioning mind, a critical eye, and a love of insight squarely at the heart of research. This demands a degree of freedom in the division of academic labour and a more intellectual, synthesising approach than a narrow, data-oriented study normally permits.

# KNOWLEDGE CAN SET US FREE!

*Science is an essentially anarchic enterprise: theoretical anarchism is more humanitarian and more likely to encourage progress than its law-and-order alternatives....The following essay is written in the conviction that anarchism, while perhaps not the most attractive political philosophy, is certainly excellent medicine for epistemology, and for the philosophy of science.*

It is with these timely words that the philosopher of science, Paul Feyerabend (1975:21), opens his book, adding, 'The only principle that does not inhibit progress is: anything goes.'

Researchers can hardly claim to be able to prove conclusively 'what things are like'. The role of the academic is to create opportunities for a more open discourse. This is generally achieved by suggesting alternatives to dominant ideals or notions, and so effecting a break with existing figures of thought.

In many ways the globalisation process, and the strengthening of free market capitalism that accompanies it, takes us back to the roots of critical research. Since we have gained profound insights into the impact of the prescriptions of patriarchy and class on the consciousness of researchers operating under the banner of humanistic values, we also appreciate – mainly because they have profound implications for preventing the exploitation of human labour and the consolidation of a global ruling elite – critical insights into the pre-eminence of capital. In this context I foresee important innovations in Marxist practices that both complement and extend many of the exciting new approaches evident under the aegis of postmodern 'entrepreneurial' society. The critical approach has yet to reach its full potential. I hope this manifesto and its three accompanying essays – my intellectual progeny – will encourage you, the reader, to embark on the hard work necessary to bring the critical praxis I have suggested closer to realisation.

In the famous text, *Der Essay als form*, 'The essay as form' (1958), Adorno puts forward the essay's open and inconclusive form against the positivist-inspired, scientific obsession with definition. His intention is not to propagate for an unscientific genre, but rather to take the aporia inherent in this way of thinking to its logical conclusion. The problem? How to balance the impossibility of writing with the necessity. The result? Writing that

resembles thought; writing that is neither clear about itself or its subject in advance.

Keeping in mind Adorno's thoughts on essay form, the essays collected here seek to engage with the convergences, past and present, between artists and writers' theories and practices, and the movements for radical change.



## PART II: EXCURSIONS



# List of Essays

## ESSAY I:

Wallmon, M. 2009: "Breaking free from mill-village mentality and learned helplessness, or the art of provoking thought", In Swedish: "Uppbrottet från bruksmentalitet och inlärd hjälplöshet – eller konsten att tankeprovocera" (co-authored with Ekstrand, L.) i Gawell, M., Johannisson, B. och Lundqvist, M. red. *Samhällets entreprenörer – En forskarantologi om samhällsentreprenörskap*, KK-stiftelsen, Stockholm, sid.174-91. ISBN: 978-91-976914-4-4

## ESSAY II:

Wallmon, M. 2008: "Basic Income beyond Wage Slavery – In Search of Transcending Political Aesthetics" (co-authored with Ekstrand, L.) in Grindon, G. ed. *Aesthetics and Radical Politics*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Pp. 42- 55. ISBN: 1-84718-979-2

## ESSAY III:

Wallmon, M. 2013: "A Plea for Radical Pedagogy. Attempts to Escape the Logics of Capitalism", *The International Journal of Pedagogy and Curriculum*, Vol. 19. Issue 3. Pp. 57-61.

