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Entrepreneurship as an Art of Subversion

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Summary: This paper proposes subversion and resistance as two fundamental aspects of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial process. Taking a start in the established notion of subversive activities in art, we outline their main expressions and consequences in the entrepreneurship setting. We further address the accompanying issue of resistance, and define and illustrate its role in art and the introduction of novel business ideas. Ultimately arriving at the concept of artful entrepreneurship, we suggest the analysis of subversion and resistance as a promising but hitherto neglected avenue of research in entrepreneurship studies.

Introduction

*“Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art.
Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.”*
(Andy Warhol)

Art and entrepreneurship have recently been compared and several analogies discussed between these human practices (Scherdin & Zander, 2011). Most of these discussions are dealing with the creative element of the two activities (Bonnafous-Boucher, Cuir, & Partouche, 2011) and how this creativity is developed in specific environments, for example where there are high levels of uncertainty (Meisiek & Haefliger, 2011).

Much less has been said about the fact that both creative artists and entrepreneurs must alter and transgress the operating rules of a field (Brenkert, 2009; Burgelman & Grove, 2007, p. 315; Zhang & Arvey, 2009) so as to change the status quo (Bureau & Komporozos-Athanasidou, 2013; Chell, Hawort, & Brearley, 1991, p. 22). Among artists, this is especially true in the case of ground-breaking or revolutionary new ideas that challenge contemporary conventions and norms (Lindqvist, 2011, p.10). Artists aspiring more radical shifts in artistic expressions must then often face and overcome hostile reactions and institutional environments (Wijnberg & Gemser, 2000). Similarly, the entrepreneur engaging in creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1994 [1942]) must be prepared to take on the role of the diverging figure (Bureau & Fendt, 2011; Danna, 2008), or even the role of the rebel (Fayolle, 2004, p. 447; Hagen, 1960; Moody, 2001), and surpass inhibitions and fears of being called an iconoclast (Bureau & Fendt, 2012; Goss, 2005, p. 206). In some cases, the entrepreneur can find himself completely marginalized by society and be forced to create *pirate organizations* (Durand & Vergne, 2010).

Some authors have addressed the subversive dimension of artistic and business entrepreneurship (Bonnafous-Boucher et al., 2011; Hjorth, 2003; Smilor, 1997). Yet, while the concept is widely known and applied in art it has received but marginal attention in the entrepreneurship literature. To illustrate the huge discrepancy between the worlds of art and entrepreneurship regarding the intensity of the debate on subversion, the outcome of two queries made on Google produces more than 4 million results for the association “art and subversion” or “subversion and art” whereas there are only 2 (!) occurrences for “entrepreneurship and subversion” or “subversion and entrepreneurship”¹.

If subversive attitudes and activities are needed to launch and develop new ideas and projects, whether in art or entrepreneurship, resistance is found on the other side of the coin. As in the case of subversion, it is a well-known phenomenon in art, where throughout history different artistic styles have had to fight hard against opposition from conventions and established institutions. Despite the fact that resistance appears as a central element in many entrepreneurs’ stories about the development of their businesses, it has nevertheless been discussed very sparingly in the entrepreneurship literature (for an exception, see Berglund & Gaddefors, 2010).

To capture the “drama of entrepreneurship” (Hjorth, 2007), in this paper we extend the parallel between art and entrepreneurship to argue that just like many artists, many entrepreneurs incorporate subversive attitudes, behaviour as well as activities in the development of their projects. We further explore the concept of resistance, how it is connected to subversion, and how it may

¹ Search executed on the 10th of January 2013.

affect the unfolding of the entrepreneurial process. The ultimate aim is to highlight how the two concepts offer broad opportunities for better understanding, conceptualizing, and empirically exploring hitherto marginalized aspects of the entrepreneurial process.

Rather than seek to build up a full metaphor, which typically involves “a more extended reach in terms of the domains of knowledge and language use connoted or drawn into the comparison” (Cornelissen, Holt, & Zundel, 2011, p. 1705), we suggest a form of analogy in the sense that we transfer some information from a specific domain – e.g. art – into a new domain – e.g. entrepreneurship (Tsoukas, 1993). Using analogical frames creates new categories of understanding to foster new perceptions of a phenomenon (e.g. subversion). This work helps to leverage specific similarities in relationships between these two domains (Gentner, 1983; Tsoukas, 1993). In this specific case, we refer to a heuristic analogy which “attempts to capture the dynamic nature of a situation without necessarily specifying concrete courses of action” (Tsoukas, 1993, p. 332). The main purpose is not so much to offer instrumental solutions for practitioners (at least in this first stage) but to show how the explanatory structure (Gentner, 1983) used to address subversion in art could be transferred in entrepreneurship. Last but not least, if analogical thinking can stress similarities and shed light on dissimilarities (Etzion & Ferraro, 2010), we will mainly focus on the similarities in this paper.

The paper is organized in three parts. In the first part, we discuss and argue for the existence of a subversive dimension of artistic and entrepreneurial activities. We then turn to the issue of resistance to outline its conceptual foundations and multi-faceted sources. The third part then introduces the notion of artful entrepreneurship, which by capturing the elements of subversion and resistance also defines two fundamental and core mechanisms of the entrepreneurial process.

Subversion in Art and Entrepreneurship

“That which comes into the world to disturb nothing deserves neither respect nor patience.”
(René Char, 1948)

The etymology of the term subversion, stemming from the low Latin *subversio*, means “to overthrow,” and can be defined as the literal and figurative destruction of the established order.² In old French, the word *subvertisseoir* designates the person who overthrows³. In the 20th century, the word was used in a variety of historical contexts: the Cold War, decolonization, the period of May ‘68 in France, *avant-garde* artistic movements, and the sexual revolution. While there is no legal definition of the term *per se*⁴, the word is used as a conceptual notion in many different fields, such as sociology, political science, law, history, and literature.

Despite this diversity in usage, meaning and occurrence, the field of business studies barely uses this term, or only in very rare cases or rather anecdotal fashion. In order to better understand the meaning of the word and the way it is used, we suggest first examining and explaining the notion

² <http://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/subversion>

³ <http://micmap.org/dicfro/chercher/dictionnaire-godefroy/subversion>

⁴ Though they do not possess any legal authority, official documents sometimes attempt to define subversion. Thus, in the early 1980s, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service whose role is to “warn and advise the government on security threats” defined subversion as: “activities directed toward undermining by covert unlawful acts or directed toward or intended ultimately to lead to the destruction or overthrow of the constitutionally established system of government in Canada” (Brodeur, Gill, & Töllborg, 2003).

outside the field of business in order to shed light on a few core concepts that can then be applied to entrepreneurship in a subsequent stage. To do so, we propose to analyse the way subversion is discussed in the art world as this domain is especially concerned with the term, as we will see below.

Our analysis breaks down into two steps: first we list the conditions (both necessary and sufficient⁵), which are required to create a potential of subversion, and then develop a framework describing how the dynamics of subversion operate. In each part, we study the phenomenon both in art and entrepreneurship.

The Subversive Potential of Art

“I am a subversive being at all times.”
(Salvador Dali)

In discussing the subversive potential of art, we would like to reveal the intensity and the diversity of questions that are raised to support the coming discussion on the subversive dynamics of entrepreneurial activities.

Beyond this preliminary remark, we would like to underline that we do not consider art as a well-defined and homogeneous field. Art can only be understood through the analysis of certain practices and representations in “specific configurations, specific regimes of identification, that allow for certain social functions or certain political possibilities” (Rancière, Wright, & Dronsfield, 2008). Obviously, there are many different kinds of art which mandate various types of audience responses (Carroll, 2000, P. 358). To take this difficulty into account, we will always introduce very specific examples taken from the art world to avoid a list of general assertions.

Having said that, we would like to emphasize that subversion has been analysed across many and very different artistic areas: researchers have studied the subversive dimension of art in literature (Booker, 1991; Godin, 1996; Seibert, 2006), poetry (Godin, 1996), painting (Bonnett, 1992) but also in theatre (Chafra, 2009), cinema (Gutman, 2011) or photography (Béhar & Carassou, 2005). Moreover, the question of subversion is discussed within various *spatiotemporal* contexts: in the 21st century with the evolution of art in China (Wiseman & Yuedi, 2011), in the 20th century – with the *avant-gardes* of the beginning of the 20th century with artists like James Joyce (Lachaud & Neveux, 2009), the Surrealists (Weisgerber, 1984) or later with the Postmodernists (Giroux, 1993) – as well as in the 19th century with artists like Charles Baudelaire or Edouard Manet (Weingarden, 2008), but also in the 16th with William Shakespeare (Greenblatt, 1988, p. 40) or even in the Middle-Ages. This list is obviously not comprehensive. It simply emphasizes the tremendous diversity of the empirical contexts where subversive dynamics have been described.

To make sense of this proliferation, we propose to study the conditions for the process of subversion to operate. We list three necessary conditions and one sufficient condition for artworks to have a subversive potential.

⁵ “A condition A is said to be necessary for a condition B, if (and only if) the nonexistence of A guarantees the nonexistence of B” (<http://www.sfu.ca/~swartz/conditions1.htm>).

“A condition A is said to be sufficient for a condition B, if (and only if) the existence of A guarantees the existence of B” (<http://www.sfu.ca/~swartz/conditions1.htm>).

The Subversive Potential in Art: Three Necessary Conditions

Three main necessary conditions are required for art to have subversive power: first, it has to be connected to the rest of society; second, art has to involve practices which will create new cognitive representations and elicit emotional responses and perceptions; third, the productions in art must have consequences beyond the sole world of art.

Necessary condition #1: to be subversive, art should not be totally autonomous but connected to society

“The puerile utopia of Art for Art’s sake, by excluding morality and often even passion, was inevitably sterile. It placed itself in flagrant contravention of the genius of humanity.”
(Baudelaire, 1851)

The value of artworks for their own sake (e.g. *art for art*) is certainly a project supported by some artists looking for a strong separation of art from society (Carroll, 2000). According to this current, art is perceived as a pure aestheticism without any social or political impact. In this extreme situation, artists have been fighting to obtain total autonomy and legitimacy to produce works of pure aestheticism (Bourdieu, 1992). If they succeed, they can do whatever they want and are always protected from legal pursuits: they have unlimited freedom without having to assume any responsibilities. Eventually, this world of art becomes a sort of “entrenched camp” (Ratiu, 2007).

With such a posture, subversion is not conceivable, as artistic production has no intentions to overthrow anything. But this argument of autonomy is mainly a social construction, which could have been developed to protect artists from the control of various influences (mainly political and economic) and to offer them a specific status in society (Bourdieu, 1992). In practice, the idea that art offers purely an aesthetic experience is simply not a universal criterion which could support the idea that art could function as an autonomous field. First, because it is not applicable to all sorts of art – for instance Ai Weiwei’s pictures are not only about aesthetics (Arsène, 2011) – and second there are many aesthetic experiences that occur outside the art world: waterfalls and songbirds provide the kind of experience which could be compared to what autonomist artists endeavour to create with their art (Carroll, 2000, p. 359).

Most of the time, the autonomy of artistic production is simply not sought nor possible. Therefore, most of the time artworks are necessarily connected to the rest of society and can potentially affect the *status quo*, defined as “the existing state of affairs, especially regarding social or political issues”(Marcuse, 1965, p. 1). The main evidence backing the argument that art cannot be totally cut off from politics and society is no doubt the history of censorship (Schlesser, 2011): artworks have always been censored and probably will always be. This situation is very frequent in countries like China (Calkins, 1998-1999) or Russia – the cases of the Pussy Riots or Voïna being current illustrations. But even in democratic countries, there is still heated debate about artworks, some artists being accused of transgressing important social norms and values – like for example the exhibition by Murakami at the Versailles Castle. Sometimes, this can lead to trials with sanctions against artists: Robert Mapplethorpe was for instance condemned for an exhibition (The Perfect Moment, 1990) with pornographic pictures involving children (Ratiu, 2011, p. 540-541).

Necessary condition #2: to be subversive, art should produce new representations and emotional perceptions

“The greatness of the artwork is always linked to the subversion of instituted frames, whether they be boundaries between genres, boundaries between arts or, more recently, boundaries between art and non-art.”

(Schaeffer, 1997, p.96)

A second pre-requisite for subversion in art is that it should give rise to new representations – for “political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 127-128) – and also new emotional perceptions – for “without a change in the sensibility, there can be no real social change” (Kellner, 2007, p. 48).

We know that art can give rise to conceptions that are provocative and challenge conventional suppositions (Edelman, 1995, p. 35). More precisely, art regularly reframes traditional boundaries of how things should be thought of (Natoli & Hutcheon, 1993). Some artists radically change, deny and even overturn old values through a total destruction of ideas that are currently taken for granted (Weisgerber, 1986, p. 666). Postmodernists could be an example of such a transformation of canonical boundaries as they created a “discourse of disruption and subversion by tinkering traditional boundaries: they reject the clear distinction made by modernists between life and art, or elite culture and the culture of everyday life” (Giroux, 1993, p. 462).

Truisms are without doubt present in the art world, but most artworks also offer an experience where people can think and feel about otherness. In the case of literature, one can experience the lives of criminals (Crime and Punishment by Fiordor Dostoïevski), alcoholics (Under the Volcano by Malcom Lowry), or amateur scientists (Quest for the absolute by Honoré de Balzac), allowing readers to apprehend new ways of thinking and acting which would not have been possible otherwise. Beyond this *as if* argument, by creating thoughts and feelings about otherness art can create new forms of sensitivity which could “challenge accepted moral wisdom and clear the path for audiences to revise their moral beliefs” (Carroll, 2000, p. 365). Indeed, some artworks – especially the so-called *avant-gardes* (Keller, 2007, p. 50) – “present readers, viewers, and listeners with depictions or descriptions that call into question or subvert our (...) settled moral views” (Carroll, 2000, p. 364). For instance, “by inscribing both “continuity” with, and “critical distance” from, the old masterpieces in the new ones, Manet sought to subvert the viewer’s aesthetic expectations, promote critical self-reflection and, thereby, advance an ongoing process of cultural renewal” (Weingarden, 2008).

Art is thereby a means of emancipation and a catalyst for the creation of utopia (Lachaud & Neveux, 2009). By producing new representations and emotions, art supports the emergence of imaginaries to go beyond the world as *it is*: “subversion exploits the possibility of changing the social world by changing the representation of this world which contributes to its reality or, more precisely, by counter posing a paradoxical pre-vision, a utopia, a project, a programme, to the ordinary vision which apprehends the social world as a natural world” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 128). Therefore art can be described as a sort of “laboratory” where the hypothetical contours of the *yet inexistent* are sketched from a few fragments of empirical reality (Bloch, 1978 [1935]).

Necessary condition #3: to be subversive, art should have a behavioural impact beyond the art world

“Art needs no longer be an account of past sensations. It can become the direct organization of more highly evolved sensations. It is a question of producing ourselves, not things that enslave us.”
(Guy-Ernest Debord, 1958)

If many artworks introduce innovative moral perspectives or reorient understandings and moral emotions in unexpected ways (Carroll, 2000, p. 369), does that suffice to change effectively our behaviour and practices beyond the art world?

“Naturally, no chef-d’oeuvre ever got the masses to “take to the streets’ – nor will it ever do so”” (Marcuse, 1972, p. 186) but art has determinate, regularly recurring behavioural consequences as the simulation of fictional characters yields information of what it would be like to undertake certain lines of action, and in this way is pertinent to moral and practical reasoning (Carroll, 2000, p. 372) and could lead to the adoption of new behaviour. For instance, some people are known to have begun smoking drugs after having read *On The Road* by Jack Kerouach (Carroll, 2000).

Moreover, sometimes art does not only simulate otherness, it creates conditions for a total reconfiguration of traditional conceptions. According to cognitive learning theories (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1975), we know that the way we process information that influences our actions depends on our knowledge and beliefs. As art can create new cognitive representations and influence our sensibility (e.g. second necessary condition), therefore, it can transform core values that also in other domains lead to the creation of new heuristics allowing the emergence of new behaviour. This dynamic is especially accurate when changes occur in the context of non-routine situations.

In the case of radical change in the art world, we can expect a strong disruption in the audience’s routine, which will support the emergence of new values and as a consequence new behaviour. This perspective is especially relevant to capture the role of the *avant-gardes* who attempted “to forge a form of expression that could be both productive for social change and “artistic” at the same time” (Golley, 1995p. 369). Notably, however, there might also be instances of change in behaviour that does not spring from more deeply rooted changes in perception and values. Those would be instances of fads and fashions, which experience periods of intensive expressions and adoption yet disappear as quickly as they emerged without any traces of overthrowing the established. In this sense, behavioural impact beyond the art world is not necessarily a sufficient condition for subversion to occur.

The subversive potential of art: activism as a sufficient condition

“The people are a silence. I will be the mighty advocate of that silence; I will speak for the dumb; I will speak of the little to the great -- of the weak to the powerful.”
(Victor Hugo, 1869)

“I have but one passion: to enlighten those who have been kept in the dark, in the name of humanity which has suffered so much and is entitled to happiness. My fiery protest is simply the cry of my very soul. Let them dare, then, to bring me before a court of law and let the enquiry take place in broad daylight! I am waiting.”
(Emile Zola in *L'Aurore*, 1898)

In the previous section, we highlighted that the possible subversive effect of art is due to the effect of aesthetic experience and not the effect of conscious and explicit artistic strategies (Rancière, 2008). Art is defined as being subversive because it can contribute to producing new changes in the cartography of the visible and sensitive, but it cannot anticipate and calculate its own effect (*op. cit.*, 2008).

In this section, we consider art practices where artists deliberately try to subvert society through a certain strategy. They consciously produce artworks with the intention to impact the real world beyond art considerations. In this approach, subversion is a fundamental principal in the sense that creation and revolt work together (Weisgerber, 1986, p. 638). James Joyce is famous for his clear position against key components of the society of his time. The following sentence is more than explicit on this aspect: “my mind rejects the whole present social order and Christianity - home, the recognised virtues, classes of life, and religious doctrines. [...] Six years ago I left the Catholic church, hating it most fervently. I found it impossible for me to remain in it on account of the impulses of my nature. I made secret war upon it when I was a student and declined to accept the positions it offered me. By doing this I made myself a beggar but I retained my pride. Now I make open war upon it by what I write and say and do” (Joyce, 1975 [1904], p. 24-26).

Many French artists, like Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon or André Breton, who grouped together to form the Surrealist movement, are another classical figure of activism in art. As claimed by André Breton, their goal was to gain the “independence of art – for the revolution” and “the revolution – for the definitive liberation of art” (Breton & Rivera, 1938, p. 500). They regularly claimed that through their art they sought to exert direct influence on society⁶. Another illustration of this posture is the Situationist International. Introducing the Situationist movement in only a few lines is a challenge because it was neither unified nor did it have one single homogenous and structured philosophy. There were nevertheless two phases in Situationist activity: from 1957 to 1962, when the pursuit of superiority of art was the primary objective, and from 1962 to 1972, when it became a more radical, more holistic revolutionary project (Hussey, 2000), concerned with a radical societal change. Whether in the context of art or in politics, “the Situationists appropriated the dialectic that emerges from the juxtaposition of Rimbaud’s “change life” and Marx’s “transform the world” (Genty, 1998, p. 5). They developed a radical critical outlook that aimed to both destroy and create: “SI explores the dialectic of achievement and elimination in one single movement” (Genty, 1998, p. 23).

To construct life differently, one must destroy the framework in which we normally live. In this perspective, the members of SI, called *Situs*, developed a number of techniques, whimsical creations, or “games of a new essence” (Debord, 1957) that could “affect human behaviour” (Comisso, 2000, p. 12). For this to be possible, *new situations* had to be constructed: everyone had to be permitted to *create new situations* in order to create a new reality and thus change life (Barnard, 2004). One of these practices, the *détournement* (a kind of deviation or hijacking), illustrates their approach. This technique consists of “integrating current or past artistic productions into a superior construct” (Situationnistes, 1958). According to this principle, “It goes without saying that we may not only correct a work or integrate various fragments of outdated works into a new one, but also alter the meaning of these fragments and doctor, in any way we please, what imbeciles insist on calling quotations” (Debord & Wolman, 1956). In this manner SI hijacked a number of artworks, comics, political slogans or ads to produce new texts, paintings, images, or films. SI distinguished between two kinds of *détournements*: minor and abusive. In the first case, the hijacked element is not

⁶ <http://www.envplan.com/abstract.cgi?id=d100069> ; <http://www.envplan.com/abstract.cgi?id=a280405>

important: “newspaper clippings, a neutral sentence, the photograph of a random subject” (Debord & Wolman, 1956). An abusive *détournement*, on the other hand, specifically hijacks a culturally significant element: “one of Saint-Just’s slogans, or one of Einstein’s sequences for example” (op.cit.). This hijacked element will derive from the new context a meaning, a different reach. This technique of *détournement*, whether minor or abusive, encourages a process of creation through destruction because it authorizes the destruction of a past work in order to produce a new work: “our past is full of futures (...) only he who is capable of devaluing can create new values” (Jorn, 1989, p. 7).

Of course, it is not because an artist is an activist that his subversive strategy will have a powerful impact: the most explicit art is not necessarily the most radical or most productive. Some major pieces of art without apparent political claims made greater contributions than pieces openly supporting an activist posture (Lachaux & Neveux, 2009). Moreover, sometimes subversion in art can simply be a sort of comedy, a way to gain popularity and funding (Rochlitz in Chiapello, 1998, p. 19) without any strong motivation of the artists for a real transformation of society.

The Subversive Potential of Entrepreneurship

After this description of the pre-conditions for subversion in art, we now turn to address the question in the field of entrepreneurship without changing our conceptual lens.

Some authors have already voiced the idea that entrepreneurship is a subversive activity (Bonnafeus-Boucher et al., 2011; Smilor, 1997) but have not explored the issue in greater depth. Beyond these occurrences, the word subversion is very rarely used in the literature; maybe because it has strong or even taboo connotations. We could have expected to find at least some case studies on subversion in specific and controversial contexts, but this has not been the case. This situation is especially intriguing because if we consider the three necessary and sufficient conditions listed above for the art world, one can surmise that entrepreneurship in the shape of creative destruction also has a strong subversive potential.

Three Necessary Conditions

Necessary condition #1: to be subversive, entrepreneurship should not be totally autonomous but connected to society

The idea that entrepreneurship could be autonomous, that is to say separated from society, is simply not conceivable. Some entrepreneurs could be solely interested in money and develop activities with the singular aim of creating a new company, but these dynamics remains very limited among entrepreneurs as shown by many researchers (Amit, MacCrimmon, Zietsma, & Oesch, 2000; Carter, Gartner, Shaver, & Gatewood, 2003). A lot of entrepreneurs are instead driven by the desire to realize their new ideas, which sometimes originate from experienced problems with existing products and services. Many (but not all) of these products and services are used in contexts which have little or nothing to do with commercial activities. They typically draw upon already existing resources, which are then reconfigured and coordinated in novel ways to produce economic value, processes that inevitably will have an effect on business and the larger society. One of the best examples of the connection between entrepreneurship and society is certainly the diffusion of social entrepreneurship, inherently defined by the fact that its goal is to solve social problems (Grimes, McMullen, Vogus, & Miller, 2013). Prominent figures in strategy like Michael Porter even claim that

“we have to take money from what we make in the business [to] deploy it for social things” (Driver & Porter, 2012). Social entrepreneurs “address social problems, create new institutions, and dismantle outdated institutional arrangements” (Montgomery, Dacin, & Dacin, 2012). As a consequence, this movement decreases the number of domains which used to be disconnected from the business world – environmental and social affairs being two of them.

Necessary condition #2: to be subversive, entrepreneurship should produce new representations and emotional perceptions

Entrepreneurship is a process which involves the production of cognitive representations and perceptions. Indeed, entrepreneurs could not develop innovations with new functionalities without transferring new knowledge and emotions to others (Verganti, 2009). The entrepreneur’s ‘model of the world’ (Nonaka, 1994) includes images of reality and visions for the future – i.e. images of what is and what ought to be – and for novel ideas to become realized those images and visions need to be conveyed others. This may be achieved through setting up firms and directing own employees (Zander, 2007), by which new meanings are gradually created through personal experiences. It also comes with the persuasion of actors external to the firm, which includes framing intended to construct meaning and convey a picture of ‘reality’ to other people (Benford & Snow, 2000; Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010; Czernich & Zander, 2010). Entrepreneurs are not passive participants in their cultural context, they act strategically to manipulate symbols to gain new resources and diffuse their innovations (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Hargadon, 2003; Zott & Quy Nguyen, 2007). By doing so, they create new frames and schemes which change the way people perceive reality (op. cit.). This process is based on both individual and collective strategies. The emergence of crowdfunding is an example of a process where several entrepreneurs gather to develop lobbying activities to limit the negative impact of regulations on this emergent sector, which could potentially disrupt the banking industry⁷.

Necessary condition #3: to be subversive, entrepreneurship should have a behavioural impact beyond the business world

If the question about the consequences of artworks beyond the art world is debatable, no one would question the fact that entrepreneurship implies activities which have an impact on our everyday lives. Inventions such as the personal computer, the cell phone, and associated software programs, have had a profound effect on human work practices and interaction, and more recently also on social movements and politics. The case of fast-growing economies could be used as an illustration of the powerful (and sometimes dramatic) impact of entrepreneurship on human behaviour. China is one the most emblematic examples of how entrepreneurship led to the expansion of consumer society (Jing Yu & Jiatao, 2008). In this type of transition economy, entrepreneurs diffused many new products and services in just a few years, which completely changed the way millions of people live in these countries (McMillan & Woodruff, 2002). Drinking coffee, which used to be a very limited practice in China, has become widespread through the diffusion of Western brands. For instance, Starbucks opened hundreds of stores (one is even located in the Forbidden City) and is planning to pursue this very fast expansion in the years to come⁸. Although this global brand does not mean the same thing to American and Chinese consumers, this firm has the ability to change a thousand-year-

⁷ Schmidt, R. 2012. Lobbyists Wanted: No Experience Required. *Bloomberg Businessweek*.(4281): 31-32.

⁸ <http://money.cnn.com/2013/07/26/news/companies/starbucks-china-sales-surge/index.html>

old tradition and to provoke an evolution in the drinking behaviours of many Chinese people in a very short span of time (Bengtsson & Venkatraman, 2008). Obviously, this example is just a tiny facet of the tremendous transformations led by the expansion of new firms in China.

The subversive potential of entrepreneurship: activism as a sufficient condition

“In business, people are thinking about what's going to change the world”
(Peter Thiel, 2010)

As demonstrated above, we believe the three necessary conditions for entrepreneurship to have a subversive potential are present, but there is also a sufficient condition which involves activism on the part of entrepreneurs.

Many entrepreneurs who position themselves as activists try to change the world radically by destroying former systems. To illustrate this posture, we propose to quote two famous American entrepreneurs operating in two different industries. First, Peter Thiel, one of the co-founders of PayPal, claimed in 2008 that the underlying ideology when setting up his firm “was if you could lessen the control of government over money and somehow shift the ability of people to control the money that was in their wallets, this would be a truly revolutionary shift” and continued by saying that “technologies like PayPal have been a major contributing factor toward the weakening of the nation-state over the last few decades”⁹ (Peter Thiel, *op. cit.*). As for Larry Flynt, who developed a business in the pornographic sector, he was aware of the specificities of this industry which he voiced out loud, declaring that “sex is subversive, it smacks of revolt and freedom”¹⁰. He claimed that he was not only motivated by money but that, quite on the contrary, he “never, from the very beginning, ever compromised [his] core beliefs” even if he had “been in prison four times, shot and paralyzed”. Eventually, just like many subversive activists, he “decided to devote what is left of [his] life to expanding the parameters of free speech”¹¹.

Beyond these two examples, entrepreneurs develop world views which always involve some form of ideology that could potentially challenge traditional representations and more generally systems that are taken for granted. Entrepreneurs tend to alter and transgress the operating rules of an industry (Brenkert, 2009; Burgelman & Grove, 2007, p. 315; Zhang & Arvey, 2009) so as to challenge and change the status quo (Chell et al., 1991; Dyer, Gregersen, & Christensen, 2011, p. 22). Indeed, entrepreneurship can be seen as an agent of social change which involves the transformation, the reinvention of the boundaries structuring our world (Steyaert & Hjorth, 2007, p. 1). If we agree on this notion of entrepreneurship as “a subversive activity (that) upsets the status quo, disrupts accepted ways of doing things, and alters traditional patterns of behavior” (Smilor, 1997), the question of how it works nevertheless remains to be addressed in much greater detail.

⁹ “The basic thought was if you could lessen the control of government over money and somehow shift the ability of people to control the money that was in their wallets, this would be a truly revolutionary shift (...) Technologies like PayPal have been a major contributing factor toward the weakening of the nation-state over the last few decades (...) [and] will lead to a world in which there's less government power and therefore more individual control” Bailey, R. (2008). 'Technology Is at the Center'. *Culture and Reviews*, 1st May.

¹⁰ Flynt, L. 2008. *An Unseemly Man: My Life as Pornographer, Pundit, and Social Outcast*. Phoenix: Phoenix Books, p.130.

¹¹ Anonyme (2004). 'Porn is business, politics is a hobby': Larry Flynt made his fortune peddling smut. But he is also a fierce political campaigner. He talks to Dan Glaister about cronyism, corruption - and why his Hustler empire has now reached Birmingham. Caroline Roux, below right, gets a preview, *The Guardian*, 20th of Oct.

How do the subversive dynamics operate?

To speak of subversion, of a subversive behaviour, or of a subversive attitude without specifying the context makes no sense. Subversion is an eminently relative notion; it is fundamentally contingent (Cochet & Dard, 2009, p. 8) and must be situated. To subvert is indeed a transitive verb: “one subverts something at a given time, or nothing at all” (Eribon, 2010). Consequently, unlike the connotation usually ascribed to it, the word “subversion” is “axiologically neutral” (Dufrenne, 1977, p. 10); that is, it takes on a value, positive or negative, depending on the choices of the person who pronounces it. These choices are obviously different for the authority that embodies the system than for the actor who wishes to destroy the system through subversive action.

To say that subversion is a contingent notion does not mean that it is impossible to define how subversive activity emerges and unfolds. Subversive dynamics rest on three fundamental elements: a triad of interdependent actors, an intent to destroy or overthrow a system in place, and limited resources.

A Triad: The System, the Masses, and the Activists

Subversion does not refer to a situation in which two groups battle each other in a more or less violent duel. For an activity to be subversive, three interdependent actors must be present: a group of activists, a dominant system, and the masses. Thus, when activists oppose a system they wish to destroy, they always take into account the masses, this relatively quiet and passive population. This desire to implicate the masses is of course shared by the system, so that “the control of the population (...) is always the objective and the issue of subversive and counter-subversive practices” (Cochet & Dard, 2009, p. 10). Even when the masses are relatively apathetic — people, citizens, consumers — they must be transformed or at least neutralized for the subversive action to take place (Mucchielli, 2010, p. 51-53).

In this context, the system is usually an institution such as a State or a Church, but it can also refer to a system of informal values such as puritan morality. In many cases, these formal and informal dimensions are interdependent. Finally, the group of activists is defined by its small size; it can even be a single individual. However, in light of the recent growth of information technologies, the size of the group tends to be larger, as coordination cost are reduced. Whatever its size, the particularity of this group is its activism or, in other words, its intent to destroy the system, to a more or less radical degree.

An Intent to Destroy

*“Shatter sacred ideas, anything that brings tears to the eyes, shatter, shatter, I deliver to you for free
this opium more powerful than any drug: shatter”*
(Aragon, 1966)

“Every act of creation is first an act of destruction”
(Pablo Picasso)

“A painting was a sum of additions. For me, a painting is the sum of destructions.”
(Pablo Picasso)

Subversive dynamics originate from groups that hold a political discourse of a certain radical nature. This radical nature can be of varying intensities and can take multiple forms, as we will see further on. It depends in particular on the type of system targeted: is it a supra-system like a State? Or a more specific system such as a particular organization (company, university,...)? The intent to destroy does not necessarily imply a structured theoretical construct or a coherent ideology; the activists' ambitions might not even have to be realized. What is required is not so much a structured philosophy as "political attitudes of refusal" (Cochet & Dard, 2009, p. 9), a desire to destroy the system in place. This will, this desire, necessarily emerges from an interaction with the system, an experience and a consciousness of this system (Dufrenne, 1977).

Unlike revolutionaries who seek to put in place a new system, the subversive group does not always aim to establish a new order. Nevertheless, subversion involves two intrinsically linked aspects: "negatively, it is a refusal of the system; positively, it is a search for a different world" (Dufrenne, 1977, p. 127). In fact, it seems difficult to imagine a radical critical process that does not lead to some form of creation or change in human behaviour. Once more, we encounter the terminology of the previous discussion on *creative destruction*: "any negative implies a simultaneous affirmative; any destruction entails a construction" (Sanouillet, 1965, p.428).

Actions with Limited Resources

Subversion necessarily involves action: it more readily designates a dynamic of successive activities than a state or a static situation (Dufrenne, 1977, p. 10). In order to act, one needs operational techniques. Subversion is often linked to utopian projects but that is not necessarily antithetical to pragmatic undertakings (Dufrenne, 1977, p. 153). To best conduct a subversive project, one needs to develop a certain expertise that will make subversive actions more effective. Subversion is thus also a technique "based on knowledge of the laws of psychology and psychosociology, because it targets public opinion as much as authority (...). It is an action upon public opinion through subtle and convergent means" (Mucchielli, 1976, p. 7). These actions, and this is particular to subversive actions, are always undertaken with very limited resources. Subversion is thus an "'economical' means in the sense that it does not require any substantial material or financial investments (...). It is first and foremost about intelligence, science, and know-how" (Mucchielli, 1976, p. 7). This technical aspect refers to the De Certeau's concept of tactics which allows us to think and study the subversive nature of entrepreneurship (Hjorth, 2007, p.724). These techniques may include violent actions such as riots or terrorist attacks (Kilcullen, 2009, p. 252; Rasmussen & Downey, 1991), but it can be limited to a simple story which could "delegitimize existing institutions and destabilize field boundaries by calling into question institutions' abilities to satisfactorily manage the dramatic events recounted" (Calvin & Owen-Smith, 2002). These "subversive stories thus carry with them normative elements by tacitly suggesting that existing arrangements should be changed" (*op. cit.*). The so fashionable "storytelling" could be translated in the terms of Bourdieu by the "*labour of enunciation* which is necessary in order to externalize the inwardness, to name the unnamed and to give the beginnings of objectification to pre-verbal and pre-reflexive dispositions and ineffable and unobservable experiences, through words which by their nature make them common and communicable, therefore meaningful and socially sanctioned" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 129). Beyond enunciation, taking the example of Shakespeare, Hjorth (2007) points to the importance of dramatization to develop these subversive stories. This labour of dramatization "is capable of destroying the self-evident truths of the doxa and (...) the transgression which is indispensable in order to *name the unnamable*, to

break the censorships” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 129). A certain type of story is especially powerful: the humoristic one. Black humour for instance, because of its ferocity, its corrosive characteristic, its extremisms, represents in this sense the apex of subversion (Weisgerber, 1986, p. 756)¹².

Scandals: A Frequent Output of Subversive Activities

“Art seems to generate scandals.”
(Lindqvist, 2011, p.10)

“I wanted to kill art.”
(Marcel Duchamp, 1968)

Subversive activities appear to be paired with scandals. Scandal is etymologically defined as any words or actions that can make others fall into sin. The more an action is subversive, the more the system will react by presenting it as scandalous, underlining its corrupting and harmful powers over individuals perceived as being “led astray”. History is full examples of subversive scandals in very diverse empirical areas like religion (Calvin, Suaud, & Viet-Depaule, 2010), sex (Wolton, 1994), or gender (Toubiana, 2010). Scandal can appear in many different ways: it is often visible in press headlines, street demonstrations and “highly publicized trials”. Divisions between groups that take a stance on the more or less corrupting influence of subversive actions are also symptomatic of subversion. One must note however that although subversion always implies scandal (Godin, 1996), the latter does not always involve subversive action.

What Subversion is Not

As we conclude this section, it is perhaps useful to specify what subversion is not, in order to avoid certain amalgams prejudicial to our understanding of the phenomena under study. In particular, we will show how subversion should not be assimilated to revolution, to delinquency, or to perversion.

Subversion should not be assimilated to revolution. The will to seize power can be part of a subversive project, but it is not always the case. Subversion has a quality that is more spontaneous, and more often punctual and fragmented than revolution (Dufrenne, 1977, p. 148). Moreover, revolution tends to involve a form of popular uprising, which is not necessarily true for subversion, even though both are often linked, since subversion can contribute to popular uprising (revolutions taking place in the Arab world at the end of 2010 and into 2011 are perfect illustrations of this aspect).

Subversion cannot be assimilated to fraud. Tax evasion, for example, is “not subversive because it is not motivated by a desire but by an interest. And most of all, it hopes to stay secret and singular; it is not meant to be exemplary. Those who cheat need others who do not, otherwise cheating is useless (Dufrenne, 1977, p. 125). For an act to be subversive, it must not want to violate a rule but to eradicate it because it is a part of the system in place.

¹² http://surreal.web.its.manchester.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal1/acrobat_files/Suleiman.pdf

Subversion can lead to acts that do not respect the current laws of morality, as was the case with the activities developed by Larry Flynt of Hustler. However, subversion cannot be assimilated to perversion. Indeed, perversion is necessarily negative, whatever the context of the viewpoint, whereas, as we have previously defined it, subversion is neither positive nor negative as such (Dufrenne, 1977).

Subversion in Art and Entrepreneurship Contrasted

It is clear from the above that both art and entrepreneurship are potentially subversive, and that the fundamental subversive dynamics apply in both fields as well. There is, however, an asymmetry across conditions and dynamics that warrant some further contemplation.

As summarized in Table 1, in the field of art it is common to see both subversive intent and in those cases also clear manifestations of the subversive dynamics. Yet, in many cases it proves difficult to extend or immediately perceive an impact beyond art and into society, and in this respect the broad-based effects on cognition and human behaviour often remain elusive. In contrast, entrepreneurship displays all the necessary and also sufficient conditions for subversion to occur, in particular the firm connection to and influence on what happens in society, but there are much fewer cases of conscious and outright subversive intent. It is perhaps this latter aspect that explains why in general entrepreneurs as well as entrepreneurship researchers do not perceive entrepreneurial activities as subversive, and also why the consequences we will turn to next often come as a surprise and so far have been given only limited attention in the field of entrepreneurship research.

Insert Table 1 about here

Resistance

Whenever there is subversive activity it is bound to be accompanied by resistance. The term resistance, stemming from French *résistance* and earlier Latin *resistentem*¹³, may be defined as “a force that opposes another”. In the fields of art and entrepreneurship, it is then related to the various forces that oppose subversive action or the introduction of novelty, be it in the form of novel artworks and performances or the attempted implementation of new business ideas.

Resistance appears in contexts that include individuals, organizations, and society, and it is intertwined with issues that concern power and authority relationships (cf. Barbalet, 1985). While the term has been given many interpretations, two of its core dimensions are action and opposition (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). Action implies that individuals or groups of individuals engage in some form of active behaviour, including physical, verbal, or cognitive attempts to address and deal with an opposing force. It is most commonly associated with physical behaviour such as marches, riots, and other forms of public protests (such as scandals), but also includes more subtle forms such

¹³ <http://www.etymonline.com>

as delaying work processes or displaying particular types of symbols or clothing. Action also includes various forms of verbal and non-verbal communication, for example the use of silence as a means of protest. Resistance implies the existence of opposition to someone or something else, the potential targets being individuals, groups of individuals, organizations, or more abstract social structures and institutions.

The definition of resistance as a force which opposes another gives rise to intricate questions about its relationship to subversion. In some cases, and as illustrated in the preceding sections, subversion can be seen as form of resistance in its own right – resistance to established convention and institutions, manifested in individual or collective acts of emancipations (Rindova, Barry, & Ketchen, 2009). The various independent exhibitions staged by the impressionists can be seen as acts of resistance to the *Salon* and its consistent refusal of pieces of work that challenged institutionalized ideas about representative and legitimate art. In the context of entrepreneurship, resistance to established conventions and institutions are evident Peter Thiel's work on PayPal, particularly his strong personal conviction about the need to lessen the control of government over money and to work towards a world in which individual control takes precedence over government power. Some contemporary performance artworks further illustrate the often fleeting boundaries between subversion and resistance (Garofan & Gaudelius, 2004).

To simplify from what could be regarded as fundamentally interactive processes of resistance, subversion may be seen as an initiative aimed at overthrowing or introducing some form of change in a larger system, rather than a reaction designed merely to stall oppressive measures imposed by others. This said, and recognizing the frequent pro-social and pro-change aspects of resistance, the continued interplay between subversion and resistance and the extent to which they can be treated as synonymous concepts (e.g. McFarland, 2004; Vander Zanden, 1959), will not be addressed in further detail in the accounts that follow.

Resistance to Art

The history of art is replete of struggles where novel ideas have been met with forceful resistance, and it is accentuated in contexts where wealth and established positions have been threatened. Such was the case in the late 19th century, when faced with the new impressionist movement members of the French *Salon* risked losing their secure privileges and sources of income as well as power over the dominant selection system (Wijnberg & Gemser, 2000). Honour and Fleming (2002, p. 713) further note that attacks on artists by the public were common in the mid-19th century, and that hostility to activities such as the *Salon des refusés* and later independent exhibitions by the impressionists were “at an intensity that is now difficult to comprehend.”

Verbal resistance has been a common way of discrediting novel art movements. In *La Presse*, April 29, 1874, Emile Cardon launches an acid attack on the independent exhibition staged by members of the impressionist movement: “In examining the works exhibited (I particularly recommend numbers 54, 42, 60, 43, 97 and 164) one wonders whether one is seeing the fruit either of a process of mystification which is highly unsuitable for the public, or the result of mental derangement which one could not but regret. In this latter case, this exhibition would no longer be the concern of the critics, but of Dr. Blanche.”

Equally known, and also an illustration of the scandals that are frequent companions of subversive artistic actions, are the public reactions to Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring*, when first performed in Paris in 1913. Goulding (1992, quoting Van Vechten), describes how the premiere

included composer Saint-Saëns leaving in anger and protest as soon as the performance began, loud laughter, barracking, spitting and physical violence in the audience, and noise levels and turmoil that rose to levels where both musicians and dancers found it difficult to hear the music that was played.

While such verbal and physical resistance may set in motion the formation of supportive groups and counter-movements, the effects can be significant delays in the introduction of the new. As reported by Berglund and Gaddefors (2010, p. 153), the *House on the Moon* project by artist Mikael Genberg raised doubt, bewilderment, and anger; a letter to a local newspaper “was so negative that it postponed one of the sponsors to contribute financially to the project.” As for Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, it played for a short period of time and was not staged again until seven years after the premiere in Paris.

Resistance to Entrepreneurship

To capture entrepreneurship that reflects both acts of creation and those driven by emancipatory desires, its subversive element is best associated with initiatives aimed at introducing some form of change in the economic system. Change may then be captured by the introduction of new business ideas, which requires a number of concurrent changes in the behaviour of others, typically the intended customers and a set of actors that include financiers, suppliers, distributors, and others in possession of valuable resources. In this sense, it involves all the players of subversion – a group of activists (as represented by the entrepreneurs), the masses (as represented by the customers), and the dominant system (as represented by existing firms and actors in the possession of valuable resources).

While some research has addressed how novel business ideas are received (Dimov, 2007; Fletcher, 2006; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009), the concept of resistance to the entrepreneurial process has nevertheless received comparatively limited attention (Berglund & Gaddefors, 2010). It is generally known and understood that many entrepreneurs struggle to get their novel ideas known and accepted in the marketplace, a struggle which plays an important role in sustaining the notion of the heroic entrepreneur who against all odds overcomes adversity and ultimately establishes a successful business. But there is relatively limited systematic information about the causes of that struggle, how it is expressed in the form of resistance, and the various ways by which resistance to novelty can be overcome.

From a behavioural point of view, resistance occurs when others actively decide to take an impassive stance towards a novel entrepreneurial idea, resulting in the withholding of critical resources that could potentially have been allocated to support its implementation, and/or commit to actions explicitly aimed at discrediting the idea and preventing its realization. It may thus occur in the form of both non-action and action, and represent resistance primarily aimed at maintaining status quo (cf. Delacruz, 2003; Hirsch, 1995; Miller, 1997; Moghissi, 1999). The most significant sources of resistance are likely to be found among actors with established positions and vested interest in the preservation of the old. Those actors typically include supplier of competing and substitute products and services, or actors with stakes in the value chains they form part of. They may also be found among various public organizations and agencies as representatives of the larger institutional environment.

To these actors, subversive new business ideas represent threats to an established order and therefore must be met by active resistance. Such resistance may take many shapes and forms, including the withholding of critical resources and investments, competitive retaliation such as

temporary price wars and new product development (cf. Howells, 2002), or various attempts at publicly discrediting the new idea. Other examples include threatening existing suppliers with repercussions if they associate with new product and service providers (such was the reaction among established furniture retailers when Ingvar Kamprad started IKEA), or lobbying aimed at sustaining a regulatory environment that protects established businesses or old monopoly positions.

The causes of resistance to novel ideas may not be immediately connected to the threat to an established order. In many cases, and especially because of the unproven nature of novelty, people may simply have different opinions about new business ideas and their chances of ultimate success. The perceived chances of commercial success may be particularly important to financiers and suppliers (who may need to commit to new and uncertain investments), but also among potential customers who may worry about product performance and the future availability of service of new and untried products. The local townsfolk's reaction to Eli Terry's experimentation with large-volume clock manufacturing in the early 19th century is illustrative: "The foolish man, they said, had begun to make two hundred clocks; one said he never would live long enough to finish them; another remarked, that if he did he would, nor could possibly, sell so many, and ridiculed the very idea." (Murphy, 1966: 173, quoting Jerome, 1860). More subtly, the causes of resistance include misunderstandings, which inadvertently delay the introduction of new business ideas (cf. unwitting or target-defined resistance; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 544). In this case, individuals actually agree about the viability of a new business undertaking, but implicitly have misinterpreted what the entrepreneur believes are the best or most appropriate ways to proceed. The result may be official support for the novel idea and the associated allocation of resources and efforts, but because of a mismatch of perceived and required efforts the new venture will experience significant delays, imperfect execution, or ultimate failure. Put somewhat differently, there may be perfectly good intentions but misdirected efforts to help out in the implementation process.

The causes of resistance can also be traced to the consequences of novel ideas. Here, different individuals may again be in perfect agreement about the viability of a novel idea and undertaking, but for some it comes with significant negative consequences. Whenever novel ideas break with or contradict traditions and prior experiences they may elicit strong cognitive reactions, which in turn can translate into obstructive action (Huy, 2002). Such was the case when in response to competitive threats in the 1980s Coca Cola decided to change its original formula by sweetening its main product. "Groups of consumers organized to resist the change. Bottlers also contributed to the clamor: to them, the traditional formula was synonymous with motherhood and apple pie" (Wayland, 1991, p. 12). A perhaps even more compelling cause of resistance is the prospective and irreversible loss of power, position, or wealth (e.g. Harris, 2002; Rothman, Schwartzbaum, & McGrath, 1971). The larger the extent to which existing positions and wealth are threatened, the higher the expected levels of resistance in all its forms, including the physical and verbal, as well as the overt and covert.

The effects of resistance are delayed implementation or ultimate failure of further attempts to promote and realize the novel business idea. Obviously, from the perspective of the entrepreneur these are unwanted outcomes, and they are also unwanted among those actors who for a number of reasons may have become involved in financing or otherwise supporting the new venture. Yet, resistance can also have important legitimizing and mobilizing effects (Berglund & Gaddefors, 2010). Official attempts to curtail the new signal acknowledgement of its potential claims on the future, thus legitimizing its role as at least a contender in current debates. Resistance may also lead entrepreneurs to discover the subversive purpose of their actions and force them to sharpen their

communication and actions to reduce or circumvent opposition. In this sense, resistance enhances the degree to which the meaning of what is done by the entrepreneur is diffused and understood.

Artful Entrepreneurship

“Any artist who wants to ‘challenge’ or ‘disturb’ must be prepared to do so in inverted commas, so to speak: to play the game according to the rules. Sponsors, promoters, government funding agencies, galleries and museums and, of course, the media all expect, even demand, some semblance of revolt, some supposed challenge to accepted ideas.”

(Timms, 2004, p. 69)

The explorations of subversion and resistance allow us to piece together the characteristics of what may be referred to as artful entrepreneurship. To paraphrase Davies (2006) and Barry (2011), artful entrepreneurship is the “upper case” form of entrepreneurship which subverts, redirects, and upends default business practices of the time. In that capacity, it is also the type of entrepreneurship that attracts the most forceful resistance, as it challenges conventional understandings of what constitutes useful products and services and also the wealth and positions of already established firms and organizations.

Like art that strives for originality and desires to break with and transform the old, artful entrepreneurship is subversive at its core. It intentionally seeks to introduce novel solutions that challenge established structures, institutions, and perceptions about what characterizes useful products and services. The subversive intent is a forceful motivator and driver, which sharpens the entrepreneur's sense of mission and exposes the deficiencies of existing solutions in the marketplace. The resistance it tends to generate puts into focus the unique elements of the novel solution, and how these unique elements are to be developed and framed to effectively replace the old. From these perspectives, and while recognizing the substantial risks associated with subversive activities, artful entrepreneurship epitomizes many of the requirements and qualities which have become associated with successful entrepreneurship.

Connecting the Future with the Past

“the avant-garde is (...) paradoxical, denoting both opposition and assimilation.”

(King, 2007, p.70)

In terms of execution, artful entrepreneurship is about the balancing of subversion with a view to the future and actions that connect with the past. Its end result is creative destruction, but to be accepted by customers and gain support from surrounding firms and organizations it requires a point of reference, specifically traditional yet imperfect solutions that leave important aspects of human needs unsatisfied. Entrepreneurs involved in artful entrepreneurship are well aware of this fact, and in the process of introducing novelty carefully balance the novel and groundbreaking properties of their new ventures against preconceived notions and behaviours in the surrounding environment. As an example, well aware of the radical nature of his invention, Edison went to great length to balance the novelties and distinguishing characteristics of his electric lighting system against institutionally shaped understandings of the value and uses of existing technologies (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001).

From this perspective, artful entrepreneurs “must carefully choose designs that couch some features in the familiar, present others as new, and keep still others hidden from view” (*ibid.*, p. 480).

Limitations

There are several notable limitations to the current study. Focusing on the connections between art and entrepreneurship in the form of creative destruction, it does not explore how subversion and resistance apply and are played out in other settings, such as entrepreneurship that merely refines the existing order or the introduction of novelty within the confines of already existing corporations and organizations. Contemplating subversion and resistance also raises the question how resistance may be overcome. Such attempts may take many forms – for example the development of prototypes, promising shares of future profits, or the strategic framing of the nature and consequences of new business ideas (e.g. Martens, Jennings, & Jennings, 2007; Rindova, Barry, & Ketchen, 2009; Rindova, Petkova, & Kotha, 2007) - but these and other strategic activities are left unaccounted for in the present study.

Subversion and resistance also raise important ethical issues together with questions about what represses productive, unproductive, and destructive entrepreneurship (Baumol, 1990). While typically entrepreneurship is seen as something desirable and positive (Berglund & Johansson, 2007), subversive entrepreneurship may come with both positive and negative connotations. Similarly, in sociological accounts resistance is typically seen as a pro-social activity that is performed by the wrongly oppressed (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004), whereas in management and organization studies it has tended to be perceived as erroneous and based on wrong assumptions (Nord & Jermier, 1994; Piderit, 2000). There are good reasons to contemplate whether in individual cases subversion and resistance are to be considered ethically defensible, but these are issues of significant depth and magnitude that cannot be dealt with effectively in the present paper.

Contributions and Avenues for Future Research

Given the often arduous process of getting new business ideas established in the marketplace, particularly in the case of more radical or revolutionary business ideas (Schumpeter, 1934; also, Kirzner, 1999), it is somewhat surprising that subversion and resistance have not received more systematic attention in the entrepreneurship literature. Taking a start in the established notion of subversive activities in art, in this paper we have explored how subversion and resistance are played out in the entrepreneurship context, summarizing the central themes and implications in the concept of artful entrepreneurship.

We perceive three main contributions of our study. First, it re-emphasizes the fruitfulness of examining entrepreneurship through the lens of other fields of inquiry, in the present case illustrating how concepts long known and applied in the field of art can have a bearing on our understanding of entrepreneurial processes (Barry, 2011; Scherdin & Zander, 2011). Second, we outline the nature and characteristics of subversion and resistance, which have been dealt with extensively in fields such as art, sociology, and organization studies, but so far have received only marginal attention in the entrepreneurship literature. Finally, and while we have only been able to capture a small part of two complex phenomena, we hope to have opened up for further and more fine-grained investigations of the unfolding of the entrepreneurial process. Some of the key

questions to be addressed are the nature of subversive entrepreneurship, why and when resistance occurs, which forms and expressions it takes, and how entrepreneurs may act strategically to reduce its consequences. Ultimately, understanding the entrepreneurial process as one that involves various degrees of subversion and resistance may become an important piece in solving the puzzle of who becomes a successful entrepreneur.

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