

L'ABÉCÉDAIRE CRITIQUE EN ENTREPRENEURIAT / CRITICAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP ABC PRIMER

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L'abécédaire critique en entrepreneuriat / Critical Entrepreneurship ABC Primer

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1. Présentation de la rubrique / Presentation of the section aim

Cette rubrique, paraissant à chaque numéro, vise à suggérer une entrée dans les approches critiques en entrepreneuriat, qui évoluent dans la communauté entre méconnaissance et scepticisme, par le biais d'une interrogation ou d'une refondation du vocabulaire. Dans la tradition de l'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze, il ne s'agit donc pas de proposer à proprement parler un dictionnaire objectivant les termes employés mais bien plus de proposer un regard critique sur le discours entrepreneurial. Les auteurs et autrices seraient aussi en mesure de développer une perspective originale et subjective des entrées traitées. Ainsi trois types d'entrées seraient proposées dans cet abécédaire en tentant de trouver un équilibre entre les types :

- Perspective critique du vocabulaire traditionnel ;
- Développement d'un vocabulaire critique en entrepreneuriat ;
- Pratique entrepreneuriale et critique : des mots ordinaires reflétant une autre pratique entrepreneuriale à l'œuvre.

The word “Opportunity”

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The opportune act is what brings us towards the harbour (referring here to the *Latin* meaning of *ob + portus*, meaning toward, port/harbour). Harbour is a refuge, meaning an escape or to flee (from *Latin* *refugere*). Opportunity, from *Latin* *opportunus*, is also about fit, convenience, about the right time. Something we recognise from *Kairos* time (rather than *Chronos* time). It is the time of the event, the potentially transformative event. Time of acting when the other's receptivity is powered up; when the other is open to improvisational entry of images of a future wanted state. Transformative insinuation, as Michel de Certeau talked about when analysing the concept of tactics (de Certeau, 1984). *Portum veniens* describes a wind that takes you to the harbour and is thus also referring to the favourable time to act, to raise the sails, to take advantage of a *Kairos* moment. However, the world can be made worthy of the event (Kirkeby, 2004) to various degrees. I have to be on the ship, have turned it in the right direction, have my sails ready, and know how to best use them – then the sudden wind meets a power to be affected that makes the world worthy of the event, and I find myself at the centre of a proto-organisational form, a configuration from which I can easily and rapidly create the organisation that can make the event into an opportunity.

This organisation-creation process – assembling resources, images and people in a favourable configuration, making the event of a coming opportunity incipient, and creating the organisation that can capitalise on the fact that the event has been tendered into ripeness – is the entrepreneurship-process. The power to be affected, the receptive capacity that makes the world worthy of the event, makes the opportunity incipient or – in the language of process thinking, virtual – can only be actualised if this power to be affected also meets a power to affect. I have to be able to create an organisation of the resources made ready, potentialized up, part of the world's worthy reception of the event, for the opportunity's eventness to be turned into an entrepreneurial organisation (Hjorth, 2014). In contrast to what historically are more common ideas in entrepreneurship research, i.e., that certain individuals possess a trait or talent for spotting opportunities, a more processual understanding of a body's receptive capacity, or power to be affected, gives at hand a more complex and socially oriented understanding. Life-trajectories bring things, experiences, people, images, stories and resources in our way. How those are remembered represents an interesting part of answering the question of how playing – moving beyond the historically delivered limits of the present – is made possible.

Openness to play, to move beyond the limits of the possible (as suggested by history, practice, habit) seems tied to a desire to actualize ideas of future value offered to potential customers. However, this seems also contrary to *ob+portus*, the pursuit of the harbour as a shield from the sea. Modern capitalist economies have transformed what opportunities are understood to be. From a sudden access to the shield or protection offered by the harbour, to

the idea that beyond the known, safe harbour, on the other side of the open sea, there I can create new value. Initially, such ideas also merged with ideas of the creative genius or entrepreneurial individual, dominating both leadership- and entrepreneurship studies for decades.

When we turn to a processual understanding, we simultaneously upgrade the importance of history, time, force, bodies, affect, stories and potentiality (see Helin, Hernes, Hjorth and Holt, 2014). Governing the modern nation state benefitted immensely from promoting commerce as way to conduct oneself (Hirschman, 1977), in the style of *commerce doux*, thought as gentle, polite, which was popularized as bringing individuals out of misbehaviour to instead 'socially useful behaviour in general' (Hirschman, 1977: 62). Odd, Hirschman notes, in a time of slavery. But of course, very useful as a governmentality that proliferated a technology of the self that made individuals more predictable and thus controllable. This individualisation of capacity, on the backdrop of Cartesian self-grounded subjectivity, given additional boost by Freudian psychology, made opportunity into a concept tightly related to the recognizing individual: the individual-opportunity nexus. But a modest historical-linguistic reflection gives us a more complex view, capable of attending to the social-contextual conditions of the emergence of an opportunity-actualizing receptivity. The change of direction in the concept of opportunity – initially going towards the harbour, but lately leaving the harbour in pursuit of the open sea – is interesting as such, but more important to our scrutiny of the concept here is the loss of a sense of the social, relational, contextual dimension accompanying the original version.

Potentiality therefore works better as a concept enabling us to think, theorise, study and analyse what we are after when we use 'opportunity' in relationship to entrepreneurship. Potential can be thought as an kairological or eventful amongst-ness (the French *entre-*), in-between co-present possibilities in resonance. In that co-presence of possibilities is an intensity that results in an individuation of the event: the wind that blows, the atmosphere of the right time to act. Such events call their actors forth should they have the power to be affected and the will to confront the limits of the possible. At that limit is where the act is needed – to breach it, to launch difference into the world. "Imagination is the mode of thought most precisely suited to the differentiating vagueness of the virtual." (Massumi, 2002: 134) Bodies - almost always a collective set thereof - imagining how potential can be actualised, willing to enter into the playful process of making this happen, we call entrepreneurs. They are as interesting as oxygen, heat, fuel, and the chemical reaction in a study of the event of fire. It would be clumsy to reduce fire to the 'firant', and even more strange to reduce entrepreneurship to the entrepreneur. In this digital-algorithmic age we need to point out that such a reduction would lose sight of intensity, force, sensation, bodies, and affect. All the stuff that opportunities are made from.

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