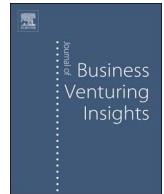




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## Towards a mythic process philosophy of entrepreneurship

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## A B S T R A C T

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

## 1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

## 2. Philosophical grounding

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

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

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

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

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

## 3. Mythological analysis

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

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