

The Symbolic Violence of ‘Social Entrepreneurship’: Language, Power and the Question of the Social (Subject)

Dr. Pascal Dey, UaS Northwestern Switzerland

Abstract

In the field of social entrepreneurship research there are only few inquiries which approach language in terms of its symbolic violence. That is to say that language has not been properly addressed as a strategic means for governing social entrepreneurship by (a) endowing the concept with a particular societal utility function and by (b) providing a grid of intelligibility for the ‘conduct’ of practicing social entrepreneurs. Departing from the assumption that violence is not some extra-linguist social reality but inherent to systems of dominant meaning, the present contribution elaborates on how language favours a particular way of thinking about social entrepreneurship and, most importantly, how this linguistically mediated rationality forms the basis of a strategy for governing community affairs. The objective of the contribution is threefold. First, it aims at kindling an understanding of the symbolic power of language, showing how the meaning of social entrepreneurship is scripted according to the changed social conditions of advanced liberal societies. In doing so, it is demonstrated that social entrepreneurship is rationalized according to a neoliberal political rationality. The neoliberal signification of social entrepreneurship is reflected historically so as to show how social entrepreneurship gets employed in transforming the question of societal responsibility by inscribing ideas of efficiency, management savvy and entrepreneurship into the body of the social. Second, and related to the first point, the contribution seeks to adumbrate language’s violence as epitomized in the process of subjectivation (i.e. the discursive creation

of subjects). This entails highlighting how the rationality of social entrepreneurship hails individuals in the social domain to adopt a responsible stance and an entrepreneurial attitude towards the alleviation of social problems. Social entrepreneurship thus gets depicted as a government technique which no longer sees the state as being responsible for the creation and safeguarding of societal equilibrium, but which relies on the normalization of the figure of the entrepreneur of one's self and hence on the imperative that individuals must relate to, and constantly improve their own bodies as a means of social value creation. The third part, then, discusses the limits of individual self-governance ('conduct of conduct') according to the managerial signification of social entrepreneurship. To this end, it is suggested that practicing social entrepreneurs are never fully dominated by strategic discourse, and that one must not underestimate the transgressive capacity of individuals in the process of their self-narration. To substantiate this theoretical claim, available discursive investigations are invoked to illustrate both how strategic discourse engenders conflicts and tensions within the field of practice and how practicing social entrepreneurs apply transgressive strategies in the narration of their own existence. Each of the three parts concludes with a brief summary of the main implications deriving for the research agenda of social entrepreneurship.

Prologue: Language and Social Entrepreneurship

The nascent stage of social entrepreneurship research is probably best characterized as a heterogeneous attempt to reveal the mystery of respectively social enterprises or social entrepreneurs. Where foundational stories (mainly imparted by business scholars) have dominated the academic landscape up until recently (Nicholls & Young, 2008), it is noticeable that the various anecdotal and conceptual narratives emanating from this period sought to reveal the nucleus that makes those individuals and organisations unique, that is, distinct from, for instance, conventional third sector organisations or profit-seeking enterprises (e.g. Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006). Though scholars keep emphasizing the need for a clearer, more unified conceptual understanding of social entrepreneurship and hence for counter-acting the fragmented status of current definitions, there are good reasons to believe that such a move might lead us astray. In my assessment, this is the case not only because the quest for universal characteristics of social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs neglects the subject's historical, contextual contingency (Steyaert & Dey, forthcoming) and hence the local embeddedness and singularity of meaning. Rather, the search for all-encompassing definitions is problematic to the extent that it conveys the assumption that the truth is inherent to social entrepreneurship itself. Hence, to believe that the true meaning of social entrepreneurship can be approximated by research endeavours incrementally (e.g. by putting forward ever more precise definitions of the term) is misleading because it conceives of language as a mere means of communication, as a mirror of reality which allows us to comprehend how things *really* are (Potter, 1996). My concern with this view is that it inevitably overlooks the possibility that the “essence” of social entrepreneurship is not ontologically real, conceived of as being prior and, by implication, independent of the use of language.

Depicting the paradigmatic contours of the present contribution, I would like to take issue with the assumption that social entrepreneurship has an essence (conceived of as a set of

fixed, universal attributes that makes it definable and recognizable), and instead suggest that it is through language that social entrepreneurship is essenced, that is, transformed into a temporarily stable essence (Žižek, 2008). The shift of perspective implied in such a linguistic turn entails looking at social entrepreneurship as a language-based achievement or, following Foucault (1980), as a construct of particular regimes of truth. Though challenging the ontological a-priori of social entrepreneurship, it must remain clear that studying social entrepreneurship from the perspective of language (and power) in no way means that one merely focuses on how people talk about social entrepreneurship while paying no heed, even ignoring, true reality. As will become clear in a moment, the linguistic perspective employed in this contribution does indeed account for the question of reality. However, in contrast to a realist research approach, it is not concerned with laying bare the universal truth of social entrepreneurship but rather with studying the subject matter as a truth effect of knowledge/power. I hence suggest a paradigmatic shift which entails reflecting scientific and non-scientific statements, utterances or claims about social entrepreneurship not in terms of their objective truth-value but, rather, in terms of how they are related with technologies of power which normalize social entrepreneurship as a legitimate epistemic formation. This perspective allows me to show that linguistic constructions of social entrepreneurship are “real” in the sense of providing a grid of intelligibility which stipulates the ideal conduct of community affairs, and which forms the basis for an identity forming process of practicing individuals.

Contextualizing the present contribution within our field of inquiry, there is a noticeable increase of research undertakings which make language (broadly defined) their explicit focus (i.e. language (Parkinson, 2005; Parkinson & Howorth, 2008; Howorth, Parkinson & MacDonald, forthcoming), discourse (Dey, 2007; Jones, Betta & Latham, 2008; Jones, Betta, Latham & Gross, 2009; Latham, Jones & Betta, 2009; Hervieux, Gedajlovic & Turcotte, 2010), narrative (Jones, Latham & Betta, 2008; Dey & Steyaert, 2010), sense

making (Seanor & Meaton, 2007) or rhetoric (McDonald & Marston, 2002; Dey, 2006; Grenier, 2009)). Whenever helpful, I will take stock of those studies to create awareness of the symbolic violence of language.¹ Responding to recent pleas for critically reflecting (research on) social entrepreneurship, the ambition of this contribution is to emphasize language's limiting effects, pinpointing how language establishes symbolic orders which determine how the object in focus (read: social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs) is supposed to look (and act). The language we use to denote social entrepreneurship, and the paradigms and ideologies being expressed in the course of signification (Boddice, 2009), necessarily normalize particular social realities at the expense of others (which are excluded, repressed, censored, etc.). Consequently, it becomes arguable that representations of social entrepreneurship are violent precisely because relying on artificially determined borders which are patrolled by "censors" (e.g. editorial boards of academic journals, policy-makers, business-case competitions, incubators, etc.) who decide which regimes of truth can be legitimately used and which not. This leads to a (problematic) closure of the meaning of social entrepreneurship because it stimulates a division between approved and disapproved epistemic formations. With this as a backdrop, the present contribution aspires to develop three avenues for language-based research on social entrepreneurship. The first research avenue approaches the symbolic violence of social entrepreneurship via Foucault's (1991) work on governmentality, a concept which stresses the reciprocal relationship between modes of thought (rationalities) and power techniques. This perspective allows us to comprehend that language-based representations of social entrepreneurship define a field of meaning in which a certain kind of government or exercise of power becomes thinkable and legitimate. The second research avenue carries this train of thought from the meso- (institutions) and macro- (state) to the micro-level (individual), demonstrating that social entrepreneurship operates as a government strategy that renders the individual body its focus of intervention.

¹ Speaking of violence, it hardly goes without saying that language is not just negative or repressive (since it constitutes, and hence brings into being the "thing" of which it speaks in the first place).

Foucault's (1988) writing on 'technologies of the self' are invoked to make sense of how the rationality of social entrepreneurship works in the process of individuation, that is, how individuals are discursively called upon to cultivate a responsive and responsible attitude towards social problems and community affairs. The third research avenue, then, gets to deal with the possibility of "resistance" vis-à-vis hegemonic discourse, thus exploiting the realization that the process of subjectivation (i.e. the production of social entrepreneurial subjects under determinate conditions) is never completely successful in that individuals "abstain" from fully submitting to the subject position of the calculating and self-actualizing subject. Using available empirical (discursive) inquiries to support the argument, it is demonstrated that practicing social entrepreneurs appropriate strategic enunciations of the *dispositif* through local language performances. Practitioners' contrapuntal readings of managerial discourse provide important opportunities for advancing the theorizing of social entrepreneurship, for instance by accounting for discursive ambivalences, ideological dilemmas and processes of transgressive self-formation which hitherto were largely absent from academic debate.

Part I: Social Entrepreneurship and the Political Transformation of the Social

To begin with, the present contribution departs from the conviction that social entrepreneurship, that way we ultimately perceive and understand it, is the result of a process of symbolic stabilization. That is to say, the language of social entrepreneurship is violent because it depends on choices ("either this, or not-this. Not both"; Lyotard, 1993, p. 13), and by doing so excludes alternative meanings of the term. Yet, language is not violent simply because it "simplifies the designated thing, reducing it to a single feature" (Žižek, 2008, p. 61). Language is violent also, and especially, because it is often used in conjunction with national or local strategies for governing individuals, groups, and organisations. It is precisely this ontological politics (Mol, 1999) entailed in the language of social entrepreneurship which

forms the focus of this first chapter. To properly understand how social entrepreneurship operates as a political rationality for governing the social presupposes a brief reflection of the historical conditions into which the term has been embedded. Moreover, it requires an understanding of the qualifying modalities as well as the relations of actors which have collectively engendered a particular understanding of the subject matter. Consequently, I would like to first reflect on the arrival of social entrepreneurship against the background of the dominant rationality of advanced liberal societies, that is, neoliberalism. This will be followed by an inquiry of the institutional assemblage or, more precisely, the *dispositif* which delineated social entrepreneurship as a new way of thinking about and, ultimately, of governing community affairs.

The Conditions of Possibility of ‘Social Entrepreneurship’

Trying to get to terms with the conditions of possibility of social entrepreneurship, that is, the concrete material and discursive “structures” that led to its emergence and normalization, it is intuitively compelling that the notion ‘social entrepreneurship’ has been brought into play during a historical period where the shortcomings and malfunctions of late capitalism were regarded as a pivotal threat to Western ideals of social equality, freedom and justice.² Despite the undeniable heterogeneity of interpretations and references, social entrepreneurship has been largely associated with the weakening of the welfare system in ‘developed’ countries or in what henceforth will be referred to as advanced liberal societies.³ Limiting the horizon of inquiry to advanced liberal societies, it is Peredo (2009) who claims that the role of the social entrepreneur has been delineated in connection with the retreat of government-led, publicly

² Notice that despite there being an affinity between (neo)liberalism and capitalism one cannot assume a direct causal homology between the two terms as this „overlooks the fact that governing practices embody their own histories and develop their own rationalities which may or may not link up with the dictates of capital“ (Isin, 1998, p. 171).

³ Similarly, Cook, Dodds and Mitchell (2003) suggest inquiring social entrepreneurship in relation with the concrete context from which the term emerged, most notably in relation with the politico-economic processes stimulated by Third Way politics.

supported welfare networks, combined with a tendency to shift responsibility to independent agents within civil society. Grant (2008) further shows that the scope of contemporary social enterprises in New Zealand was influenced by neoliberal reforms dating back to the 1980s. Cook, Dodds & Mitchell (2003) add to this that social entrepreneurship “is the means that Third Way writers propose to reconstruct welfare and involves building social partnerships between the public, social and business sectors” (p. 57) while harnessing market behaviour in the interest of public goals.⁴ Taken together, it appears intuitively compelling to concur with Ziegler (2009) who mentions that “efforts to privatise goods and services, and to restructure social services with a ‘neoliberal’ twist, provided fertile soil for the emergence of social entrepreneurs in the ‘developed’ world” (p. 14). Yet, accepting that the retreat of the welfare state posed a real challenge to the provision of public services at face value would be problematic to the extent that this interpretation would miss out on the opportunity to conceive of the matter as a political justification of a new regime of government. This new regime of government (in which social entrepreneurship works strategically to reformulate the *regnum* of the social) will henceforth be “been called “advanced liberalism” and its tactics, strategies and rationalities “neoliberal”” (Isin, 1998, p. 173). In contrast to studies in political philosophy which conceive of neoliberalism as an ideology which aims at reducing the power of the state (in the market as well as in the sphere of private life), it is by delineating neoliberalism as a new government strategy that it becomes possible to embrace the matter as being less about weakening the role of the state than about changing its *modus operandi*. What distinguishes neoliberalism from liberalism (which preceded the former) is that the former no longer assumes the role of government in using technologies of power (e.g. the penal or psychiatric system) to discipline particular groups and classes (Lemke, 2002). Neoliberalism reconfigures government in such ways that it gets to extend political forms of government to forms of self-regulation, that is, ‘technologies of the self’ (cf. below). It is in

⁴ Cf. Humphries and Grant (2005) for a critical review of social entrepreneurship’s apparent over-reliance on the market metaphor.

this way that neoliberalism gets to replace or, more precisely, supplement more panoptic or disciplinary forms of governance with strategies that aim at influencing the conduct of individuals through themselves.

The pivotal “conjuring trick” of neoliberalism is that it envisions both the cause and solution of ill-fates and misfortunes in relation with the community (or the individual, for that matter). Peredo (2009) provides a point in case, mentioning that social entrepreneurship gets envisioned through the discourse of possessive individualism which stresses attributes such as alertness, inventiveness, risk-taking propensity while pointing out how talented individuals use those skills to create and distribute social goods. Generally speaking, it is arguable that neoliberalism, conceived of as a mentality of rule (and not a naturalistic phenomenon; Foucault, 1997), sidesteps the (failed) responsibility of the state by thrusting the question of responsibility back onto the community.⁵ This is achieved, following Lemke (2001), precisely by expanding entrepreneurial forms to the body of the social. In accordance with Guala (2006), one can see that the role of government in advanced liberal societies is to “constantly intervene, but on society, rather than on the economy itself [...] by encouraging [social] entrepreneurship in all areas of life, including those areas that were traditionally alien to the economic way of thinking and acting” (p. 6). The chief task of government is to foster active social entrepreneurs, instilling them as both moral and desirable, and accommodating them to the needs and requirements of the ‘the market’ rather than the other way around. If looked at from this vantage point, social entrepreneurship is not antithetical to neoliberalism (as many critics would have it⁶), but rather one of its conceptual creations.⁷ This being said, it would be

⁵ This does, however, not mean that the state becomes passive or inert in any absolute sense. It is rather the case, following Graefe (2005), that government stipulates its role in relation to public policy in supporting social entrepreneurs who seek to develop new markets in personal and care services. “There is a hope that this will allow social entrepreneurs to mobilize otherwise untapped resources (such as voluntarism), and in the process meet social needs that are too expensive for public provision, and unprofitable for for-profit provision” (Graefe, 2005, pp. 12-13).

⁶ Zografos (2006) adds an interesting perspective to the discussion, distinguishing a ‘reformist’ view which “supports the position that social enterprises are simple extensions of existing economic systems” (p. 38) from what he terms a ‘radical’ stance which sees “them as the embodiment of an alternative vision of running local economies” (ibid.).

incomplete to solely envision social entrepreneurship as an intellectual or ideological product of neoliberalism because this supports the simplified view that social entrepreneurship merely provides a new regime for thinking about the social (without necessarily affecting it). We must hence emphasize how social entrepreneurship is rendered intelligible and meaningful in the practical domain, how it is transformed into a particular kind of knowledge (read know-how) that has a bearing on individuals and organisations.

Essentially, social entrepreneurship, to become practical (rather than just contemplative or theoretical), needs to be connected to series of technologies of power. This quite evidently marks a complex task in that massive social interventions are needed to position the entrepreneurial form at the very heart of society (Lemke, 2001). To elaborate on how the sign ‘social entrepreneurship’ was conditioned and employed by socially authorized individuals and organisations for acting upon the social so as to ensure its effective governance, it becomes necessary to bring to the fore the institutional forces, as well as their discursive and non-discursive connections, which participated in its ‘productivization’ (Huczynski, 1993), that is, in the process through which social entrepreneurship is rendered a practical opportunity (not to say imperative).

‘Social Entrepreneurship’ and the Dispositif

Speaking of productivization, it is undeniable that academia has and still does play a significant role in rendering social entrepreneurship “tangible” in the realm of practice. Yet, though the impetus of academia (and in particular of business schools) inhabits a central position in the present contribution, it must be noted that academia has clearly not acted in isolation but has rather operated as a node in a larger institutional assemblage. It thus becomes

⁷ To be precise, social entrepreneurship did in fact stimulate a reformulation of neoliberalism. Craig and Porter (2006) are instructive here in showing how social entrepreneurship represents a rupture between what they call conservative neoliberalism (i.e. Thatcherism) and ‘inclusive’ (neo)liberalism.

helpful to relate this presupposition with Foucault's (1980) notion of apparatus or *dispositif*,⁸ a term which allows us to conceive of social entrepreneurship as an epistemic formation being engendered by a network of remarkably disparate actors. In general terms, these actors (among them business schools, investment banks, venture capitalists, incubators, think tanks, policy-makers, etc.) are related with, and thereby support one another, through particular discourses, scientific and political statements, laws⁹, philanthropic and business initiatives, etc.¹⁰ This makes it clear that the "institutionalisation", mainstreaming and hence normalisation of social entrepreneurship in the domain of practice equally depends on the orchestrated use of language as well as on sector-transcending strategies of government (e.g. business competitions, social entrepreneurship awards and courses, media coverage, etc.). The concept *dispositif* further enables the view that the system of relations between different elements has – despite its many contradictions, ruptures and tensions¹¹ – "as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need" (Foucault, 1980, p. 196). In other words, the meaning of social entrepreneurship that arises from (and to a certain degree conditions; Agamben, 2009) the *dispositif* has a strategic function in that it on the one hand seeks to identify the problem of advanced liberal society while on the other hand offering practical knowledge for governing the issue at hand.

The two studies by Grenier (2009) and Parkison and Howorth (2008) are particularly

⁸ Given that there exists no precise English translation for the French term *dispositif*, I prefer using the original concept (though indicating its French heritage by keeping the term in italics).

⁹ It is noticeable that social entrepreneurship is often not captured by national laws: "While some countries, such as the UK, have been proactive in drafting favourable legislation, others are lagging behind" (Mair, 2008, p. 13).

¹⁰ Concerning social entrepreneurship research, it is indeed reassuring that the scientific community has already embarked upon a journey to approach the matter as the result of particular institutional arrangements. For instance, O'Connor (2006) points out that the emergence of social entrepreneurship in the USA, and particularly in the Silicon Valley, has been contingent on networks of venture capitalists, philanthropists and for-profit enterprises which have paved the way for seeing that social issues must be addressed through economic initiatives. Hervieux, Gedajlovic and Turcotte (2010), who study the legitimization of social entrepreneurship as a field (of research and practice), make it clear that "foundations, consultants, academics and, of course, the networks that bring these actors together, all have the potential to influence the development of the SE field and its constitutive logics" (p. 45).

¹¹ Though Foucault's term *dispositif* seeks to explain how heterogeneous elements are connected and how their interplay results in a specific historical formation, it must be noted that it would be untenable to assume that the formation of social entrepreneurship occurred in a harmonious, univocal concert.

helpful for making the *dispositif* of social entrepreneurship more palpable.¹² In her study of the emergence of social entrepreneurship in the UK, Grenier claims that it was in the course of the 1990s that the idea of individual social entrepreneurs being a crucial ingredient in the alleviation of social problems has gained currency in policy circles. Pinpointing the numerous texts and reports on social entrepreneurship being produced during that time, Grenier convincingly argues that the term – though chiefly conjoined with the election of New Labour into government in 1997 – attracted “unequivocal cross-party political support” (p. 175). Social entrepreneurship hence quickly moved beyond political parlance which is evident from the founding of specialised institutions seeking to identify and support individual social entrepreneurs.¹³ Studying the minutiae of the interplay between think tanks, social entrepreneurship organisations (among them Ashoka, CAN, Senscot, SSE, UnLtd) and policy-makers, Grenier testifies to the multifaceted operation of different institutions, most notably by revealing how think tanks such as Demos, the New Economics Foundation, and the Fabian Society “drew on the policy discourses of the day to reinforce the importance of social entrepreneurship to issues such as ‘social capital’ and ‘community cohesion’, thereby positioning social entrepreneurship as immediately relevant to government policy” (p. 182). On the face of it, the term social entrepreneurship has been used strategically so as to attract “policy attention, press coverage, money” and to inspire “people and organisations to take action” (pp. 176-177). In Foucauldian terms, social entrepreneurship, despite the chronic ambiguousness of the term, was employed by the *dispositif* to stage a call to action or, following Grenier (2009), “to frame [social] issues and solutions, to influence how practitioners and policy-makers think, to imply possible futures and to constrain what is done

¹² It must remain clear that the two studies do not make recourse to Foucault’s concept of *dispositif*. Nevertheless, they are utterly helpful in revealing how certain institutional arrangements work to signify social entrepreneurship, and how these arrangements engender political priorities and omissions. One might add the inquiry by Nicholls and Cho (2006) which examines the field of social entrepreneurship through Giddens’ structuration theory, using critical theory to illuminate the political dimension in the constitution of sociality.

¹³ According to Grenier (2009), between “1997 and the end of 2006 hundreds, if not thousands, of social entrepreneurs were identified in the UK” (p. 175).

in practice and policy” (p. 177). By the same token, Parkinson and Howorth (2008) focus on the interplay between policy-makers, funders and support agencies in the UK, claiming that these collaborative endeavours have engendered a particular understanding of social entrepreneurship, one which places great emphasis on individual capabilities as well as on a managerially defined model of community service delivery.¹⁴ As a result, the social entrepreneurship agenda has discursively marginalized community issues as well as “complex values and meanings behind the *social*” (Parkinson & Howorth, 2008, p. 291; emphasis in original), provoking a semantic shift from “political engagement to problem fixing, collective action to individual entrepreneurs, and from democratic structures to a focus on social purpose” (ibid.).¹⁵

Both studies get to support the view that social entrepreneurship has served as a fluid signifier which institutional actors were investing in (i.e. bestowing it with political objectives) so as to legitimate it as a “mechanism for aligning certain novel ideas or interesting practices with policy agendas” (Grenier, 2009, p. 182).¹⁶ I would like to add to the picture the specific contribution of universities and business schools in particular, not only because they have increasingly embraced social entrepreneurship through their core activities (research and education curricula), but also, and most importantly, because they have opted to align their activities with the pragmatic needs of society (Gunn et al., 2008). In my own work (Dey, 2007), I have studied the distinct contribution of business schools in stabilizing certain

¹⁴ Nicholls and Young (2008) further claim that the interests of philanthropic and grant giving bodies contributed to delineating social entrepreneurship as being primarily about ‘hero entrepreneurs’.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive overview of the ‘mainstreaming’ of social entrepreneurship based on various collaborations between actors from academia, the community and business sector, government, and philanthropists see Nicholls and Young (2008) and Hervieux, Gedajlovic and Turcotte (2010).

¹⁶ It is probably no coincidence that the UK context has been the focal point of observation in both publications. Indeed, the UK has spearheaded the government-led promotion of social entrepreneurship, which is supported by Hoogendoorn, Pennings and Thurik (2010) and Nicholls and Young (2008) who make it clear that social entrepreneurship in the UK has been wholeheartedly embraced on the level of national government. Hoogendoorn, Pennings and Thurik (2010) thus employ the neologism ‘UK approach’ to emphasize that social entrepreneurship has been integrated into legislative initiatives which aimed at addressing social issues under Blair’s Third Way politics.

understandings of the sign ‘social entrepreneurship’¹⁷ based on to the immediate urgencies of society. Regarding the institutionalization of social entrepreneurship, the study reveals that business schools often cooperated with non-academic partners (e.g. philanthropists, business ventures, etc.) in establishing social entrepreneurship centres or courses respectively, receiving financial support from non-academic stakeholders to alleviate societal problems.¹⁸ Additionally, the study points out how the ever mounting number of social venture competitions are mostly initiated through co-operations between business schools on the one hand and venture capitalists, investment banks or for-profit enterprises on the other. What is striking about these observations is that actors came to “work together” which, though not necessarily antagonists, are conventionally operating with different agendas, objectives, and root assumptions.¹⁹ More importantly, institutional ties between the corporate world, philanthropists, universities and business schools have in many instances amplified the need to make social entrepreneurship tangible by way of ‘hands-on approaches’.²⁰ Based on the premise of societal utility, the *dispositif* of academic and non-academic actors has become involved in codifying social entrepreneurship as a hands-on, value creating approach “in the pursuit of high social returns” (New York University, 2009). Conceiving of social

¹⁷ Though it hardly needs mention that social entrepreneurship has first and foremost been conceptualized through the lens of business economics (Peredo, 2009), one needs to recognize that its meaning has been denoted from the adherence to a small number of academic texts. In social entrepreneurship’s stage of infancy, it has been particularly the work of Gregory Dees (e.g. 1998; 1998b; 2001 with Emerson & Economy) which has been used as a reference point both inside (e.g. Stanford Graduate School of Business, Fuqua, Haas School of Business; London Business School; Columbia Business School) and outside (e.g. Ashoka Foundation, Changemakers, Future Shifters, Social Edge) the business school context.

¹⁸ For instance, Harvard has received a USD 10 million donation from the Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation to fund students who adopt a businesslike approach to social science disciplines (O’Connor, 2006). Nicholls and Young (2008) provide further illustrations of how universities’ quest to become pragmatically significant has in many instances been accompanied by the establishment of ties with non-academic institutions.

¹⁹ It is further interesting to notice that the different actors of the *dispositif* actively create isomorphic tendencies in terms of the understanding social entrepreneurship (Hervieux, Gedajlovic & Turcotte, 2010). To be fair, the isomorphic tendencies in the enunciations of social entrepreneurship have recently weakened a bit which is partly due to the allowance of new disciplines to the field of academic research (Nicholls & Young, 2008).

²⁰ For instance, Murdock et al. (2009), outlining the contours and achievements of the UK-based Social Enterprise Research Capacity Building Cluster, point out that (PhD) research carried out at the Centre explicitly aims at being relevant for the involved organisations. Government concerns with regard to the practical focus and utility of the Centre’s research were taken into consideration, which is materialized in the Centre’s objective to have a decisive impact on their communities. Moreover, the Centre came to address the looming disjuncture between research and practice through the development of so called ‘knowledge transfer partnerships’, thus relying on the experiences from similar initiatives from the private sector while using business plans to calculate returns on investment.

entrepreneurship as being the amalgam of particular skills and drives of the individual, this view was conducive in rendering social entrepreneurship part of an identifiable project, namely the rejuvenation of welfare systems and national economies at large. By extension, the legitimacy of social entrepreneurship, as Chris Steyaert and I discuss elsewhere (Dey & Steyaert, 2010; Steyaert & Dey, forthcoming), was increasingly related to its ability to gauge performance. It was in light of this realisation that Chris and I have referred to Lyotard's (1984) notion of performativity to make it comprehensible that the *dispositif* (and not least academic institutions) works strategically in the sense of delineating the usefulness or uselessness of social entrepreneurship exclusively according to the principle of optimal performance (in the best possible interest of society²¹). Where Lyotard (1984) makes the general point that contemporary knowledge is increasingly evaluated according to economic categories (e.g. "Can it be sold in the market?"; "Does it allow for increases in efficiency?"; or, most generally, "What [practical] use is it?"; Lyotard, 1984, p. 51), we have added to this that performativity provides the meta-script for aligning social entrepreneurship with ideas of rationalism, utility, progress, individualism and the maximization of input-output relations. It is as a result of this performative normalisation of social entrepreneurship that the *dispositif* achieves to embed the matter in a means-ends constellation where it derives large parts of its value (and hence its legitimacy) in terms of whether or not it is economically viable and socio-economically value adding. In other words, performativity forms the modern mentality for either pinpointing or increasing the relative power of any given individual, institution or nation states. Performativity is all encompassing in that it reflects the value of social entrepreneurship on the level of individuals (the 'calculating self'; cf. below), organisations

²¹ It is important to recognize that the nation state forms the teleological focus in Lyotard's (1984) treatise on knowledge in that the question of knowledge's performativity is critically linked with the 'productive power' of the nation state. In terms of teaching, and indeed in terms of the production and dissemination of knowledge through education institutes at large, Lyotard (1984) claims that its value is evaluated according to whether or not it contributes "to the best performativity of the social system" (p. 48).

(financial self-sufficiency and autonomy), communities (efficient and effective provision of public services, customer orientation) as well as of the nation state (tax savings). Yet, though performativity provides a schema for evaluating social entrepreneurship in terms of its efficiency and effectiveness, and indeed for rendering it a means for managerial welfare provision (Grenier, 2009), it should remain sufficiently clear that the *dispositif* is not only involved in a particular work of imagination but also in concrete interventions into the body of the social. That is to say, we cannot understand how social entrepreneurship supports the neoliberal governmentality of advanced liberal societies only in terms of the *dispositif* (which provides the means towards achieving certain political objectives: performativity in the name of society), but must add to the picture those practices which are supposed to lead to these ends and which enable governing the social (subject) through ‘technologies of the self’. Before getting more concrete about the government of individuals through particular practices of self-engineering (i.e. ‘conduct of conduct’; Dean, 1999, p. 10), I would like to use the following section to sketch out the implications which derive from the above insights in terms of prospective research.

Implications for Research

It hardly needs to be mentioned that not everybody is allowed to speak in the name of social entrepreneurship and that not everyone is heard and accepted as a legitimate truth-teller. It is, however, important to get involved in inquiries which shed light on the conditions under which statements about social entrepreneurship become accepted as representing the truth. It is also necessary to bring to the fore the linguistic and institutional processes which render social entrepreneurship a socially authorized repertoire for thinking about how to best address the social challenges and obstacles in advanced liberal societies. If we assume, in accordance with Agamben (2009), that under current conditions there is no space of meaning without a *dispositif* at work, then it becomes imperative to approach the sign ‘social entrepreneurship’

not in terms of its ontology (i.e. what it really means), but based on meticulous analyses of the material, historical, economic, discursive or linguistic structures and practices that constitute the conditions of possibility of social entrepreneurship and of which social entrepreneurship is an effect. Foucault's concept of *dispositif* provides a fertile starting point in this connection as it conceives of social entrepreneurship as a work of imagination which presupposes the normalization of particular meanings through concrete practices, strategies and relations of force. Hence, in contrast to Vasi (2009) who suggests that researchers should come to study the "social conditions that are conducive to social entrepreneurship" (p. 168), I propose inquiring how those very conditions rationalize 'social entrepreneurship' in accordance with the problems immanent to the particular society at hand. Accordingly, studying the texts, statements, narratives or discourses as well as the qualifying modalities of social entrepreneurship renders perspicuous why certain meanings of the term are rationalized (and not others), thus allowing us to come to terms with why only a limited number of meanings is identifiable in public enunciations of social entrepreneurship. In fact, a grounded sense for the strategic relationship between social entrepreneurship and its *dispositif*, that is, how the *dispositif* designates the principles and conditions (both material and symbolic) in which, and through which, social entrepreneurship realizes a "pure activity of governance" (Agamben, 2009, p. 12), represents a crucial step toward revealing the political aspect of social entrepreneurship narratives. This further allows for problematizing the linguistic construction of social entrepreneurship by showing that the *dispositif* at one and the same time operates as social entrepreneurship's condition of possibility and impossibility. That is, it allows us to see that the *dispositif* is political in that it puts in place an economy of presences (i.e. what is said or effable) and absences (i.e. what is omitted or ineffable), and that this symbolic economy provides the basis for interventions into the social by pinpointing urgent societal problems and approaches for solving them. Accordingly, studying social entrepreneurship in the making, as it were, offers a way to distance ourselves from taken-for-granted assumptions

(constantly perpetuated and re-inscribed into our everyday thinking by the signifying practices of the *dispositif*), and to reflect on and permanently question the political reality into which social entrepreneurship is transformed. Such reflective “detachment” is important not least because it provides the means for re-politicizing social entrepreneurship by making us “see entrepreneurship as primarily belonging to society and not simply to the economy” (Hjorth, 2009, p. 213) or to the state apparatus.

Part II: “Thou Shalt Be a Social Entrepreneur”

Where the *dispositif* has the general capacity to “to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings” (Agamben, 2009, p. 14), this shaping is achieved less by rendering individuals “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1977) but by making them acknowledge that their potential is contingent on them acting upon themselves as both free and responsible agents. Consequently, the *dispositif* perspective, which chiefly looks at the relations of force that pre-structure our horizon of understanding, must be complemented with a view that looks at individual social agents while asking how their talk and action reverberates the symbolic stipulations of their social context. Only if a *dispositif* has a proven effect in mobilising individuals’ inspirations, interests, desires, mentalities (i.e. ways of thinking), etc. will it be possible to govern the social through the social itself. Put differently, for the *dispositif* to be effective in terms of neoliberal government requires that it establishes an explanatory link between the individual’s belief or mentality (thus *governmentality*) and proper action so that in the end the individual gets to integrate those convictions and gets to act according to them out of free will.

As should be obvious by now, the volitional and seemingly autonomous subjugation of individuals to the figure of the social entrepreneur is the result of a reflective process, a process whose success chiefly depends on the individual’s identification with the subject

position of the social entrepreneur. Essentially, this identification presupposes that a certain kind of knowledge is rendered reasonable, necessary and attractive for the individual. In terms of bestowing the figure of the social entrepreneur with a sense of urgency, it is Grenier (2009) who points out that policy discourse in the UK has been successful in signalling the “need for ‘enterprise’ and culture change in a variety of institutional settings”, that is, “the need for a change in attitude, approach, behaviour and, ultimately, culture, in the voluntary sector, in the public sector and in community development” (p. 198). Grenier attests how epochal language (du Gay, 2003) works to position social entrepreneurship in general and social entrepreneurs in particular as a viable option in the face of societal problems in the UK. While it is arguable that policy-makers have had an important impact in rationalizing the need for social entrepreneurship in society as well as in mobilizing (material) support, it is once more business schools which deserve special attention here as they have come to play a pivotal role in prompting individuals (social activists, community leaders or change makers) and nonprofit or nongovernmental organisations to work on behalf of themselves in such a way as to become more professional, efficient and enterprising. To see how social entrepreneurship becomes part of a complex process of individuation, one must understand that business schools “productivize” social entrepreneurship (i.e. render it amenable to practical application) in conjunction with teaching activities, practitioner publications (guidebooks, toolkits, best-practice approaches, etc.) and practice-oriented research. The ever-mounting number of case-studies, commissioned research, and, most essentially, toolkits and best-practice approaches on social entrepreneurship substantiates the view that business schools are increasingly aligning their goals and practices with pragmatic societal needs (read ‘end-orientation’; Derrida, 2004). Furthermore, it indicates that business schools and higher education institutions quite generally have become actively involved in shaping, channelling and controlling social entrepreneurship (Todres et al., 2006), and indeed in drawing the

contours of the ideal conduct of individuals and organisations in the social domain.²²

Consequently, instead of asking “If you want to be a ‘good’ social entrepreneur, should you study management (literature)?” (Illouz, 2009, p. 107), we should ask what kind of subjectivity is implied in the textual archive of business schools.

The two publications by Dees, Emerson and Economy (2001; 2002) are utterly helpful in this connection as they exemplify how guidebooks and best-management approaches aspire to equip nonprofit managers with knowledge that shall enable them to become more effective as social entrepreneurs.²³ Generally speaking, these sorts of texts seek to provide nonprofit managers with a set of routines and suggestions that appear applicable to any type of organizational context and domain of action. They operate upon the assumption that strict adherence to state-of-the-art management, comprising practices such as ‘competitive strategy’, ‘mission’, ‘human resource management’, ‘investor-relations’, and ‘customer relationship management’, will allow these organisations and individuals to gauge efficiency. Additionally, references to the merits of business entrepreneurship gets to provide the script for exploiting untapped (financial) opportunities, to innovate, diversify revenue streams and hence to become financially self-sustaining. In light of this, it is not uncommon for practice-oriented publications to relate to resource dependency theory to support the view that nonprofit organisations and managers must act towards becoming independent from subsidies and grants.²⁴ Resource dependency theory effectively works to postulate that the ‘flabbiness’ of the third sector (Grenier, 2002) can be overcome provided that traditional third-sector practices and attitudes are exchanged or supplemented with those of management and

²² Following Ren (2005), one must bear in mind that expert know-how is indispensable for effective government as it provides the means for ‘technologies of the self’.

²³ On the face of it, social entrepreneurship within the account of Dees et al. (2001; 2002) is part of a ‘progressive narrative’ (Gergen & Gergen, 1988) where a particular evaluative position is taken to improve over the course of the plot. That is, given that people follow the actions and initiatives prescribed in the textbooks of social entrepreneurs, it is assumed that, despite ordeals and eventual obstacles (Dees & Economy, 2001), social entrepreneurs will be able to re-establish a state of equilibrium.

²⁴ For instance, Helm (2004) mentions that “budget cuts tend to be the most commonly cited explanation for the proliferation of social entrepreneurship” (p. 2).

business entrepreneurship.²⁵ For instance, Boschee and McClurg (2003) suggest that “[s]mart nonprofit managers [...] realize they must increasingly depend on themselves to ensure their survival [...] and that has led them naturally to the world of entrepreneurship” (p. 3). Further examples abound, it is important to notice that social entrepreneurship toolkits depend on a ‘periodizing schema’ (du Gay, 2003) which simultaneously makes the changed social conditions in advanced liberal society appear unavoidable while offering practitioners a series of technologies, rationalities and identities which are deemed essential for dealing with those changes. References to, for instance, the weakening of the welfare system or the increased competition over subsidies and donations provide the argumentative basis for claiming that “[n]ow it is time for social sector leaders to use every tool [from the business community] available to them and to apply those tools to further the organization’s mission, serve its customers, and build community” (Dees, Emerson & Economy, 2002, p. ix). In light of this, toolkits enact professional expertise by way of providing the techniques for establishing sustainable enterprises (i.e. social enterprises), for instance by supporting nonprofit managers with the precise ‘definition of the mission’, the implementation of ‘performance measures’, the writing of ‘business plans’, the control of ‘risks’ and the ‘mastering of innovation’ (Dees et al., 2001; 2002). Social enterprises are thus presented as the remedy for the threats inherent to the conditions of advanced liberalism, a remedy which is based on management practices of calculation and control. The point to be emphasized here is that calculation and control are not to be envisioned exclusively as organisational practices, that is, as actions and behaviours which the nonprofit manager or social leader carries out but which do not affected her/him on the level of being. More than anything, calculation and control (in relation with, for instance, opportunities, risks, efficiency) are part of a general mentality that represents an important aspect of the social entrepreneur’s being or identity. Claiming that the social entrepreneur is

²⁵ Notice that there is a paradox here in that “typically entrepreneurship and management are juxtaposed as two competing modes” (Illouz, 2009, p. 108).

chiefly a ‘calculating self’ (Rose, 1996), this means that the social entrepreneur is a subject that constantly acts upon her-/himself in order to improve her-/himself (and not “just” her/his organisation). Notions of calculation and control hence get to imply that the social entrepreneur at the same time embraces the imperative to use the means at her/his disposal in the best possible way (that is, efficiently), while also acting upon her-/himself so as to constantly align her/his thinking, beliefs, enthusiasm, empathy, etc. with the goals in hand. By implication, the social entrepreneur transforms life itself into an enterprise, using the know-how of management and business entrepreneurship to organise her/his life in terms of choices, challenges and opportunities and to transform her-/himself according to the political interests of the state. While calculation and control form the basic capability for governing social entrepreneurs through themselves, it is worth bearing in mind that categories of ‘calculation’, ‘performance’ and ‘efficiency’ in conjunction with social entrepreneurship do not get to work as “cold” technical terms. Instead, they are scripted into what Illouz (2009) calls “valid cultural repertoires” (p. 107), which chiefly means that they are part of a collective mentality which is aligned with esteemed attributes of Western culture. Though it is beyond question that the vocabulary of management and business entrepreneurship does not strike an attentive chord with everyone (cf. Ogbor, 2000; Ahl, 2002), it is indeed the case that the subject position of the social entrepreneur largely relies on the use of cultural icons which convey positive evaluative accents. On the most general level, it is noticeable that the case for the social entrepreneur is buttressed through the provision of persuasive illustrations. These illustrations gain part of their persuasiveness from being based on successful ‘cases’ (cf. Mair, Seelos & Borwankar, 2005; Mair & Marti, 2006)²⁶ and, most importantly, from being related

²⁶ It is hardly surprising that one encounters frequent hints at the case of the Grameen Bank, which figures as a standard reference in both scientific publications and practitioner literature. This tendency systematically ignores unsuccessful cases or cases which never went to scale. Vasi (2009) thus gets to conclude: “While identifying less successful or media-unsavvy social entrepreneurs is likely to be challenging, it is also imperative in order to advance our understanding of the conditions under which social entrepreneurs can solve the vast social problems of our times” (p. 169).

with individualized cultural repertoires such as risk-taking, innovativeness, opportunity-orientation and circumspection (Dees & Economy, 2001). On the face of it, using personality attributes which are generally held in high regard, the neologism ‘social entrepreneur’ gets to re-interpret the root causes (as well as the *pharmakon*) of social ills not in relation with, for instance, structural or political terms, but in conjunction with individual categories. Guidebooks and best-management approaches play no small role in supporting this imagery in that they depict social change and transformation as being the result of individual efforts and as being contingent on particular skills, beliefs and attitudes. More than anything, they mobilise a sense of urgency, identify the requisite aptitudes and skills for addressing the urgency while grounding their accounts on attractive, culturally mediated images so as to render social entrepreneurship a worthwhile option for the individual.

Importantly, the imagery of the social entrepreneur created by guidebooks and best-management approaches works through a logic of free choice (evidently, nobody is forced to become a social entrepreneur). That is, they work through inculcating the individual with an active desire to become a social entrepreneur and offer the kind of expertise (read know-how) that can guide them along their transformation. The logic of free choice is hence based on a mechanism that sees every individual as being capable to accept that the best way forward as a nonprofit manager, social leader, community activist, etc. is to believe in the ideas of management and business entrepreneurship, to freely accept them, to integrate (i.e. properly embody) them, and to carry them over into the realm of every-day work. Essentially, and according to (Rose, 1999), the idea of free choice has a compulsive side because the individual is not simply free but obliged to be so. Social entrepreneurs must thus actively and constantly use their ability to make proper choices in order to transform both individual and societal potentialities into actualities. The logic of choice forms a vital strategy for drawing the contours of communities in which individuals freely and autonomously work upon themselves so as to play “a strong and vibrant part in society” (Blair, 1994). Where the logic

of free choice gets to replace the rhetoric of obligation and duties, it must remain clear that it works to conceive of responsibility (in terms of the self as well as of society) as a matter of individual provision. If looked at it from this perspective, we can see that the know-how entailed in guidebooks and best-management approaches forms part of a strategy for rendering individuals ‘responsible’ by transforming societal challenges into problems of proper ‘self-management’. This ultimately comes down to saying that the effective government of individual social entrepreneurs does not just depend on government support but also on a ‘new subjectification’, that is, the creation of a new subject position which provides an appealing opportunity for the social actor.

Though the above analysis has necessarily been selective, I have tried to pinpoint how business schools operate in relation with the shaping of individual social entrepreneurs, how they promote a kind of know-how (i.e. skills, aptitudes, motivations) that is ostensibly required for successfully leading social change, and how this same know-how works discursively to render the individual a particular kind of subject, a subject whose ethos is based on sound calculation and the instrumental use of free choice. This process of individuation is emblematic for neoliberal forms of government as it does not rely on disciplinary interventions of specialized state apparatuses, but rather on furthering the cause of society through the volition of individuals “without at the same time being responsible for them” (Lemke, 2001, p. 201). Whether and to what this government strategy works (i.e. whether it has an impetus on the individual) will become the subject of the third part. Before that, I would like to make some tentative suggestions for future research.

Implications for Research

Neoliberal governance always implies a process of subjectification, that is to say, advanced liberal society – to be able to govern community affairs – must produce its subjects

(Agamben, 2009). What I have tried to pinpoint in this chapter is the kind of subject position implied in the know-how provided by business schools. Yet, though guidebooks and best-management approaches operate discursively to engender social entrepreneurial subjects, it is also true that this always presupposes that individuals get to accept or draw upon the subject positions “offered” to them (Bennett & Edelman, 1985). The transition from language, discourse or ideology to becoming a subject, which is referred to by Althusser (1977) as ‘interpellation’, represents a reflective process through which practitioners use publicly available knowledge and know-how for their own ‘self-creation’. In terms of prospective research, there are two implications that are to be taken into consideration concurrently. First, the field of social entrepreneurship research should get involved in creating an understanding of the kind of subject positions implied in their texts but also in those imparted by policy-makers, media, think tanks, etc. To some extent, this is already happening in that scholars have come to critically reflect the linguistic accounts of academia in terms of how they reify the elitist idea of the heroic entrepreneur (Nicholls & Young, 2008). The second avenue for prospective research, which is in no way less urgent than the first one, would then come to deal with how such texts and meaning formations become part of a dynamic of symbolic recognition by which the practicing individual is called upon to act according to the text’s invocation. The particular task here would be to investigate whether there are reasons to believe that the imperative of the enterprising individual has a bearing on the ‘ontological narratives’ (Somers, 1994) of individual social entrepreneurs?²⁷ Such a perspective calls for research approaches which study the minutiae of practitioners’ language-based accounts, and which pay attention to how nonprofit managers’ and social leaders’ capacity for self-

²⁷ To give a definitive answer to this question is by no means easy. A casual answer would be that images produced by academics, business-case competitions, media, etc. are significant for the individual because it is evident, for instance, that Ashoka has no difficulties in identifying and awarding prizes to successful social entrepreneurs or change makers. Yet, though it is undeniable that social entrepreneurship promoters such as Ashoka will continue to find people who are willing to shine bright in the public spotlight (cf. also Grenier, 2009), there is growing awareness of there being a significant disjuncture between the language-based constructions of practitioners on the one hand and policy-makers and social entrepreneurship promotion agencies on the other (cf. below).

governance is linked to particular political rationalities. It is only by studying the interplay between meaning (or rationalities) and technologies of the self that one is able to finally gain a more grounded understanding of how individuals are discursively “exploited”.

Part III: “Resisting” the Invocation: Transgressive Opportunities of the Self

With the above as a backdrop, one might reasonably assume that business schools are involved in “infiltrating” the local thinking and acting of nonprofit managers, social leaders, community activists, etc. However, their truth claims are only materially effective if being internalized by the individual, that is, if individuals get to govern themselves according to the respective truth’s invocation. Consequently, assuming a determinate, causal relationship between expert know-how and social entrepreneurs (qua calculating subjects) is overtly optimistic. Indeed, the assumption is barely tenable in view of recent studies which have come to critically reflect on how the master signifier of policy-makers and academia gets contested through practitioners’ local use of language. For instance, Howorth, Parkinson & McDonald (forthcoming) show that the language of business and entrepreneurship being used by policy-makers, funders and support agencies to project the way forward for social entrepreneurship becomes the source of discursive tensions of social enterprise organisations and individuals. The authors express their concern that “social entrepreneurs who feel most ill at ease with business language may well be those who have a higher commitment to social aims and often the greatest potential to make a difference”. As follows from Howorth, Parkinson & McDonald’s treatise, the pre-eminent problem is that the language being employed by policy-makers, social entrepreneurship incubators and the like is not in accord with how social entrepreneurs construe their worlds. Baines, Bull and Woolrych (2010), studying initiatives intended to advance entrepreneurial and business-like approaches in the realm of public service delivery, show that government authorities (i.e. public sector commissioners) and third sector organisations often face difficulties in relating to the other

party's world view and assumptions. Conducting interviews with participants of a social enterprise network leads Seanor and Meaton (2007) to conclude that most interviewees come to reject the prevailing image of the heroic leader and even deny wanting to become social entrepreneurs. Parkinson and Howorth (2008), inquiring the use of language by individuals involved in social entrepreneurship, provide evidence that their language conventions and semantic references differ both from those of business entrepreneurs and UK social enterprise policies. In terms of the former, the authors compare the linguistic content of interviews conducted with social and private sector entrepreneurs, pinpointing that social entrepreneurs more frequently refer to issues such as groups, affiliations, obligation or social action. The authors further use discourse analysis to inquire the degree to which social entrepreneurs actually perceive the political enterprise discourse as being meaningful. Their analysis suggests that social entrepreneurs' discursive accounts do in fact echo the political context in which they work (most notably in conjunction with the framing of local problems and their respective solutions). The analysis further reveals that business terms were used by the social entrepreneurs, yet often being positioned through the use of negative attributes such "as 'dirty', 'ruthless', 'ogres', 'exploiting the black economy', 'wealth and empire building' and 'treating people as second class'" (pp. 300-301). Importantly, being asked whether they saw themselves as social entrepreneurs, interviewees got to dismiss the concept claiming that "'it's amusing!', 'it's ridiculous!', 'too posh ... I'm working class'" (p. 301). Parkinson and Howorth (2008) provide ample evidence that social entrepreneurs' articulations are at odds with UK social enterprise policies, which rely on a managerially defined rhetoric of enterprise that promotes efficiency, business discipline and financial independence. Similarly, in my own research (2007), I asked how, if at all, the latest thinking about business-like social entrepreneurship is used by practitioners in the discursive construction of their practice and identity. To this end, I have come to investigate the interpretive repertoires used by practitioners from Swiss nongovernmental development organizations (NGDO), juxtaposing

their narratives with representations of social entrepreneurship put forth by management research. The analysis revealed the ambivalent character and complex “nature” of practitioners’ accounts while illuminating that their constructions were by far more equivocal and paradoxical than those encountered in business and management literature. Not only did the inquiry bring to light that the entrepreneurship discourse formed a marginal sensemaking device in practitioners’ accounts. It also revealed that their representations of the social as well as their identity constructions were intermingling (economic) orthodoxies of entrepreneurship and managerialism with social and ethical categories such as benevolence, religion, self-fulfilment, community, help, etc. Practitioners’ accounts of their work and their selves, in other words, were defined through different, and at times antagonistic, semantic possibilities (e.g. doing good versus being effective, empowering others versus acting authoritatively). Such oscillations, as I conclude, demonstrate, first, that practitioners constantly re-configure their ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988) according to the specific conversational situation and, second, that the ‘social’ forms a deeply contested discourse in which neither economic nor social stipulations gain the definitive upper hand.

As these textual references show, the individual social entrepreneur never fully accedes to the symbolic placement offered to her/him by the matrix of the *dispositif*. The meta-discourse of management and business entrepreneurship ultimately “fails” in the sense that there is always a certain left-over, as it were, which cannot be integrated into the individual’s symbolic universe. Parkinson & Howorth (2008) sum up this point eloquently in concluding that “discursive shifts [towards dominant entrepreneurship discourse], driven by policy-makers, funders, the sector and academics alike, do not necessarily infiltrate ideology at the level where the action is located” (p. 305). On the face of it, the meta-discourse of social entrepreneurship is often punctuated by the local language performances of practitioners, which provides good reasons to disbelieve that strategic language games achieve to fully

embody individuals and to “alienate” them from themselves. Hence, the language use of social entrepreneurs does not necessarily reproduce and perpetuate social identities and systems of knowledge, it “also contributes to their displacement and transformation” (Jones, et al., 2009, p. 881). Social entrepreneurs’ narrative sensemaking practices attest how social realities and identities are scripted as local, embodied phenomena. Given that individual social entrepreneurs use alternative interpretive repertoires to “invent” their own forms of individual and collective life, consciousness, and affectivity, this shows that they are agents, and thus in a certain sense free. This is arguably what Parkinson and Howorth (2008) had in mind while suggesting that discourse analysis represents a fertile approach for capturing “the voices of those most often assumed to be the object of, rather than a subject in the production of, the discourse of which they form the centre” (p. 305). Yet, following Foucault’s (1978) contention that “[w]here there is power there is also resistance, and yet or consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power“ (p. 95), it must remain clear that practitioners’ “resistance” vis-à-vis strategic discourse takes place not in the form of overt opposition but in its appropriation at the local level. It is hence at the margins (yet never outside) of dominant discourses (Foucault, 1998) that “emancipatory” practices of self-narration and instances of ‘becoming other’ (Tamboukou, 2003) become possible.

Implications for Research

As Boddice (2009) points out, the excitement revolving around the notion of the social entrepreneur tends “to draw a veil over the [...] variety of motives and ideologies carried by social entrepreneurs themselves” (p. 133). This situation is deplorable to the extent that it supports the impression that the reality of social enterprises and entrepreneurs is easier, more harmonious and conflict-free than it actually is. In terms of practical implications, the ignorance of the perspective of social entrepreneurs, as Parkinson and Howorth (2008) convincingly argue, might fuel “lack of understanding, conflict, misallocation of resources

and loss to the sector” (p. 286). With the exception of the studies cited above, what is yet largely missing from portrayals, case studies and anecdotal reports of social entrepreneurship are probing discussions of the relational paradoxes, complexities, dilemmas and struggles coming to the fore in the pragmatic context of everyday practice and the politico-ethical consequences deriving thereof. The urgency to overcome this void has been expressed in recent calls for “interdisciplinary approaches that reflect the complexity and ambiguity that characterize activity in the social or community context” (Parkinson & Howorth, 2008, p. 286). I thus suggest that empirical investigations of concrete social entrepreneurial initiatives and individuals are imperative for fostering a more variegated and ambivalent image of social entrepreneurship (Jones, Latham & Betta, 2008), and for revealing that “the social is a deeply complex and contested category” (Nicholls & Cho, 2006, p. 105). This plea takes part of its inspiration from Hervieux, Gedajlovic and Turcotte (2010) who contend that “[f]urther research is needed in order to gather data on micro discourses in SE [social entrepreneurship], those of social entrepreneurs. Such research will provide a better understanding of how social entrepreneurs define themselves and will show whether the discourses of social entrepreneurs are consistent with those of the actors that study, fund and teach them” (p. 61). Though the authors’ suggestion quite obviously runs counter to the relentless call for unifying definitions and understandings of social entrepreneurship, it seems worthwhile to advance our theorizing by looking at how the meaning of the term is punctuated, contested, and, ultimately, re-territorialized by the narratives of practitioners. The pre-eminent task of research, in my assessment, is to study practitioners who are ill at ease with the subject position they are positioned in, and how they use language to mobilise contradictory, opposing views which in turn enable new self-makings where “no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authorities for themselves” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 148). Given that the subject position ‘social entrepreneur’ is neither a matter of the individual’s authentic choices nor directly the result of the power of the *dispositif*, we must come to approach the question of the

social (subject) as being a matter of the reciprocal interaction between flows of meaning and their local use in individuals' narratives. Accordingly, the challenge in front of us is to engage with how strategic truths of social entrepreneurship take local form, how the meaning and know-how imparted by the *dispositif* is respectively embraced or transgressed through practitioners' local language performances.

Closing Remarks

Provided that Nicholls and Young (2008) are right that the “discourse around social entrepreneurship has moved away from business school centred accounts that simply applied established neo-liberal economic models and strategic approaches from the commercial world to social problems” (p. xiv), it would be true that the field of social entrepreneurship has come a long way. Yet, it is intuitively compelling that studies inscribing performativity into the discourse of social entrepreneurship numerically and ideologically dominate those taking a more critical stance (Steyaert & Dey, forthcoming). A first step towards counter-acting the performative codification of social entrepreneurship would comprise studies questioning claims that construe the matter as being solely about applying “pragmatic and result-oriented methods of a business entrepreneur” (Hsu, 2005, p. 61). It is my firm believe that language-based approaches form a promising avenue in this connection because only if we recognize that language establishes social entrepreneurship as an object of knowledge which works strategically to engender particular kinds of subjects will it become possible to better comprehend the impetus of particular policies, educational curricula, promotion schemas, venture competitions, etc. Most importantly, to gain a more thorough understanding of how strategic truths render the social (subject) amenable to political forms of self-government, we must at the same time deepen our understanding of how social entrepreneurship gets constructed through the use of language while at the same time probing the limits of the

available stock of knowledge so as to come up with understandings which have yet remained untapped.²⁸ The present contribution, and the last part in particular, was designed as a first step towards the multiplication of the meaning of social entrepreneurship. In my view, inquiring sites of alternative enunciations (most notably the field of practice) signifies a way of practicing justice in the face of language's symbolic violence. This is the case since doing justice to the immanent alterity of social entrepreneurship necessitates a mode of signification that seeks to release difference by maximizing "as much as possible the multiplication of small narratives" (Lyotard & Thébaud, 1985, p. 59). Little narratives of practitioners lay out a promising path towards justice, yet not because the truth lies within the local²⁹ but, instead, because any recognition of difference depends on the "ruthless discipline of context" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 17).

Having said this, there is a notorious danger that "resistance" and semantic multiplication remains an individual rather than a collective affair. What is needed, then, are collective spaces where (alternative) reality accounts and identities can be tried out through different flows of ideas, practices and struggles. This is indeed the task of a progressive politics of social entrepreneurship, a politics which allows for the formation of deterritorialized identities "as active forces by creating platforms and forums for their articulation, proliferation and recognitions" (Isin, 1998, p. 188). By implication, the political urgency facing us today is not a problem of individual agency (since this is ubiquitous; cf. above) but the problem of coordination. Consequently, the problem – both in research and in politics – is not so much "uncovering resistance, as it is a question of 'tuning' it – finding

²⁸ To be sure, it would be unreasonable to believe that one can change the meaning (and strategic tendencies) of social entrepreneurship by simply changing the way one talks about the subject matter. Language (and knowledge, for that matter) becomes materially effective particularly (not to say only) if being related with technologies of power (i.e. practices (policies, incentive structures, laws, etc.). However, a reflective and in some way pessimistic attitude towards the experience of social entrepreneurship is conducive for transgressing dominant meaning.

²⁹ One must not ignore that the local does not offer a direct path towards the true. The local, or locality for that matter, is a historical product which always derives part of its knowledge from dynamic global flows (Appadurai, 1996).

channels, concepts, or practices that can link up and thereby intensify transversal struggles into larger, collective but discontinuous movements” (Nealon, 2008, p. 106).

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