

6. The rhetoric of social entrepreneurship: paralogy and new language games in academic discourse

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INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of social entrepreneurship narratives being broadcast on television and published in newspapers, practitioner books and scientific journals represents one of the very latest fashion trends that has penetrated researchers', politicians', and journalists' discourse in equal measure. It is thus noticeable from a cursory glance at the available academic literature that social entrepreneurship gets grounded in such diverse realms as developmental aid work (Fowler, 2000), the voluntary and community sector in the United Kingdom (Pharoah and Scott, 2002), the development of economic communities within the United States (Wallace, 1999), the enrichment of women's work in Sweden (Pestoff, 2000), the promotion of health services in Europe (Catford, 1998, de Leeuw, 1999), non-profit organizations (Mort et al., 2003) and the welfare system more generally (Thompson, 2002). Of utmost importance to me was the recognition that the corpus of texts produced a unanimously positive image of the subject matter.¹⁷ Given, for instance, that many texts stress the univocally positive effects of social enterprises, while providing selective and/or anecdotal illustrations of their 'heroic deeds' – such as empowerment (Pestoff, 2000), social transformation (Alvord et al., 2002), regeneration (Thompson, 2002), creation of social benefits (Fowler, 2000), increase of social capital (Leadbeater, 1997), or community economic development (Wallace, 1999) – I was charmed into believing that there was no other option than holding the matter in awe.

Hereon I started to deliberate why and how social entrepreneurship was granted such a self-evidently good image? Doggedly refusing to join the approving choir of academics who endlessly rehearsed their hymn of praise, I opted for what I here call an 'abnormal path of science';¹⁸ I followed a stream of reasoning that puts centre stage the question how texts 'seduce' the reader into one possible interpretation of a situation over a (theoretically) infinite set of alternative possibilities (Westwood and Clegg, 2003). Given the paramount

plausibility, trustworthiness and assumed objectivity ascribed to academic statements (Alvesson and Willmot, 1996), I deemed essential a study that puts prime emphasis upon the ways in which the scholarly community has appropriated the term 'social entrepreneurship', and how those constructions serve particular stakes and interests while eliding others. In the adept's mind this might have a familiar ring. The position that I am aspiring to here is that academic discourse¹⁹ rests on skilfully crafted rhetoric, nothing more, nothing less. So, whether you (not WE, because I truly enjoy this vista) 'like it or not, we live in a rhetorical world' (van Maanen, 1995, p. 687).

Discourse and Rhetoric

Admittedly, pinpointing academics' utterances as rhetoric might appear as a denouncement. However, such an impression is comprehensible and tenable only if we take rhetoric to represent that which is not true, as something which stands in opposition to reality, and which aims at seducing compliance and consent (Carter and Jackson, 2004).²⁰ In contrast to this latter view, my own interest in rhetoric is grounded on the assumption that language is genuinely constitutive and performative. Language in that sense is not something which simply reflects or communicates a particular realm of reality which objectively exists beyond the sign. Rather, while we can dismiss the idea that words might demonstrably mean what they say, that they are 'literally literal' (Eagleton, 1983), using language irrevocably means engaging in rhetoric as the immanent process through which we produce the very realities of which we speak. As we get reminded by van Maanen, '(t)heory is a matter of words, not worlds; of maps, not territories; of representations, not realities.' (van Maanen, 1995, p. 134). By implication, all discourse – irrespective of being deemed scientific or not – contains rhetoric as that aspect of language which serves the purpose of convincing the audience of its truthfulness.²¹

Objective

Concurring with Barthes (1967) that no language can ever be 'non-rhetorical', I spotted an opportunity to illuminate the current enunciation of social entrepreneurship in academic texts, and to delineate how science gets to persuade the audience of the sincerity of its utterances (Watson, 2000).²² As Michel Foucault felicitously pinpointed, interpretations represent a 'violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning', but which tries to 'impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules' (Rabinow, 1984, p. 86). By extension thereof, the ensuing investigation (see below for the list of texts being selected for analysis) will pay prime attention

to how texts being deemed 'academic' are organized so as to rhetorically ward off potential counter-arguments (Billig, 1987, 1989). For the present purpose, I strongly identify rhetoric with Derrida's (1976) deconstructive endeavour in that rhetorical analysis irrevocably entails a sensitivity for the indeterminacy of the sign 'social entrepreneurship'. In other words, by virtue of highlighting the rhetorical dynamic of the respective texts, I will try to invoke a space for the tactical other of social entrepreneurship, 'the residue of indeterminacy which escapes the system'. (Sipiora and Atwill, 1990, p. 3).

Obviously, instead of grounding social entrepreneurship within a specific theoretical or methodological space, my analysis seeks to evoke a productive crisis, or a 'rupture' to use Derrida's (1966) wording, in which novel cultural interpretations may become possible. To lay bare social entrepreneurship texts' rhetorical dynamic, that is, to expose the binary systems which warrant stability, and to problematize the field's consensus will thus (hopefully) become a transparent strategy for making language the object of its own scrutiny. By implication, after Derrida (1992), it is important to notice that this deconstructive reading is not necessarily an exclusively negative act (Critchley, 1999), but rather a response to, and affirmation of, political struggles against systems pledged to presence. As such, the process of dismantling and constructively deconstructing the rhetoric of scholarly texts on social entrepreneurship serves the aim of laying bare the instability of these texts, and to set in motion some creative playfulness. The last part of this chapter is therefore devoted to making suggestions for the prospective research agenda of social entrepreneurship. Regarding the enrichment of the prevailing truisms, I will argue for a proliferation of deconstructive analysis as well as for the endorsement of new representational practices. New groundings of social entrepreneurship will further be advocated with regress to Loytard's concept of paralogy (movements which go beyond or against common reason), aporia (such as paradoxes) and undecideability (Derrida, 1995, 1997, 1999).

RE-READING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP TEXTS

Let me begin the present reading with a representative extract from Wallace (1999), in which we are provided with a narrative of social enterprises and the population they are presumed to help.

These businesses [social purpose enterprises] serve as a necessary bridge into the mainstream business community for their target populations. Educationally and economically disadvantaged populations with sporadic employment histories do not benefit automatically from opened doors to the job market. What non-profit organizations have discovered over time is that many of them lack the very basic skills of how to act and/or contribute to a work environment (Wallace, 1999, p. 164).

On the face of it, we get to hear that social entrepreneurs have spotted that an underprivileged population lacks the necessary skills for traditional employment opportunities, and that social entrepreneurs exhibit the very resources needed to align this population with the mainstream business community. On closer inspection, it is revealed that the excerpt from Wallace's text operates upon the construction of two subjects: social purpose entrepreneurs envisioned through a particular affiliation with mainstream business, and an inchoate population of educationally and economically disadvantaged people. The latter subject is denoted as 'underprivileged' on the ground of its lack of the 'very basic skills' which are necessary to contribute to the workplace (as determined by mainstream business). The relationship between the two subjects is specified through the notion of 'target', which implies uni-directional influence; that is, social entrepreneurs define the target at which they finally 'shoot' their actions and initiatives. Obviously, while the underprivileged group is marked by a lack of specific, and thereby highly relevant (in that it hands those populations to the mainstream business community) resources, it is implied that social purpose entrepreneurs possess those valuable characteristics by virtue of which they are able to 'bridge' the specified populations from an inferior (i.e. underprivileged) state to a superior state (being defined alongside the characteristics of mainstream business).

The Metaphor of Medical Treatment

So far so good. But how then does Wallace's statement appear so agreeable? Peculiarly enough, iteration by iteration I got to recognize that the text was allegorically related respectively to the discourse of (Western) medical treatment (Parker, 1992) and development (Frank, 1997). Summoning the former metaphor, we get to see a physician, (social purpose enterprise) representing an all-knowing, incontestable authority, who is infallible in diagnosing (discovering) his (yes, the doctor is male, but more of that later) patient's (underprivileged populations) pathologies (lack of the very basic skills requested for the work environment). Further implied through the medical metaphor is the notion that the physician is able to mitigate the identified problems while the patient gets envisioned as passively entrapped within his/her pathological state. Hence, while the doctor is assumed to have the requisite medical skills to cure (bridge into the mainstream business community) his/her patient, this discourse of medical treatment equally prescribes that those same patients blindly give themselves into the healing hands of their 'redeemer'.

One-sidedness and Dependence

As western medical treatment, specifically its notion of aid, is quasi-

naturalized through the image of a needy patient vis-à-vis a skilful help professional, it comes as no surprise that reading the respective social entrepreneurship texts (for the first time) did not arouse much suspicion. After all, what would one consider a solid basis for challenging that health is a good thing worth striving for, or that providing help to subjects facing severe problems conforms to higher human standards? However, by applying the analogy of medical treatment, it becomes utterly apparent that social entrepreneurship is premised on an unequal distribution of knowledge. In specific, through the creation of an expert subject (read the social enterprise), and an uninformed and thus helpless subject (read the underprivileged people), the text works to construct a power-knowledge nexus which produces an strategic relationship of dependence between the two subjects.²³ By stressing the dependence and inertness of patients and by means of depicting their pathology as an incontestable matter of fact, the implicit medical discourse, by association, renders underprivileged populations passive and thus malleable.

Accountability and Blame

While constructing patients as dependent subjects, medical discourse simultaneously works through a disciplinary stance: 'The need is to innovatively develop new forms of social capital which, in turn, will help empower disadvantaged people and encourage them to take greater responsibility for, and control over, their lives' (Thompson, 2002, p. 329). Following Thompson et al.'s prospect, it gets delineated that social entrepreneurs provide the medical help needed to leverage (empower) the inferior state of patients, up to the point that patients are finally made accountable to maintain (take greater responsibility for, and control over) their own health. By the same token, help professionals are envisioned as restoring the health of their patients while the sustenance of patients' health lies within their own responsibility. On the flipside of this image, people who do not take care of their health are contestable for acting irresponsible. To be clear on that, wouldn't it therefore appear somehow heterodox to elide the doctor's advice of minding one's health by leading a restful life? Yet, taking into consideration that patients, read social enterprises, within certain texts (which will be elaborated more thoroughly further down) are held accountable for deviating from the prevailing market ideology, things might start to change their shading.

Entitlement

In academic writings on social entrepreneurship it has become somewhat canonical that business practices (must) serve as criteria for devising social enterprises' governance and for assessing their very performance. However,

what is conspicuous, at least for me, is that those texts radiate decisive univocality. The setting beyond dispute of the idea that social enterprises should adhere to the market's logic is achieved within those texts through a particular process of entitlement. As pointed out by Potter (1996), knowledge is culturally and historically linked to categories of actors in a variety of different ways. Certain categories of actors are thereby entitled to know certain things which, in effect, gives their statements particular credence and pertinence. In other words, given that actors are entitled to possess a specific kind of knowledge or skill, it follows that their narratives are warranted pervasiveness and rhetorical intelligibility.

Invoking the metaphor of medical treatment, we thus get to see that the help professional is assumed to perform his cure without hindrance as he knows what health is and how health is to be restored and sustained. Hence, by virtue of envisioning an all-knowing curer who is entitled to heal (in that he has the apposite knowledge) and by conceding to him good health (because he is presumed to govern his own health accordingly), it gets increasingly difficult to envision that the prescription of these practices actually marks a reduction of available treatment opportunities and thus a distinct form of governmentality (Foucault, 1979). However, wise to our text on social entrepreneurship, we get to see that the ascription of expertise is worked up through the dichotomy of knowing–not-knowing. Whereas social enterprises get depicted as possessing indispensable knowledge, namely knowledge which warrants their successful conduct along the lines of mainstream business, those organizations are unquestionably deemed appropriate for their respective positions and tasks.

Progressive Development

A pervasive observation within many articles on social entrepreneurship relates to the strong focus those texts lay on anticipated endpoints. To underscore the important posture of social enterprises and to provide their textual structures a stable centre (Derrida, 1966), such texts operate through the establishment of valued standards towards which social enterprises direct their respective underprivileged populations and help beneficiaries. Conveying the spell of teleological development, it is implied that patients – once they receive appropriate treatment – will evolve in a regular, that is, progressively improving manner. By such accounts, the reader is taught that to achieve a progressive (read healthier), state it suffices to expose the patient to the meticulous interventions of help professionals. Healing, namely the process of development, requires no effort on the part of the patient, which implies that teleology is contained in the action of the help professional!

Importantly, the ideological consequences of this imagery derive from the conflation of social entrepreneurship and mainstream economy. Whereas I

have no principle reservation against this respective interconnection, it is the exclusiveness of this truth regime which requires critical heeding. Hence, invoking the image according to which everything gets better once exposed to social enterprises, and taking into account that this dynamic gets sustained by virtue of sweeping eulogies, that is, stories filled with praise and commendation, it is equally important to envision that we have ‘sacrificed’ a more variegated picture at the cost of stories which univocally provide confidence and hope. However, wouldn’t it be all too subversive to call into question an image which warrants such a bright future?

The Demise of our Present

Besides legitimising social enterprises through the celebration of their (to conjure a forceful metaphor) God-like acts of redemption, other texts foster an exigency for social enterprises by virtue of constantly reiterating the putative demise of our current (welfare) system (e.g. Wallace, 1999). In other words, by perpetually emphasizing that the status quo, in its infernal guise, is no option, those texts achieve to foster a conviction that things have to change immediately. In heralding that the status quo is no longer tenable, this view works pervasively to call into question practices of, for instance, non-profit, voluntary, bureaucratic and governmental, and similar organizations, in that those organizations are made responsible for our crumbling present. In other words, the univocal appeal for increased efficiency, effectiveness and amplified professionalism in the public and non-profit realms are made easily acceptable while being interwoven into a narrative that features these latter organizations as the very reason for our contemporary miseries.

External Pressures

While what du Gay has termed ‘modernization hyperbole’ (du Gay, 2004) makes us believe that everything in place has to change; this belief is buttressed with respect to social entrepreneurship in the ubiquitously perpetuated story that the environment is turbulent and volatile and shaped by a virtual explosion of complexity: ‘The pace of change continues to accelerate globally and traditional attempts to extrapolate from the past are no longer valid’ (Catford, 1998, p. 95). This pervasive ‘futuresology’ (Cheney et al., 2004) being revealed in Catford’s story predicates that only those will survive (and possibly prosper) who exhibit the aptitude of constant adaptation. Let me illustrate these claims through Mort et al.:

Within the increasingly competitive market social enterprises are viewed as entities competing with their commercial counterparts and other social enterprises for

survival and growth. Similar to commercial enterprises, NFPs (annotation: non-for profits) are compelled to adopt innovative ways of perceiving and delivering superior value to their clients (Mort et al., 2003, p. 85).

What follows from Mort et al.'s extract is an image that displays a seemingly unchallengeable outside pressure that stems from increased commercial competition. By extension, the image spurs a need to adopt practices traditionally carried out by commercial enterprises. The discourse of economic competition thus gets to justify increased efficiency, customer orientation, corporate accountability, and so on, which seem attainable only through a sound business focus. For instance, 'deinstitutionalization' is depicted in certain texts (e.g. Wallace, 1999) as a reified (a material and therefore not manmade phenomenon) and irrevocable (obscuring the alterability of the phenomenon) force that presupposes economically orientated practices. Remarkably, the belief in the irredeemability of outside pressures is sustained in apprehending them as results of cosmic laws. In other words, being envisioned as a material reality, we get to believe that those pressures are beyond human terms and therefore unchangeable.

Globalisation as the Prescription of Economic Activity

As business-related terms such as re-engineering, financial accountability, cost-cutting, new public management, and so forth constitute an incremental part of our everyday vocabulary, their use (even in relation to issues that formerly operated devoid of such premises) does not make us flinch. On the contrary, while such claims have become part and parcel of lived ideology (Billig et al., 1988), it is somehow commonsense to prescribe, for instance, economic efficiency, smooth management and organizational effectiveness. As suggested in conjunction with the futurology of social entrepreneurship, a Darwinian notion of the environment is being used to support a business mode of conduct in an evolutionary process of natural selection. Envisioning globalisation as a ubiquitous process that presupposes constant competition evokes a threat that can only be counteracted by means of sound business practices. Hence, in many social entrepreneurship texts 'globalisation' gets coined as a 'god-term' (Cheney et al., 2004) that is primarily related to (and thereby prescribes) economic activity (Parker, 2004). Consequently, once we get to comprehend social entrepreneurship as an inseparable aspect of the globalised world, the respective globalisation – economy nexus works arouse an urge to comply to an economic mode of conduct.

Business–Non-business Binary

While the conflation of globalisation and economic activity is unquestionably

pivotal for encouraging social entrepreneurship, other texts emphasize the relevance of profit-related practices in social enterprises through a critique of traditional public or third sector organizations. Through the installation of a bureaucracy–social enterprise binary, these texts rhetorically achieve the overthrow of the belief in practices genuinely applied in public, non-profit or non-governmental organizations as in this typical example:

Because a bureaucracy practices a high degree of specialization in its tasks (on the assumption that specialization results in efficiency), it can only respond to problems, procedures, and solutions in piecemeal and/or uncoordinated fashion (Wallace, 1999, p. 158).

As follows from Wallace, bureaucracies are not pertinent for meeting public expectations, which implies that these organizations need to be premised on contemporary liberal norms of market-driven responsibilities. While the installation of a Darwinian image of the environment works to condition a belief that social enterprises strive above all to survive, it is implied that those organizations must overcome the natural inclination of the uninspired and lethargic bureaucrat.

Hence, ascribing to (social) entrepreneurial organizations the potential to overcome prevailing calamities (by means of, for instance, their flexibility and innovativeness) works to outdate Wallace's 'bureaucratic organizations.' In this 'epochal schema' (du Gay, 2004) 'bureaucracy' or 'administration' is reduced to a simple and abstract set of negativities contrasted with an equally simple and abstracted, but positively coded, set of 'entrepreneurial' principles. Accordingly, the image of non-entrepreneurial organizations appears univocally disadvantageous whereupon there is virtually no alternative to 'enterprising' unless institutions and persons aim to seal their own fates. Ultimately, how could anyone be for bureaucracy or otherwise non-entrepreneurial forms of organizing if they simply get to represent dysfunctional, outdated and inefficient leftovers?

Universal Claim for Economic Activity

As elaborated above, the discourse of (social) enterprise is normative as it enjoins the conduct of organizations previously seen as non-commercial, including the conduct of government agencies, voluntary organizations, social-purpose enterprises and individuals. A notable number of texts thereby rely upon the proposition that bureaucracies must be aligned to meet the demands of the market, to empower consumers and to create vitalized leaders at the helm of new agencies. While such claims might appear far-fetched, it is revealed on the background of the metaphor of medical treatment that these statements are nonetheless pervasive. As the metaphor of medical treatment

highlights *the* universal way of healing, it follows that this treatment is apposite for all living beings. Taking for granted that all people equally strive for a healthy life, prescriptions being staged under the spell of 'health' appear benign and beyond question. However, let us be reminded that health within social entrepreneurship texts gets to represent the ability to pursue a job and make money:

. . . working and earning are not merely yardsticks by which to measure 'improvements'. . . rather they are a precondition for these improvements . . . an underlying principle is that bearing part of the enterprise's risk produces therapeutic effects because it is therapeutic to be able to make mistakes, to learn by trial and error, to run the risk of change (De Leonardis and Mauri, 1992, p. 53).

As revealed in De Leonardis and Mauri's utterance, working and earning are literally circumscribed as therapeutic, meaning that those activities are at the service of patients' health. Blatantly obvious, working and earning therefore become quintessential activities in that they teach underprivileged people a vital lesson for successful living.

Measurability and Technical Rationality

While the penetration of social entrepreneurship texts through business discourse becomes easily acceptable, we have to bear in mind that our agreement, witting or unwitting, requires strong persuasive buttresses. What finally gets to appear as natural and inevitable thus relies on constant reiteration. Additionally, to bolster the respective claims against potential critique one needs to enrich one's argumentation with easily retrievable commonsense, that is, lived ideology (Billig et al., 1988). A common rhetorical strategy for immunizing one's accounts thus materializes in allusion to instrumental rationality. For instance, within its appropriation by Thompson et al. (2002), social entrepreneurship is portrayed as a foremost rational and technical activity which can be measured and therefore predicted. The notion of 'operationalise', for instance, represents social entrepreneurship as a calculable undertaking. What is revealed in such accounts is a kind of 'hyper-realization' (Casey, 2004), which works to emphasize the merits of technical rationality in the realm of the third or non-profit sector. The persuasiveness of this particular view is granted by delineating social entrepreneurship as a programmable and therefore rather easy undertaking (at least as long as sound business practices are employed), while simultaneously creating the impression that social entrepreneurship operates smoothly, completely devoid of political struggles.

Science

While the invocation of technical rationality as such is already sweeping, some

texts on social entrepreneurship additionally strengthen their rhetorical power through recourse to science.

Although ideas are powerful, people often place too much emphasis on the initial flash of brilliance. [...] the bigger challenge is converting an initially appealing idea into a worthwhile opportunity. This step combines rigorous analysis with creative adjustment as social entrepreneurs test and refine ideas through a mixture of action and research (Guclu et al., 2002, p. 6).

Research, within the extract by Guclu and colleagues, gets depicted as a crucial aspect of the social entrepreneurial endeavour. In deeming technological knowledge scientific, and relying on the assumption that science unanimously is (and does) good, there are no sound reasons presented why people working in the third or non-profit sector should reject such a code. Due to the paramount credibility of science (in the Western mindset), such texts seek to legitimise the rational calculus of business while simultaneously sidestepping potential criticism of that respective image. Consequently, once social entrepreneurs are delineated as possessing the relevant 'scientific' body of knowledge, these texts are bestowed with a certain cachet of incontestability. And, by implication, any form of knowledge that fails to exhibit the relevant scientific credentials gets judged as worthless. While operating upon the assumption that sound scientific practices lend themselves to evaluation (which stipulates quantitative rather than qualitative parameters), such texts create an urge to provide objectively measurable results in the form of, for example, changed social impacts and outcomes (Johnson, 2000). In effect, such rigorous endeavours of measurement and categorization, as has been shown by Foucault (1988), equally get to represent a processes through which objects are rendered amenable to regulation.

Normalization of Business Practices

What follows from equating social entrepreneurship with quantitatively measurable activities (such as number of beneficiaries provided with a job) is that practices and effects of social enterprises which do not materialize in desired numbers are either rendered invisible or are treated as deviant, and thus inferior. This process of normalization–abnormalization is thereby installed through working up a contrast structure which deems particular activities respectively appropriate or inappropriate. Applied to our subject matter, this gets to mean that charging social entrepreneurship of not using quantitative evaluation and scientifically validated practices, business discourse operates to depict traditional voluntary, non-profit and social sector practices as 'flabby' and 'amateurish' (Grenier, 2002). Taking for example the statement by Thompson et al.: '[...] many typical volunteers will need training in up-to-date

information technology skills for some of the needs and tasks involved' (Thompson et al., 2000, p. 336).

As we get to see through the extract of Thompson et al., knowledge of IT is a specific skill which can be acquired through education. The attribute of 'typical' thus points out that subjects working in the social realm normally do not have the requested knowledge (or at least do not exhibit state-of-the-art knowledge). In Thompson et al.'s universe, successful work without the requisite knowledge is bound to fail. To demonstrate the necessity of business modes of conduct, the text has to render those other, read abnormal, practices problematic. The randomness and uncontrollability of such non-business practices has no place in a Tayloristic vision (Morgan, 1997) of social entrepreneurship. As they seem to threaten the survival of those organizations, they get to represent hostile elements that must be destroyed: business practices are privileged, the other practices are denigrated; business is what counts, non-business is the unimportant other, that which needs compulsive appropriation to management. Hence, the normal–abnormal binary calls upon an all-or-nothing logic where you are either for or against business practices. However, it might be unwise to proceed aloof of sound measurement as one would undoubtedly fall prey to the disarrangement of unfunded speculation!

Beyond Profit

As elaborated above, a normal–abnormal division is interwoven into business discourse so as to undermine the appropriateness of social enterprises being premised on non-business practices. There are other texts, though, that install a premium position of social enterprises through notions of 'good intention', 'moral need', 'contributing to society', 'social purpose', 'common good', or even 'passion', 'love', 'honesty', 'empathy'. Following Pearce we get to hear that

their (annotation: social enterprises) common characteristics involve activities centered around a 'social purpose', the regeneration or expansion of local economic activity, collective advancement of the common good rather than solely commercial or private profit (Pearce, 1994).

Texts such as the one by Pearce are rhetorically premised upon a social–non-social divide. While the non-social prospect gets envisioned through monetary issues most frequently exemplified through business entrepreneurs, social enterprises are assumed to account for *both* social and non-social activities and duties. To understand how this seemingly paradoxical combination of features can work without appearing self-contradictory or paradoxical, it is worth looking at Catford (1998) who points out that

social and economic entrepreneurs share the same focus on vision and opportunity and the same ability to convince and empower others to help them turn these visions into a reality. In social entrepreneurs, however, these characteristics are coupled with a strong desire for social justice (Catford, 1998, p. 96).

As becomes comprehensible through the extract by Catford, the business-related aspects of social entrepreneurship get depicted in the sense of an add-on criterion. While social entrepreneurs are portrayed as not only exhibiting sound business skills but as additionally embracing social aims, the pursuit of what I here call 'non-social activities' does not seem to collide with their adherence to moral convictions. Remarkably, this particular rhetorical twist seems to reconcile our basic either-or contradiction by means of exchanging it with an inclusionary as-well-as logic. Whereas social enterprises simultaneously are envisioned to carry out profit seeking activities and to retain their social mission (e.g. Pomerantz, 2003), those texts seek to set such organizations aside from those that are characterized by an exclusive, and thereby morally flawed, aim of making money. Hence, as we get to see in the extract below from Dees' (1998) text, it is not monetary activity per se which gets devalued but rather the respective purpose (money, profit, etc.) conveyed in those accounts: 'social entrepreneurs involved in for-profit activities see profit as a means to an end, while economic entrepreneurs see profit as an end in itself' (Dees, 1998).

Through the distinction between means and ends Dees's text aims to bypass inscribing monetary activities an inferior ethical value. Within the above utterance, profit is presented as containing no inherent and pre-existing value. Instead, profit derives its value in conjunction with social entrepreneurship by getting envisioned as a device for achieving particular moral ends. Profit-seeking, according to the text, can be social as long as social entrepreneurs resist the temptation of using it for selfish ends (Guclu et al., 2002). What gets revealed herein is a utilitarian principle, which works to distinguish social entrepreneurs from ordinary entrepreneurs, business people, and the like, despite the fact that all are doing the same thing: earning money. However, by means of its utilitarian 'superstructure', such texts suggest a superiority of social entrepreneurs that makes us so effectively believe that their work, regardless of potentially negative ramifications, gets to serve higher purposes. Overtly criticising such images would thus not only call into question the appropriateness of social enterprises' moral standards but would equally scrutinize their ideal of our common good.

Supernatural Individual

Working up the impression of exclusiveness through an argument of superior

morality is one rhetorical strategy. Another strategy creates a similar effect by drawing out a picture of social entrepreneurship on the basis of a singular individual characterized by supernatural talents. For example, as elaborated by De Leeuw, social entrepreneurs comprise multiple talents, including the ability 'to analyse, to envision, to communicate, to empathize, to enthuse, to advocate, to mediate, to enable and to empower a wide range of disparate individuals and organizations' (De Leeuw, 1999, p. 261). Taking into consideration the commonalities this extract shares with other texts, it concludes, to put it bluntly, that social entrepreneurship is largely envisioned through a single person, respectively his/her particularities. By virtue of the accumulated depiction of such traits and aptitudes, an image of social entrepreneurs is created that at one and the same time highlights their power of foresight, their facility for organization and administration, their unusual energy, as well as their more general (but nonetheless valuable) leadership properties. Hence, to gain an understanding of how this effect is achieved through the use of language, let us take a look at the statement following by Thompson et al.: 'In and amongst [social entrepreneurs] will be some non-enterprising people simply committed to doing good' (Thompson et al., 2000, p. 336).

Following this, it is not suffice for successful social entrepreneurs to possess good intentions (as entailed in the morally inclined discourse discussed above). In particular, the addition of 'simply' fosters the impression that the intention of doing good is not only insufficient, but that the intention to do good may even be the most facile part of the whole endeavour. The motive of doing good seems so self-evident and pre-ordained that it does not request any further consideration:

Others may be sound leaders of some particular venture or organisation, but, lacking vision and charisma, they will never behave in a truly entrepreneurial manner. Such leaders may, for example, lack the courage to take the risks (an issue of temperament) to create growth (Thompson et al., 2000, p. 332).

Within this extract it becomes even more evident how the individualistic enunciation of social entrepreneurs delimits the subject matter from 'sound leaders'. By invoking 'temperament' it is implied that social entrepreneurship is deemed possible only through the possession of certain innate capabilities. Contained therein is the idea that the success of social entrepreneurs is bound to pre-determined (such as genetically defined) capacities. Hence, ascribing to social entrepreneurs prestigious attributes such as 'charisma' or 'the courage to take risks' (both qualities which are conceived as being in short supply) makes it a matter of rare individuals, of 'champions', who sustain their social mission despite upcoming obstacles. In effect, the image of the heroic individual makes us believe that social entrepreneurs are 'sovereign and self-

determining beings' (Alveson and Willmott, 1996), and, owing to their grandiose successes, we get to see that social entrepreneurs are in fact indispensable for rebalancing the maladjustment of current societies.

Maleness

Having pointed out that the individualist discourse works by endowing social entrepreneurs with extraordinary personality traits, it will be shown in the ensuing paragraph that certain texts operate upon a gender bias that favours a male perception: '[Social] entrepreneurs display innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking propensity in their key decision making' (Mort et al., 2003, p. 82). Examining this statement by Mort et al., we first find a seemingly uncontentious notion of 'risk taking' and 'proactiveness'. While taking into consideration characteristics being employed in other texts such as 'tolerance for insecurity', 'independence', 'determination', 'self-confidence', 'logic', and so on, it becomes increasingly evident that we are entrenched in a stereotypically male narrative. Despite the fact that the gender of social entrepreneurs is mostly not made explicit, such texts, through the employment of male-associated personality traits, nevertheless succeed in erecting an impression of maleness.

The male identity script thereby achieves, seemingly unproblematically, the accentuation of male characteristics as a prerequisite for successful social entrepreneurship. Examined from an ideological vantage point, individualist discourse leads to a gendered division of social entrepreneurs, whereby discourse works to naturalise male qualities and to advocate a demand for free spirit, detachment and rationality. Evidently, the hierarchy works at the expense of those practices and values traditionally attributed to the female domain such as housework, childbirth, child-care, and the like. Such texts, by implication, operate to convince us that these latter qualities obviously do not generate any entrepreneurial spark.

Following from these observations, it seems pertinent to claim that models of social entrepreneurship that are based on an individualist discourse are normative and exclusive in that they marginalize individuals, such as women or ordinary people, who do not comply with the default standards. Accordingly, these particular images contribute to and reinforce the conviction that the sidelined subjects, that is the anonymous others, have psychological and gender characteristics which inhibit social entrepreneurial development.

LOOMING STALEMATE?

We live in this 'reality' and this 'reality' lives with/in us; but so 'obvious' is this reality that it does not arouse much curiosity and/or debate (Prasad, 1997, p. 91).

On the face of it, the discourses examined in the previous deconstructive reading mimic research that has been conducted in the realm of management, marketing, entrepreneurship, and organization science more generally.²⁴ Contrary to my rhetorical allegation that what I said is important and worth heeding, I thus anticipate being accused of having served old wine in new bottles. However, it is important to recognize that this sense of *déjà vu* – including its (potentially) associated boredom – is equally to be taken as a revealing reflection of the status quo of social entrepreneurship research. In fact, the prevailing ‘objectification of discourse’ (Daston, 1992), in my opinion, provides no reason for staging a party. Giving the nascent state of social entrepreneurship research, I feel even more compelled to pose a question regarding the ceaseless perpetuation of management and economic discourses and to instigate new representations, language games and criteria for our future research.

However, there can be no question here of offering exhaustive and definitive suggestions for advancing the field of social entrepreneurship. What I would like to propose, however fragmentary and allusive, as a ‘way out’ in the ensuing paragraphs follows four distinct, though closely related lines of arguing: first, I will stake out a space for additional reflective, and more specifically deconstructive, studies. Second, some recent developments in entrepreneurship research will be highlighted as potential sources for social entrepreneurship’s semantic multiplication. Third, I will hail a paralogical grounding of social entrepreneurship through the employment of styles of writing so far unfamiliar to scholarly representation. And fourth, as a result of scrutinizing the performative grounding of social entrepreneurship writing, I will reclaim a space for ethics and justice through Derrida’s work on aporia and undecideability.

Infinite Deconstructive Practice

Departing from the assumption that the ‘invisibility’ of our common sense rhetorically endows our mindscape with truth-value, my investigation was set up to illustrate how and in what ways social entrepreneurship becomes ‘black boxed’ (Law, 1994), or disguised in its undecideable complexity. My deconstructive reading was therefore put forward to dismantle the black boxes that render social entrepreneurship incontestable, and, therefore, to disrupt some of its discourse’s shiny surface aesthetics. In other words, to see the ordinary with a fresh vision, we first have to make it ‘extraordinary’ and ‘free ourselves of normalized ways of thinking that blind us to the strangeness of the familiar.’ (Cooper and Morgan, 1988, p. 101). In line with Derrida (2001) who claims for deconstruction a central position in the ‘university of tomorrow’, I would like to spur us to see deconstructive and/or rhetorical readings²⁵ not as something to be avoided or eliminated, but as tactical devices which bear the potential to bring

forward a vision of social entrepreneurship that no longer dispenses unclouded optimism but equally radiates ironic antagonism. As critical readings overturn texts' meanings and thereby initiate a de-objectification of social entrepreneurship, we get to create an empty space (Steyaert, 2002) or discursive springboard, on the basis of which we get to see the 'human possibilities' of social entrepreneurship instead of its 'settled certainties' (Bruner, 1986, p. 26).²⁶

As deconstruction can never be achieved in any definitive sense, it would be a fallacy to believe that prevailing social entrepreneurship texts and their underlying premises have been dismantled and overcome. Instead, I concede that we are far from beyond the present ideologies, which we probably never will be, and that what is needed is a 'practical politics of the open end' (Spivak, 1990, p. 105), that is the relentless and persistent undoing of the taken for granted and the oblivious supplement upon which they are based. Following Derrida, 'we must join forces to exert pressure and organize ripostes, and we must do so on an international scale and according to new modalities, though always while analyzing and discussing the very foundations of our responsibility, its discourses, its heritage, and its axioms' (Derrida, 2003, p. 126). Deconstructive practice can, against all denunciation, do justice²⁷ since it effectuates a decoupling from our scholarly heritage and especially its concealed political consequences²⁸ (Derrida, 1966). Such analysis, I contend, cannot be postponed with regard to social entrepreneurship as it enables an irrevocable concern for indeterminacy, and, by implication, for resistance to what Derrida termed 'exhaustive accounts'. Yet, only if we take upon us this painstaking, and infinite, task might there emerge a chance to change the rules of prevailing language games and thus to reformulate a new grounding for social entrepreneurship.

Inheriting the Other Entrepreneurship

Having mentioned the impression of *déjà vu* being elicited through the above deconstructive reading, we are foremost reminded of our legacy in respect to entrepreneurship research. Despite having become somewhat disenchanted by the observation that the sign 'social entrepreneurship' equally features strong inscriptions of business and economic discourse, of discourses relating to progressive development and technical rationality, of expert knowledge and individualism, I would nevertheless like to conjure up some anachronistic movements in entrepreneurship research. To this end, I would like to confront the current impasse of social entrepreneurship writing by recommending especially, but not exclusively, a careful reading of the texts by Steyaert and Katz (2004) as well as Hjorth and Steyaert (2003) who have formulated both cogent treatises of the field's foreclosure as well as lines of flight for subverting the prevailing discourse.

Concerning the issue of foreclosure, Hjorth (2005), Hjorth and Steyaert (2003), Steyaert (2000), Steyaert and Katz (2004) thoroughly pinpoint that academic texts reveal a clear bias towards construing entrepreneurship on the background of management theory and business administration. In that respect, I feel much sympathy with Hjorth's (2003) estimate that the dominant representations of entrepreneurship mark a clear limit to our understanding of entrepreneurship as social creativity. Through Hjorth (2005) we further get reminded that by envisioning entrepreneurship as well as the entrepreneur as events of 'controlled creativity' and 'economic managerialism', metaphors of *ludens* (playing), *narrans* (storytelling) and *traditionalis* (tradition) are crudely put aside. Regarding this kind of thematic enrichment, the two texts by Steyaert and Katz (2004) and Hjorth and Steyaert (2003) provide us with additional inspirations concerning how, in other words through what perspectives and in what dimensions, the matter of social entrepreneurship prospectively could, or better should, be conceptualized.

However, as with deconstruction, the task of semantic opening and multiplication (which all of the above articles instigate) is never completed but needs untiring repetition, not only in relation to entrepreneurship (where it only has started) but equally well regarding the matter of social entrepreneurship. It is thus imperative to remind ourselves that we have to insert a question regarding what social entrepreneurship, and especially the epithet 'social', is, and what it ought to be. While this latter issue will be treated further down, I deem it important to emphasize that Steyaert, Hjorth and Katz all contribute to unhitching entrepreneurship from its performative enunciation. In particular, by prescribing multidisciplinary and multiparadigmatic experimentation, and in calling for comprehending entrepreneurship in its everydayness, playfulness, as well as political, cultural, ecological and societal accentuation, the authors make a pivotal plea for paralogical groundings, that is opportunities for innovative enunciations (Brugger, 2001), where interpretations beyond *homo oeconomicus* and technical rationality become possible. To claim new groundings of social entrepreneurship, it is thus not only necessary to instil new contents and theoretical trajectories²⁹ but also to reflect upon new forms of expressions and representation. Instead of legitimizing knowledge of social entrepreneurship according to whether it can be commoditized and thus made saleable,³⁰ we must seek criteria that intensify our relationship to the difference that is distinctive about social entrepreneurship. These possibilities shall be elaborated in the following sections.

Paralogy and Style

Derrida (1976) has coined the term 'logocentrism' to depict philosophy's insolence in explaining what words and concepts *really* mean. The assumption that

meaning can be grasped by philosophical discourse, unsullied by the imprecision of metaphors is, following Derrida, naive, as the signifiers of language systems cannot refer to any transcendental signified. In line with Derrida's elaboration of the state of philosophy, Czarniawska (2004) has equally made clear that our heritage as organization scholars not only hinders us from seeing fiction, narratives of the self, performance science, polyvocal texts, responsive readings, aphorisms, comedy and satire, visual presentations, and mixed genres (Hardy and Clegg, 1997) as legitimate forms of knowledge, but above all demands that the questions of knowledge status and legitimisation remain unexamined. Hence, the selective admission of scientific discourse and the invocation of absolute conditions of discourse deny difference and multiplicity in respect to academic enunciation. Such a delimitation of ways of thinking and talking is, according to Lyotard (1984), fascist³¹ as it forcibly exempts alternative narratives.³²

Given the totalizing inclination of prevailing metanarratives, what seems to be needed are new criteria for judging knowledge. Regarding the appraisal of the status quo of social entrepreneurship, it is again Lyotard who makes us aware that a large degree of scientific knowledge is legitimated either by invoking truth (in the form of metanarratives) or performativity.

In contrast to those hegemonic codes, Lyotard puts forward an ontological position which stresses that the world is composed of events which give rise to multiple interpretations (or small narratives³³). In his attempt to formulate an alternative legitimizing principle, Lyotard puts forward 'paralogy'³⁴ as the kind of movement which seeks new meaning in excluded language games. Lyotard's paralogy thus undermines the determinism aspired to by the two former principles and instead incites a search for instabilities and anomalies yet recognized.³⁵ Heeding paralogy's concern for pluralism and diversity, it is of central importance (and utterly timely) to consider the issue of its style and its interrelation with knowledge of social entrepreneurship. In other words, to advocate the polysemousness of the signifier social entrepreneurship and to detain its performative legitimization, I would like to search for paralogical groundings through writing styles that feature a sensitivity towards the uniqueness of social entrepreneurial endeavours and thereby sidestep the exclusionary 'terror' of univocal readings.

As outlined by Game and Metcalfe (1996), the practice of writing is actively involved in the production (and not only with mimicking the representation) of knowledge as a result of which (academic) writing becomes an act of cultural production. It follows from Game and Metcalfe's observation that how we are expected to write irrevocably affects what we can write about. Consequently, it might be helpful to temporarily sidestep the distinction between science and non-science and instead instigate a discussion of style and representational practice. Hence, while the kinds of language or discourse

we employ in making sense of social entrepreneurship are not reducible to one another (Lyotard, 1988) we get to see that by writing in different ways, each style can bring to the fore a fresh perspective on the phenomenon being studied. While I have tried to liberate us from the myth that there exists such a thing as ‘getting it right’ (Barthes, 1986), I would like to advocate the introduction of ‘breaching’ (van Maanen, 1995), or experimentation with styles in order to learn about social entrepreneurship what is unknowable, unimaginable, using prescribed writing formats. In accordance therewith, we are called upon to transcend existing boundaries between disciplinary fortresses and to invent new connections for the sake of understanding social entrepreneurship differently. Grounding the prospective writing of social entrepreneurship in such a ‘third place’ (Huyghe, 1993) will inspire ‘experimenting’ with varieties of writing which employ language not only to inform but equally to surprise and to evoke (Lacan, 1977); a language which, by virtue of its tropes, arouses ‘imaginative play’ (Bruner, 1986, p. 4). In the sense of a rhetorical refolding, the function of new styles and rhetorical tropes is to open the field of social entrepreneurship towards the range of possibilities that a text can refer to. Having located in the field of social entrepreneurship an exigency for ‘cool’³⁶ texts (Linstead, 2003), i.e. texts that ‘recruit the reader’s imagination – that enlist him in the performance of meaning under the guidance of the texts’ (Bruner, 1986, p. 25), I hope for stories of social entrepreneurship which appeal to thinking outside of rational order and prescriptive rhetoric, and which make us hear the ‘noise’³⁷ that might generate novel understandings.

Aporia, Undecidability and Ethics

As the previous deconstructive reading has revealed, staging the neologism ‘social entrepreneurship’ does not necessarily mean that one has bypassed economic discourse. On the contrary, the ostensible shift towards the social dimension of entrepreneurship might arguably conceal how deeply inscribed exchange relations still are. Quite ironically, while social entrepreneurship is heralded as a moral actor and social benefactor, I have pinpointed that its economic calculus nevertheless reverberates, in fact quite fiercely. In keen contrast to this, paralogy signifies not only a break with established theories and modes of representation but simultaneously incepts a political move by enabling difference in the face of the discourse’s ‘economic energy’ (Steyaert and Katz, 2004, p. 188). Paralogy’s avowed focus on instabilities and the unknown thus directs Lyotard’s endeavour away from prescriptive, calculative, or consensual knowledge to the point of immanent instabilities. If we take seriously Lyotard’s call to investigate incommensurabilities, undecidables, conditions of incomplete information, and paradoxes, I irrevocably sense revealing associations with Jacques Derrida. In reverting to Derrida, it is there-

fore of particular importance to see that Derrida, within his latter work, has shifted ground into the terrain of ethics. In what has been hailed as a turn towards ethics (see Dews, 1995),³⁸ Derrida interrogated the aporiatic, i.e. paradoxical nature of issues such as democracy, law, friendship, hospitality, the gift, and so on. Derrida has thereby conjured a sensitivity towards the undecidable nature of particular situations, to their 'experience of the impossible' (Jones, 2003b, p. 229).³⁹

In conjunction with social entrepreneurship, the previous deconstructive reading has revealed that a fair number of texts operate with an economic logic. Furthermore, epitomized through the quest for technical knowledge and best business practices, those texts prescribe the conduct of social entrepreneurship in a programmable and predictable manner. By implication, social entrepreneurship becomes an endeavour which relies on the application of pre-ordained rules. Yet, as Derrida contends, such programmable applications of rules do not require a decision and thus do not represent an act of responsibility. Derrida made clear that 'there would be no decision, in the strong sense of the word, in ethics, in politics, no decision, and thus no responsibility, without the experience of some undecidability.' (Derrida, 1999, p. 66). It is thus through Derrida that we get to see that the notion of *undecidability accentuates the infinite task of responsibility* and, by implication thereof, that prevailing images of social entrepreneurship ignore the point that *a decision which didn't go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision*.

Obviously, the notion of undecidability is diametrically opposed to the idea of performativity and pre-ordained rules, in that it indicates that a decision is a 'moment of madness' that must move beyond rationality and calculative reasoning.⁴⁰ By extension to social entrepreneurship, we are thus reminded that a decision, to be a decision, must transgress the economic or otherwise calculative rationale, and thereby stretch out to that which is outside of the subject's control. Arguably, a conceptualization which takes seriously the aporiatic feature of responsibility, namely that '*ethics and politics [. . .] start with an undecidability*.' (Derrida, 1999, p. 66), does not lend itself to the formulation of ready-made rules. In somewhat stark opposition to the mainstream writing on social entrepreneurship and taking recourse to Derrida's ingenious 'Politics of Friendship' (1997), we are thus impelled to concede that *to be(come) social, social entrepreneurship must be able to exceed the economic and performative circles of input–output relations*.

If we are willing to envision social entrepreneurship in relation to societal and cultural creation, the question is what we conceive of as moral or ethical and what kind of relations we thereby endorse, for instance, between social entrepreneurs and its other (i.e. the silent majority of help recipients, jobless, handicapped, underprivileged, or beneficiaries more generally). While ethics, responsibility and justice have largely escaped the attention of organization

studies (Jones, 2003a, 2003b), I would like to conjure up these perspectives for our prospective writing on the matter of social entrepreneurship. Derrida's deliberations thereby seem apposite in respect to social entrepreneurship as the matter has been envisioned by a sizeable number of scholars as a moral or social deed (e.g. Catford, 1998; Dees, 1998; Guclu et al., 2002; Pearce, 1994; Thompson et al., 2002). Derrida, I believe, is indispensable when it comes to deliberating about justice and ethics beyond the boundaries of (performative) prescriptions. First of all, it is implied through Derrida that the moment social entrepreneurship becomes performative about ethics, that is a matter of strategic rules, the focus shifts from respecting the other to caring about oneself. It follows therefore that ethics cannot be commanded a priori (in the sense of 'before the act') and once and for all. Instead, justice and ethics need to be judged in the moments of their inception, that is against the background of specific events (read small narratives). The ethics of social entrepreneurship thus always has to be created anew, becoming social. Hence, in order to decouple social entrepreneurship from its conditional, performative exegesis, it appears vital to imagine social entrepreneurship as an act that is addressed to the other, devoid of any conditional reciprocity looming in the background. Whereas the clutches of economic calculation undoubtedly still exert a strong hold on academics' perceptions of social entrepreneurship, I nevertheless hope that Derrida's cogent deliberations can lead us to envision the 'social' not as an instrumental, that is calculable, epithet of entrepreneurship, but as the expression of genuine openness towards otherness. On account of this, the 'social' of social entrepreneurship shall be elevated above the level of a 'supplement' (Derrida, 1976) or nice little 'extra' of entrepreneurship through which entrepreneurs (retroactively) legitimize their practices, to become an unconditional hailing of difference, regardless of potentially negative consequences that might derive there from.