“Let them not make me a stone”
Repositioning Entrepreneurship
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“Let them not make me a stone”—repositioning entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT
Entrepreneurs create our tomorrows and we have a responsibility to comprehend as well as appreciate what they do. A repositioning of entrepreneurship scholarship is essential, if we are to fulfill our purpose, enact our principles, and engage fully with the peoples, places, and processes of entrepreneuring’s edgy ecotones. We argue for embracing the biosphere and exploring the in-between. We confirm the need for research that champions everyday entrepreneurs and challenges dominant ideal types. We propose and support an ethics of creative and circular frugality. To achieve these consistent and coherent aims, it is time for entrepreneurship to reposition as a connective, heterotopic, engaged, and transdisciplinary ecotone—rich, diverse, and embedded in the in-between.

KEYWORDS
Entrepreneurship; everyday entrepreneurship; marginality; theory
Who am I?

Professor of Entrepreneurship, at Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship for 6 years,
Visiting Professor at Lancaster University Business School

I’ve also served as Director of Research for the Centre, and co-founded / led the
University’s Strategic Theme on Entrepreneurship and Innovation for a couple of years

Before that, I spent 20 years in Greece at ALBA Graduate School of Business, and the
American College of Greece, founding Greece’s first university Centre for
Entrepreneurship (AHEAD)

I’ve worked at Middlesex University, Aberdeen University, RGU Aberdeen and Glasgow
Caledonian University. And “visited” at the University of Limerick, and Aarhus University

And before that…real jobs. In marketing, training, and business development

I’ve been a soldier, a nanny, a driver, a deck hand, & a cook

Sometimes zoom and I have some minor issues – I apologise in advance.
Amongst the things I miss most about Middlesex...

Being a Professor of Small Business and Enterprise.

The Dean’s provision of vintage sweeties at any opportunity.

And lunch in the Greyhound – I know exactly what I’m missing by visiting only virtually this time.
I am not yet born; O hear me.
Let not the bloodsucking bat or the rat or the stoat or the club-footed ghoul come near me.

I am not yet born, console me.
I fear that the human race may with tall walls wall me,
with strong drugs dope me, with wise lies lure me,
on black racks rack me, in blood-baths roll me.
We add our voice to a growing critical chorus

Arguing that (academic) entrepreneurship has taken a wrong turn

That we’re focused on a very narrow range of elite entrepreneurs

Their purposes, places, principles and processes
Our manifesto runs thus...

- The hegemonic focus on the high tech, high growth, high finance celebreneurs is wrong.
- It just is.
- It’s wrong
  - intellectually,
  - morally,
  - ecologically,
  - ontologically,
  - cosmologically,
  - teleologically,
  - pedagogically,
  - epistemologically
The point of my work is to show that culture and education aren't simply hobbies or minor influences. They are hugely important in the affirmation of differences between groups and social classes and in the reproduction of those differences.

— Pierre Bourdieu —
It matters a great deal that entrepreneurship carries so much cultural legitimacy. And perhaps family business more so than most forms of entrepreneurship, symbolically.
There is a toxic link between the most hegemonic forms of power globally, and the elite, mythologised “entrepreneurship” which provides them socio-cultural legitimation.

“Entrepreneurship” has become a centralising force, a policy silver bullet, the hobby and resource acquisition / allocation strategy of the few, at the expense of the many, the 99% of small scale entrepreneurs.
Trump auctions drilling rights to Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Move comes after major energy companies passed on drilling in a polar bears

Entrepreneurs And Suicide Risk: A New Perspective On Entrapment Provides Hope

Prudy Gourguechon
Senior Contributor
Leadership Strategy
Insights into the psychology underlying critical choices in business
Mega-rich recoup COVID-losses in record-time yet billions will live in poverty for at least a decade

Published: 25th January 2021

The 1,000 richest people on the planet recouped their COVID-19 losses within just nine months, but it could take more than a decade for the world’s poorest to recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic, reveals a new Oxfam report today. ‘The Inequality Virus’ is being published on the opening day of the World Economic Forum’s ‘Davos Agenda’.

The report shows that COVID-19 has the potential to increase economic inequality in almost every country at once, the first time this has happened since records began over a century ago. Rising inequality means it could take at least 14 times longer for the number of people living in poverty to return to pre-pandemic levels than it took for the fortunes of the top 1,000, mostly White male, billionaires to bounce back.
We call for repositioning entrepreneurship towards the everyday peoples and places of the edges,
towards purposes beyond growth,
and with principles that honour the biosphere, and each other;
frugality, stewardship, equity, collectivity.

But because we are such tragic nerd geek bluestocking swots, our approach was quite philosophical in nature.
And because we’re *pretentious* blue stockings...there’s some poetry in there too

It’s a way to highlight our very passionate commitment to interrogate

“the sins that in me the world shall commit,
    my words, when they speak me,
    my thoughts when they think me”

(Louis MacNeice, Prayer before Birth)
What then shall we do?

Let’s start by asking what entrepreneurship is FOR?
What is entrepreneurship FOR?

- David Audretsch recently argued, in a Hunter Centre seminar, that entrepreneurship is long linked with compelling socio-economic problems.

- In the 80s, it was the depredations of mass unemployment, as manufacturing died, that we were trying to tackle with entrepreneurship.

  - “Over the years, entrepreneurship has been linked to a myriad of the most pressing and compelling topics and themes of its day, ranging from job generation (Birch, 1981; Storey, 1984), to innovation (Lerner, 2012), economic growth and productivity (Foster et al., 2008), social goals (Saebi et al., 2019), and the inclusion of socially and economically excluded people and communities (Hughes et al., 2012)”

- What is entrepreneurship for now?

- Which compelling socio-economic problems are we spending our time, knowledge, principles and careers on?

  - (Next question: are these really the most compelling issues facing our communities and contexts?)

“What is a re-positioned entrepreneurship for?”

I have absolutely no intention of doing all the work this morning, so I’d like you all to go to Menti.com, use code XX XX XX

And give me three words or short phrases which express what you think a re-positioned entrepreneurship might be for.

(Let’s co-create our repositioned teleology)
What is eship for?

This is what our Middlesex workshop co-created
So which people should we be studying?
Teaching to, for and about?
Writing policy for?
Creating role models out of?
Learning from?
The critical chorus extends beyond academia, too
it applies to.

To help them do this, the institutions that have been promoting just one model of entrepreneurship (high-growth and high-tech) need to realize the limits of that and broaden their own definition. Universities, colleges, and even high schools need to study the world of entrepreneurship beyond Silicon Valley’s unicorns and its homogenous model of success and teach students that there are actually innumerable paths to pursuing a business that defy standardization.
The organizations that work with entrepreneurs—from nonprofits like the Kauffman Foundation to banks, government programs, and business incubators—need to focus less on creating the next Facebook, or the simple metric of job creation, and develop more tools to support entrepreneurs at every stage of their journey. This includes promoting funding models that are more equitable for startups than venture capital, as well as offering the kinds of business coaching and education that can increase an entrepreneur’s odds of success. More attention needs to be paid to the entrepreneurs who have typically been ignored, such
Visioning Exercise

Who ARE these overlooked entrepreneurs?
Diverse, heterogenous, numerous
Your task (in small groups):
Draw us an annotated image of who an everyday entrepreneur of the edges is (should be, could be)

You can draw together on the zoom whiteboard, or by hand or online in any other mode which works for you
Which new knowledges can we co-create with these peoples, in their places?

From people to places...

WHERE are these peoples?
Which edges of our worlds can we move to, to be with them?
Peoples of the Marginal Places

• The peoples of the margins not only have a greater need for entrepreneuring, given their resource paucity, but also perhaps a more intrinsic connection with the process.

• Consider the entrepreneuredness (potential for change) of the other, as of the margins; the migrant, the firm that is also family, the ethnic, the micro, the high tech geek, the Puritan, the woman, the adult with ADHD, even Kets de Vries’ “personality at the crossroads”.

• In each example we see liminality, edging dominant fields and probably characterised by tensions and instability.

• These are people on the edges, socially, economically, racially, ethnically, psychologically, cognitively.

• Moreover, these zones are where the in-between is most accessible; this entrepreneurial space is ripe for change.
Where is entrepreneurship?

• It’s the liminal places, the edges, the in-betweens
• In the magical, interstitial spaces where fields, boundaries overlap

• It’s on the coasts where we first ventured, sustained and exploited
• It’s along the riverbanks
• It’s between the woods and the water
• The places and spaces where two ecosystems overlap, ebb and flow, merge and tussle is called an ecotone, and ecotones offer all species an ever changing abundance of resources found nowhere else...

• as has long been known to ecologists, biologists, geologists, coastal historians, coastal sociologists (sigh)
A bit more formally...

- Entrepreneurship is enacted in contexts as diverse as humanity and practised within social sites of human interaction (Steyaert and Katz, 2004).
- It happens in the everyday micro-practices of people’s lives as they connect (Dodd et al, 2016).
- It materialises as exchanges within fields and institutions, communities, ventures, sectors, clusters, networks, localities, regions, or states (Welter et al, 2019).
- All of these places, and spaces, and times, experience entrepreneurial new forms. All, too, have something interesting to teach us about entrepreneurship.
How does this link to your co-created teleology?

What did we decide entrepreneurship is FOR?
What is eship for?
The Di Chiacca family are rebuilding an entire village community, around sustainable farming and tourism.
THAT’s our place

NOT at the centre, not at the heart of fields & institutions & universities.
On the edges. Sustaining the edges, and their biospheres.
NOT growing the centres.

We have become the very problem we were meant to solve.
What then shall we do?

• You can find some of our ideas in the paper...
  • An ethos of frugality, and an epistemology of phronesis
  • Stewardship and sustainability, not growth
  • Teaching with through and for the everyday peoples and places
  • Just saying no.
  • Looking to the biosphere; eg: the coasts, waters, seas and rivers
  • De-centralising entrepreneurship within universities

• What about you? What do YOU profess?
A small advert...

(Once a marketer, always a marketer)
You might also like to respond to this call for papers, for our friend Ged McElwee, outgoing editor of IJEI. ...

International Journal of Entrepreneurship & Innovation

Call for Papers/Special Edition ‘Festschrift in Honour of Professor Gerard McElwee – In line with his approaches to researching entrepreneurship’.

Editors for this SI:

Dr Robert Smith, Independent Scholar and Senior Research Fellow at the East Midlands Police Academic Collaboration, Loughborough University.
Prof. Mike Danson, Professor Emeritus of Enterprise Policy, School of Social Sciences Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh.
Dr Ciarán Mac an Bhaird, Associate Professor in Economics and Finance, Dublin City University.
Prof. Laura Galloway, Herriot Watt University, Edinburgh.
Dr Deema Refai, Lecturer in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship, University of Leeds.
We get by with a little help from our friends – the Critical Chorus

Some selected highlights – none of our other papers are listed here, but we’re not hard to find.


MacNeice, L, 1944, Prayer before birth, Springboard Faber and Faber, London


In conclusion...
We call for repositioning entrepreneurship
towards the everyday peoples and places of
the edges,
towards purposes beyond growth,
and with principles that honour the
biosphere, and each other;
frugality, stewardship, equity, collectivity
• It is time to embrace the new affordances of cyberspaces’ in-betweens, and become an entrepreneurship of the many, the everyday, the edges
  • To use every drop of bandwidth at our disposal to build new networks, co-create new knowledges, and teach new wisdoms

• This paper is an invitation, a call to arms, a manifesto.
• WE decide what to teach, and what to study, and who to teach, and why, and how, and what for.
• We legitimate. Or not.
Let them not make me a stone
And let them not spill me

Otherwise....Kill me.