9. Going all the way: the creativity of entrepreneuring in *The Full Monty*

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Over the past two decades, creativity and entrepreneurship have become twin notions to emphasise the increasing and by now crucial importance of creation for business life and society in general. From being considered a nice add-on, the paired concepts have become an imperative that should stimulate a whole series of professional groups and their creative role in developing organisations, communities and cities, and in transforming ‘the economy’ into a ‘creative economy’ (Florida 2002) and ‘society’ into an ‘entrepreneurial society’ (Steyaert and Katz 2004).

But this hype has lost any kind of historical perspective. Starting with Schumpeter (1994), one can trace a long-standing interest in relating entrepreneurship with creativity. Creativity is considered crucial for entrepreneurship, not only to spark it, but especially to perpetuate it. Even if creativity has sometimes been given a much reduced role or just been considered a personal feature or individual skill of the entrepreneur, there is increasing interest in a more radical conception that situates entrepreneurship within a creative process view (Sarasvathy et al. 2003, Steyaert 2007). This view engenders a fundamental rupture with mainstream approaches that conceive of entrepreneurship as being located in a stable world, that work with a logic of causation and that, consequently, emphasise entrepreneurial activities as a kind of allocation or discovery. Instead, researchers adopt the basic assumption of a becoming reality (Steyaert 2012) and try to explain entrepreneurship as the creation of artefacts by imaginative actors fashioning purpose and meaning out of contingent endowments and endeavours (Sarasvathy 2001). The verb ‘entrepreneuring’ has been suggested (Steyaert 2007, Rindova et al. 2009) to emphasise that entrepreneuring is an ongoing process and to explain its ‘ways of worldmaking’ (Goodman 1978) as one of its inherently creative contributions.

To reveal the creative process that enacts entrepreneuring, I will use a film from popular culture. Movies, like novels, have been considered valuable tools to understand social and organisational realities, although more such analyses have been conducted in organisation and management studies than in entrepreneurship contexts (Bell 2008). Moreover, novels have been considered important to study processuality. As Bakthin (1981:
7) puts it, the novel is ‘[t]he only genre which is in a state of becoming, therefore it more profoundly, essentially, sensitively and rapidly reflects the becoming of actuality itself’. To relate cinema to becoming, we must turn to an analysis, which ‘diagnoses the affects and intensities that create us’ (Colebrook 2002: 114).

To illustrate the various moments of the creation process – and the various affects and intensities that come with it – I will draw on the movie *The Full Monty*, made by Peter Catteneo in 1997 and later adapted both as a comedy play and a musical, which tells the story of six unemployed steelworkers who undertake an entrepreneurial project: setting up a male strip show. This low-budget movie has been one of the highest grossing UK films and received a BAFTA Award for best film and an Academy Award for best music among several more nominations. I have chosen this particular movie for several reasons. First, though a handful of unemployed men may not seem like the prime example of entrepreneurship, these non-heroic figures fit well with the non-elitist view of entrepreneurship I aim to develop here: the creator is not an individual genius, but an artistic collective. Second, the movie neatly exemplifies the transition from a production economy to one where creative capital is central, as the men evolve from blue-collar steelworkers into a group of performers. Third, the film lets me emphasise the increasing importance of the creative industries in understanding the role of creativity in entrepreneurship (see Bilton 2007, Henry 2007). With *The Full Monty*, we get a performance group that pre-figures the upcoming importance of the cultural and creative industries.

In the following, I will zoom in on different scenes of the movie to develop a theoretical understanding of the creative process of entrepreneuring. Practising what I would like to call ‘theoretical bricolage’, I will draw in the spirit of this book (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 15 this volume) on an almost forgotten model of creativity, described back in 1964 by Arthur Koestler in the *Act of Creation*, and connect it with one of the most original attempts at conceptualising entrepreneurship by Spinosa et al. (1997). The title of Koestler’s book is still appealing: creativity is an act. Koestler competes with Einstein’s $E=mc^2$ to develop one of the shortest explanatory formulations, in this case creativity as a triple variation of the letters A and H: Ah – Ah/a – H/aha. In short, his model says that creativity combines three unique human qualities – aesthetic, intellectual and humorous – which I will adopt and adapt to come to three episodes which sketch the creation process around emotional, social and historical relations. I will thus not use this model as a fixed scheme, but will give it new life and add to it, reconstructing entrepreneuring by fleshing out its AH-, AHA- and HAHA-quality. First, the AH-quality presents
entrepreneurship as a way of ‘wandering’ into unexpected places and sensing possibilities which can overturn the usual ways of doing things. Second, the AHA-quality emphasises that entrepreneurship consists of an intensely social process which moves from apparently aimless wandering and vague intuitions to a deliberate, iterative process of rehearsal and hard work. Third, the HAHA-quality foregrounds the idea that entrepreneurship consists of redefining and reconfiguring a historical context, which works with, reinvents and turns upside down existing ideas and practices. Before going more in depth into each of these three qualities, I will first explain the framework by Spinosa et al. (1997), which will help me to deepen out and transform Koestler’s initial notions.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS HISTORY-MAKING

To connect the creation process with entrepreneurship, I conceive of entrepreneurship by relating to the work of Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus (1997), who understand it not as coming ex nihilo but rather as departing from existing frameworks and practices. Entrepreneurship thus forms an intervention which makes a connection between how (we speak about, understand and live how) the world is/has been and how (we say, conceive of and practise how) the world could be. Thus, we encounter a more nuanced understanding of creative destruction: rather than being dualistic, implying that a phase of destruction is followed by a phase of creation, the creation process literally produces a simultaneous multiplicity. That is, entrepreneurial practice draws upon and reuses current resources, forms, concepts and materialities as much as it engages with distancing, appropriating, questioning, rephrasing, overwriting or leaving all of that behind. For instance, as we will see in the film, the entrepreneurial team will take elements of the performance by the professional strippers, the Chippendales, and adapt them, but they will also go beyond this by doing a ‘full monty’. They will also call their group ‘Hot Metal’, clearly drawing upon their past as steelworkers, but giving it a very different interpretation.

Spinosa et al. build their theory on the experience of anomaly, in which one relates to certain everyday practices and conceptions but also senses that they could be done differently and need to be altered. That is why the authors see entrepreneurial change as a form of history-making: because entrepreneurial endeavours intervene in our everyday styles of living and ways of understanding and thus always imply political choices, the authors ask how we encounter things in the course of our everyday practices and thereby bring new worlds into being. This process, which they call history-making, is predominantly reserved for those actions and events which
Fundamentally ‘change the way in which we understand and deal with ourselves and with things’ (p. 2). They are primarily interested in people’s ‘ability to appreciate and engage in the ontological skill of disclosing new ways of being’ (p. 1). Disclosure is a general term for the coordinated practices which create an openness wherein things and people can show up; as disclosure excludes too, it is seen as opening a space that is bounded by a horizon (p. 191). Disclosure allows people to act upon, refine and even extend the traditional ways of doing things, which Spinosa et al. call the style of a disclosive space. Practices of disclosing require a sensitivity to detect the ‘small perturbations that rule-followers miss’ (p. 179).

In the case of entrepreneurship, this sensitivity moves persons away from simply pursuing rules since it takes the form of identifying the unique ‘anomalies’ in the disclosive space in which they find themselves. What makes change possible, then, is that entrepreneurs hold on to these anomalies long enough for their meaning to become clear; they can then reduce the given disharmony by changing the style in which those anomalies initially appeared. Hence, Spinosa et al. see articulation as a central disclosing activity of entrepreneurs: entrepreneurs bring marginal practices or concerns to the centre of people’s attention by making them more important, and then reconfigure the practice of concern. This is how they make change. As the authors state about reconfiguration, ‘successful entrepreneurs bring about social change by modifying the style of particular subworlds or the style of society in general’; they specify that the ‘entrepreneur reconfigures the style of a disclosive space by installing a new product, service, or practice in that space’ (p. 68).

Furthermore, disclosure is essentially about the embeddedness of creative processes: change only becomes possible if the actors involved are familiar with the disclosive space they want to alter. In the film, two disclosive spaces are connected. As we will see, the unemployed men start to question their usual practice of ‘hanging out’ waiting for ‘a job to walk in’, as Gaz, one of the strippers, puts it; instead they consider the possibility of (under)taking an entrepreneurial initiative by entering a process of questioning the sexual identity and relationship between men and women. Since each disclosive space has its own requirements, it is only by gaining an in-depth contextual sensibility that entrepreneurs are able to shift the customary ways that things are done. Here, we see, people need a distinct ‘skill of intensified practical involvement’ (p. 23) to notice the disharmonies that common sense would lead us to overlook. Thus, history-making is predicated mostly on a practice of ‘involved experimentation’ (p. 24) where change is stimulated as people continuously examine their lived experience of a given disharmony. In our example of The Full Monty, we can follow the men’s ongoing involvement with their upcoming show, but
the key experience is their experimentation with their self-understanding and their relationships to each other and to women, given that work, and urban contexts in general, are shifting dramatically. Along these theoretical framings, I will now give a reading of various movie scenes that turn *The Full Monty* team into a showcase for describing entrepreneurship as a process of exploring anomalies and paradoxes, bringing these to the surface and so reconfiguring the dominant way of framing the world.

**ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS REFRAMING**

The film opens with a short promotional clip, rolling from an old-fashioned projector, with pompous fanfare-style music, that presents Sheffield as ‘a city on the move’. This opening sequence is taken from a ‘real’ promotional film from 1972, commissioned by the city’s first-ever publicity officer, and praises the prosperity of urban life that came with Sheffield’s steelworks in the early 1970s: Sheffield as ‘the beating heart of Britain’s industrial North’ is developed based on modern town planning where ‘Victorian slums have been cleared to make way for the homes of the future’ and the city offers an exceptional quality of living and shopping and ‘fun’ leisure time. Indeed, it is ‘thanks to steel’ that Sheffield is ‘on the move’.

Then, the film shifts ahead 25 years; now, instead of a thriving city, the image is a devastated landscape, an abandoned industrial site, a city on the dole. There, we meet Gaz, accompanied by his son Nathe and his friend Dave, wandering about their deserted former workplace, where only the brass band still seems to be active in an attempt to hold on to the past. Gaz and Dave, both unemployed, are trying to steal some rusting girders but fail to move them across a canal. The movie zooms out on Gaz and Dave balancing on a wrecked car floating in the water. The image of these two isolated men, who have lost everything and are about to drown, could not be more suggestive of their completely desperate and precarious situation. The question is indeed whether these complete losers can become entrepreneurial in what seems an utterly unmovable situation. At this moment in the film, we see little indication that they will take part in an entrepreneurial and ultimately successful endeavour. Thus, this point of departure for a creation process is hardly a *tabula rasa* situation; rather, there is a fixed frame, a particular kind of history, consisting of an urban narrative mixed with personal stories, which will need to be changed.

Their entrepreneurial initiative will entail a group of six (and a half) men developing a profitable strip show; it will require them to break with a state of being unemployed and looking for jobs to a situation where
they create their own conditions of employment. Set against the ‘unmov-
able’ urban frame, we can follow the creative process through which an entrepreneurial endeavour becomes enacted, focusing on three episodes. In the first, I emphasise the affective immersion that opens up for a new idea by sensing an anomaly; in the second, I zoom in on how they develop and materialise this felt idea through social processes of improvisation and experimentation. In the third, I discuss how they further materialise the idea as they confront it critically and test its relevance for potential users.

AH: SENSING THE ANOMALY BY WANDERING AROUND

In the first episode, we follow Gaz, Dave and Nathan as they wander around in their neighbourhood. They are wet from rescuing themselves from the canal. As Dave is complaining about this, Gaz suggests that ‘you should have taken your kit off’, and insinuates that Dave might be too shy to do so, which Dave quickly laughs off: ‘Don’t! Shut it, all right?’ At the same moment they pass a woman, and Gaz greets her with ‘All right, babe?’ and sizes her up: ‘What do you reckon, Dave? Eight? Maybe even a nine?’ In these few seconds, the film makes explicit its main point of departure with regard to male–female identity: women are objects, and men don’t take off their clothes. However, on their walk, they run into a queue of women waiting to attend a male strip show by the Chippendales. As his son Nate seems to know (all) about this and explains it to his father, Gaz’s first response is to ridicule the whole thing. However, as Gaz realises that women have taken over the Working Men’s Club and that even Dave’s wife plans to attend, he realises they cannot let this pass: ‘She’s already got you hoovering! I saw it and I let it go! But this? No, no, no.’ Even when his son says that this is a ‘women only’ event, Gaz will not be stopped: he climbs through the window. Having entered ‘the Alley of Death’, Gaz observes not only some elements of the performance, but also the hundreds of enthusiastic women and their raucous cheering of the strippers. Furthermore, Gaz has to flee into the gents’ toilet when Dave’s wife and two girlfriends sneak into the men’s room to skip the line at the women’s toilets. There, peeping through a keyhole, Gaz can watch how women behave in the toilet, and listen to their comments on the show and how they feel about it. Suddenly, the scene changes abruptly as one woman drops her underwear, hikes up her skirt, and starts to pee standing up, as men do. Gaz, who cannot believe what he has seen, finds his son and gets out as quickly as possible, leaving Dave’s wife with them, saying that ‘Auntie Jean is busy’ enjoying the show.
The next day, Gaz is at the Job Club. The men, playing cards, are busy discussing Gaz’s experience of the night before, instead of filling in job applications. We see more clearly the shifts these unemployed men have undergone as the changing economic situation has committed ‘a series of assaults’ on the ‘male privilege’ of them as fathers, husbands and breadwinners (Halberstam 2005: 138). For instance, Gaz has trouble keeping up with his alimony payments for his son and being a father who does ‘normal things’, as his son puts it; Dave has resigned from his job and has lost confidence in himself, even in his sexual potency. And Gerald, formerly the foreman over Gaz and Dave, has not told his wife that he is unemployed and cannot accept that he is ‘just like the rest of us’, as Gaz points out; instead, Gerald leaves home every morning pretending he still has a job. Against this background, the men discuss how men will no longer exist except in a zoo, as women will turn into men through genetic mutation. However, during the discussion, Dave points out that thousands of women were present the night before to look at those obsolete men. The men quickly calculate that if a thousand women would pay £10 each, they could take in £10,000 in one night. Gaz is overwhelmed at this, and replies to Dave: ‘It’s worth a thought, though, innit?’ As they ponder themselves as would-be strippers, Gerald intervenes and kills the idea: ‘Little and Large prancing round Sheffield with their widgers out. . . . Widgers on parade! Bring a microscope!’ Dave defends the idea: ‘I don’t see why the chuff not!’ And Gerald replies, ‘Because you’re fat and he’s thin and you’re both fucking ugly.’ The scene quickly escalates into a fight.

These fragments illustrate how the creative process consists of sensing an anomaly. If the creativity of entrepreneurship starts with new ideas, at first these ideas are simply sensed, before they can be consciously formulated. Before anyone can articulate the idea that these men could become strippers, they must connect with an embodied experience from another world. Gaz, wandering around with his friend and son in the streets, suddenly encounters a world he did not know thus far: one where men can be objects of pleasure for women. If creativity, according to Koestler (1976), requires a form of bisociation where two habitually disconnected frames of reference are connected, Gaz actually ‘creates’ a new frame of reference by pushing himself through the window of the Men’s Club and crossing new boundaries. Suddenly he is totally immersed in a different world, and he gets ‘privileged’ access to how women enjoy watching men strip, how they gossip about men, and how they even imitate and make fun of them in the bathroom. Once Gaz and his friends talk about this experience, it has a totally discomforting impact: they sense that things are changing even if they cannot pinpoint it. Then, rather paranoid (Halberstam 2005), they imagine how men will soon be obsolete: ‘When women start pissing like
us, that’s it, we’re finished, Dave, extincto.’ Their talk does not really make much sense, but it reveals their profound emotional confusion because of something they cannot yet grasp. The creative process consists of sensing an anomaly that might lead to them engaging with a new project.

Thus sensing is first of all an emotional, aesthetic and embodied experience. Gaz’s experience is based on his concrete, practical involvement of crossing a boundary and engaging with a different, unfamiliar world. They are all surprised and baffled. Being able to be surprised, to wonder how and why, to be astonished is indeed a primary quality of creativity. AH is the sound we make when something new comes to us. It gives us a sensation of wonder, of revelation, when something is disclosed. Creativity is indeed an act of opening up, of making things empty so the possible can enter. People experience the AH-quality through their senses.

The French philosopher Michel Serres (1995a) is a good help in pointing at the creative force of our senses. To fuel invention, he says, one must transcend the closed reference system of which one is a part. Serres believed in the role of the senses: ‘if a revolt is to come, it will have to come from the five senses!’ (p. 71). The first experience of anomaly and the creative impulse that this can be altered – in short, this emotional kind of knowing – comes through the body. The possible, the virtual and the imaginary are thus closely linked with the way we ‘treat’ our bodies. These days we place great trust in the visual and in images, but even before we have seen, we have already been in touch, we have smelled or heard or felt the phenomenon. As Paul Klee (1964: 310) famously wrote, ‘One eye sees, the other feels.’ Gaz has ‘seen’ many things that later will be used in their project, but at this moment, he holds an intense feeling that something is not right here and a burning question of how to deal with it.

Consequently, at this moment the friends do not yet say ‘ah’; rather, they might say only ‘oh’, as they feel quite intimidated by their own feelings. However, this sense of anomaly turns into ‘seeing’ new possibilities and entering the level of the possible. In the fragment at the Job Club, this turnaround is the effect of a joint conversation. We can notice that becoming strippers is not the idea of a specific person. If any one person points at the financial potential, it is actually Dave, not really the smartest guy around the table. Yet overall, the idea gets formulated as the various men add elements to their joint articulations. And indeed, Gaz ends with a big smile on his face, turning his earlier worries into ‘seeing’ the potential in what felt at first like a cold experience of marginalisation. Indeed, he suggests that it might be worth a thought, letting himself be seduced by the AH-experience.

However, his words are hardly spoken when something very typical happens: Gerald kills the idea in a completely ironising intervention. Often,
when a new idea is uttered, it is immediately criticised and what somebody imagines as possible is turned around as impossible with the simple utterance of a ‘yes, but’. I like to call such a ‘yes, but’ a creative murder, as we explain why an idea is not possible and give all kinds of reasons, rather than say why it would be possible. Critique is important during a creative process (Bilton 2007), but it should not come too early on. For instance, we experience this response during creativity courses when we try out the six thinking hats of de Bono (1999), which is a model that highlights the different kinds of thinking involved in a creative process and in making lateral thinking possible. It often occurs that the black hat (giving a critical response) is immediately adopted when a creative idea is proposed (by someone wearing a green hat), before the white hat (giving facts and information), the yellow hat (giving positive support), or even the red hat (giving one’s feelings about an idea) have had a chance to enter the conversation.

A long list of creative ideas and possibilities has been killed off prematurely by ‘black hat thinking’. In 1962, Decca Records refused a contract to the Beatles, at that time still an obscure group, commenting to their manager Brian Epstein: ‘Not to mince words, Mr. Epstein, but we don’t like your boys’ sound. Groups of guitarists are on the way out’ (Barrow 2005: 19). The rejected demo, which contained ten songs from their audition on 1 January 1962, was found back in 2012, and auctioned for £35,000. In a similar vein, 12 publishing houses rejected J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series, before Bloomsbury offered her a contract, supposedly at the insistence of the Bloomsbury chairman’s 8-year-old daughter. Even before people can become aware of an anomaly, someone will have bounced away a new idea or intuition with a simple ‘yes, but’: that communicative move we have all mastered so well. ‘Yes, but’ doesn’t sound at all like ‘ah’. Every ‘but’ commits a new creative murder.

Will these lads be able to hold on to this sense of possibility? An entrepreneurial process doesn’t seem very likely after Gerald’s intervention. According to Spinosa et al. (1997: 41), ‘the entrepreneurs worth thinking about are the ones who are sensitive to how the problem that they sense has its roots in our pervasive way of living, our lifestyle (. . .). The changes they bring about are the changes of historical magnitude because they change the way we see and understand things in the relevant domain.’ Therefore, the idea of becoming strippers is not just a golden opportunity; it is anchored to the whole framework I have been describing, as the idea also relates to a paradigm shift in how these men relate to themselves, their own bodies. And thus the development of the idea operates on the level of a change of lifestyles, for themselves, for their families and friends, even their neighbourhoods. The question is: can they learn to see themselves as strippers and change their own form of dominant masculinity?
Thus, the creativity inherent in entrepreneurship is above all a form of sensing, a sensing that moves between the unspoken and the articulation, between the possible and the rejection (the impossible), between a feeling of anomaly and an opening up of the possible. Entrepreneurship, then, means entering the possible with regard to something that seems completely unmovable, overly coded and fixed. And here is where taking a risk is part of everyday life in entrepreneurship: one becomes vulnerable as one stands in front of the firing squad of those shouting ‘yes, but!’ to even the Beatles or J.K. Rowling. So the AH-quality also refers to the suspense and the necessary risk: it requires going for it, which comes with the necessary thrill and might produce a stretched out aaaaaaaaaaaaahh. It requires taking one’s chances while so many other chances are not taken, as one stands intimidated by the army of disbelievers who stand firm and say ‘no’. But some do take the chance. They have the feeling of being pioneers. That’s what forms the cutting edge of entrepreneurship: people enter the edge of what exists, and re-establish the first contact, which I call, inadequately, an emotional relation. That’s why we can often call entrepreneurship a matter of pioneeer-hood, based on a belief in the possible, as we can read again in the poetic words of Serres (1995b: 25):

There are other possible worlds, I know other possible meanings, we can invent other forms of time. And this is why the philosopher broods over the possible as if it were a fragile newborn babe, like a bouquet of times, like a multibranched candelabrum, like a living network of veins and fibrils, he harkens to the noises and the ringing of changes.

Entrepreneurship, then, is about disclosing a possible world, hidden to most, but available to be sensed by some who haven’t lost their sense for the sensible.

Let me summarise what I consider an AH-quality. It’s an openness to the possible, the zero degree of being in the world, a receptivity to what comes to you, to what is strange, vague, chaotic. It’s a quality of being able to begin, to follow what you feel, being able to recognise the access to the beginning. Here is a possibility . . . You say ‘ah’: it’s the impulse to the virtual. It’s the pulse of the imagination and the imaginary. It’s the dream all people have when they sense the possible, when they open up to multiplicity. The AH-sound is about sensing the anomaly, having the ‘pioneer’ feeling of wanting to start something and taking a risk, breathing in and breathing out, followed by an ‘ah’, the door to one’s raison d’être. Here an idea gets formulated and fed, as energies are accumulated. It’s having a freedom to sense, a hospitality to ideas. In Flemish and Swedish we call it respectively gastvrijheid/gästfrihet; it’s embracing ideas as your ideal guests . . . . It’s saying aahhh, therefore I am possible.
AHA: MATERIALISING THE IDEA THROUGH REPETITIVE EXPERIMENTATION

Gaz is mesmerised by this possibility and keeps thinking of the ‘stripping project’, even if he has not been able to convince Dave to step into it. For Gaz, who has taken the road toward petty crime by nicking a few cars, the entrepreneurial route would give him money to pay his alimony, so he can keep his partial custody of his son. In one of the next scenes, Gaz and Dave find themselves in their former workplace, hanging out with Lomper, a security guard who they earlier saved from a suicide attempt. To Gaz, Lomper is more than his desperate and depressed former colleague; through him, he realises, they would have a place to rehearse. Also he is a bugle player, which might come in handy for the show Gaz is still dreaming of. As they find Lomper’s records in his car, Dave plays ‘You sexy thing’, a song from Hot Chocolate. Now Gaz starts to improvise, trying out some sexy movements under the ‘spotlights’ of the car lights. The attempt ends in utter chaos. Still Gaz seems to take pleasure in his first steps on the scene, even if his son begs him to stop. As Gaz thinks he would ‘need an audience’, Dave says, instead, ‘you need a doctor’.

At this moment, one would see no future for this idea, as everybody keeps discounting it, and the first tryout was a disaster. But Gaz does not give up: for once he is ‘serious’. He wins back his son who had run off, by telling him how much he loves him, a confession that does not come lightly for a macho lad like Gaz. Gaz and his friends are also trailing Gerald because he is an experienced dancer. While nobody is really convinced, Lomper and Gerald have joined up with Dave and Gaz; they organise auditions and manage to recruit two more mates, Guy and Horse. In one of the next scenes, we find the group rehearsing, against all odds. Nathe, the boy, is helping out with the music; Gerald is trying to get some choreography going while the other five are trying to simply stand in a straight line. When an irritated Gerald interrupts them again to correct them, Horse suggests that they imitate Arsenal players when they set up an offside trap. When they try out his idea, they form a perfect line and get an initial feel for how it could work.

Later, the group reunites in Gerald’s home where Gaz instructs them to undress in front of each other. For each of them, this is an embarrassing moment, a boundary they try to cross with lots of moaning and self-loathing. Then they are interrupted by two men who have come to repossess Gerald’s television because he is behind in his payments, but the five others show up in their underwear and scare away the visitors. Again, the group has a positive experience, and even Dave, usually the most sceptical one, remarks that ‘It’s not bad, this stripping lark, is it?’
With renewed energy, they go into a new round of rehearsals, struggling to get all the moves in the right order, slapping their belts into each other’s faces, and stepping on each other’s feet. Nathe is not just helping play the music; he is also giving the lads blunt feedback, like ‘that were crap’. In the meantime, Gaz is transforming some borrowed costumes with Velcro so they can pull them off easily, something he saw the Chippendales do.

In the above scenes, we can follow how the felt idea of ‘becoming strippers’ is not aborted; instead, it is continued as the men give it direction and find a certain focus for it through experimentation and improvisation. With Koestler, who refers to the intellectual component as part of the creative process, we can speak of an AHA-experience. Indeed, at this stage, the idea is further conceptualised, which takes time and effort until the lads reach a breakthrough about how it all might work. This AHA-Erlebnis we all know from a story dating back to Greek times, when the Sicilian-born inventor Archimedes was able to solve the scientific problem he was chewing on by relating it to his observations about the way water moved when he took a bath: by connecting two unrelated frames in a process of bisociation, he finally could shout EUREKA!, I have found it. The difference between AH and AHA is only one letter, but moving from one to the next can take a lot of time – and blood, sweat and tears. In that sense, the conceptual development is not just based on cognitive and intellectual competences; above all, it relies on embodied practices, material translations and social interaction.

These activities of experimentation, improvisation and rehearsing – core activities in the social process of creativity – have been increasingly integrated in our understanding of the process of entrepreneuring. When we follow Gaz in his first attempts at ‘stripping’, a few things are remarkable. First, we find a typical situation of bricolage: one tries to accomplish something new by using existing resources in a new framework and combination (Baker and Nelson 2005). In many ways, like so many start-up situations from Apple to Google, from Amazon to Hewlett-Packard, the scene of this rehearsal is essentially a ‘garage’: with the lights of Lomper’s car as spotlights and a record Gaz and Dave find in his car, they can create a rehearsal space for Gaz to try out what he has seen the strippers do at the club. As I mentioned earlier, this trying out is not just an intellectual activity, but something that Gaz experiences and performs through playing and role-playing. Bilton (2007) calls this a do-it-yourself aesthetic where everybody is learning and making it up as they go along. Gaz seems to be happy with his first performance, while the others look on in disbelief, and his son Nathe plainly refuses with a creative murder: ‘Dad, don’t.’

Indeed, as the team is extended, they continue its core activity of developing the concept of the show, through improvisation and trial and error.
As the team rehearses hard, they learn the moves and find a concept for the show. Here they must learn to do the movements in unison. This joint learning process is enacted with lots of mistakes and humour. When they repeatedly fail to move together, the reference to the Arsenal offside trap helps them to envision how to succeed. This bisociative thinking brings the worlds of football and stripping together to get them through their creative block. It reminds us of how Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press was stimulated by his exposure to the workings of a grape press (Koestler 1964). Thanks to this bisociative move, the team succeeds in making a perfect line, and they experience their form of Eureka: ‘that’s easy.’

The team has another experience of working together successfully when they manage to chase away the men who would repossess Gerald’s television. The emerging collaboration among the team members is primarily a matter of building trust in each other and convincing themselves that this is something they can – and want – to do. When they undress at Gerald’s house, they literally experience how it feels to undress in front of others and they discover its new force. Thus, the team is testing everyone’s involvement but also giving everyone enough space to try out this move on their own terms. In this sense, ‘team-based innovation is an attempt to build a collective model of creativity and remains the key unit of activity in the creative industries’ (Bilton 2007: 39).

By emphasising the collective creativity of the AHA-experience, we also import the idea that entrepreneuring is primarily a social process. This has been emphasised in the story of Jim Clark, a multiple entrepreneur of such companies as Netscape and Healtheon (Lewis 2001). Although some tend to place the entrepreneur Clark in the centre of the picture, he has emphasised that the team around him has done the bulk of the work to reach the Eureka moment based on what he sensed initially. For instance, in negotiating about Healthscape with a venture capitalist, Clark says, ‘The problem I have with the way this discussion (…) has been going is that it is more or less in the abstract – that is, we’re cooking up a business plan without a management team. This may be the way some companies are formed, but I’m more interested in finding bright people with a passion to change the way things are’ (p. 109). Thus, invention requires a collective bath – and the AHA-quality requires in this way another kind of freedom, the freedom for collective search, social experimentation, trying out great ‘casts’. In other words, the AHA-quality is far less a traditional intellectual one than a collective effort of a longer breath. Or to quote from the Clark story again: the point is not only ‘to hire people bent on changing the world but to avoid hiring the people bent only on changing jobs’ (Lewis 2001: 114). Collective experimentation is not a 9 to 5 job: the picture we get...
is that the work behind the scenes makes the entrepreneurial process into an intensive process where nurturing social relations is a daily activity. As Spinosa et al. (1997: 162) emphasise, the entrepreneurial team needs to ‘hold on to this disharmony and live with intensity until it reveals how the common-sense way of acting out ought to take care of things and how it fails’.

Furthermore, the film gives us an insight into the everyday process of such a team forming itself, with all its ups and downs. Coming to an AHA-experience requires time, effort and patience. The ‘actors’ have to rehearse and learn by role-playing, if we follow the theatre metaphor that Bilton (2007: 29) endorses: ‘The craft of acting is a useful metaphor for creative thinking and team-based innovation.’ Indeed, this team is building up an intensive joint experience, trying out not only their roles as performers in the upcoming show, but also as creative performers and risk-taking entrepreneurs rather than unemployed steelworkers; thus they switch from being dominant males to taking up the position of a minority masculinity and exploring a series of dilemmas associated with femininity: ‘the men worry about their bodies, their clothes, their ability to dance, and their desirability’ (Halberstam 2005: 138).

Let me summarise what I understand as being an AHA-quality. Here sensing becomes transformed into sense-making, into finding a direction and a focus. The multiplicity of sensations requires refinement, repetitive work to make things visible, doable, to make them happen. There is no easy way. The AHA is the hard work. Let there be no doubt: they do not experience early winner’s luck though they do need a lot of luck. The AHA requires working with people, making teams that are well connected, finding trust, taking up multiple roles and finding pleasure in trying out all kinds of roles. It’s not enough to just put together the best and most competent people even if you are sensing and developing a vision and an imagination. All kinds of competencies must become connected and that process has to make sense to everyone who contributes. The freedom here is a freedom to engage in collective experimentation and search, a freedom to rehearse instead of performing.

**HAHA: TURNING AROUND THE OLD ORDER**

As the six men are building up inner confidence, they need to win over others in their community to step into the project, whether as funders or part of the future audience. Gaz first tries his luck at getting the Working Men’s Club as a performance hall, which will cost him a deposit of £100. When the hall’s owner asks him what they are up to, Gaz can only say that
it is ‘top secret’. As he does not have the money, he tries to borrow it from his former wife, encouraged by his son: ‘The thing is, Mand, you have to speculate to accumulate, like in business. I’ll get you it all back. I just need a tiny bit.’ His wife is not willing to loan him any money, but does offer to start working in the packing section.

In the end, his son Nathe decides to take the £100 out of his savings — to his father’s loud protests. In a very touching scene, Nathe says it is his money even if Gaz has to sign to retrieve the money. Gaz tells him to wait until he is 18 but Nathe wants to help:

Nathe: You said you’d get the money back.
Gaz: But you don’t want to listen to what I say.
Nathe: You said so. I believe you.
Gaz: You do?
Nathe: Yeah.
Gaz: Blimey Nathe.

Nathe has moved from the one who told his father ‘Dad, don’t’ when seeing him rehearse for the first time to the one who fully believes in him and funds his project. With renewed trust, we find the six men rehearsing. Their rehearsals are no longer so uptight. Under Gerald’s guidance, they work out in an open field; they are having fun, playing some soccer, and teasing each other. Though their team confidence is rising, it is still difficult to convince external actors. They have started to do some marketing, hanging posters on walls and mailboxes announcing the performance by the group ‘Hot Metal’ with the slogan ‘We dare to be bare’. When two women approach them and ask what is so special about this event, as ‘we had the real thing up here the other day’, Gaz at first pretends that his friends are putting on this show, but he then blurts out that his mates are a better show as ‘this lot go all the way’. ‘The full monty,’ the women reply, ‘that would be worth a look,’ and they walk off very amused. The other group members explode and tell Gaz he’s gone too far; they fear they will become laughing stocks. However, Gaz says it’s their choice whether to go back to the Job Club or maybe get rich. He gives them an ultimatum: ‘are you in or are you out?’ In the next scene, we see the group back in the queue collecting their unemployment cheques.

Now that the entrepreneurial team has built up an internal base of trust during rehearsals, we can follow, through the above fragments, how they leave their inner circle and confront the hard work of gaining trust outside. Here we have an almost classical ‘step’ in an entrepreneurial process of seeking and bringing resources together. However, finding investors is as much a matter of sound economics as of gaining and receiving trust. Such trust depends on people’s ability to share their enthusiasm for the
Going all the way

unfolding concept. This often implies a cold shower, when an entrepreneurial team has been working for a long time on their project, and other people seem not to follow automatically; in the end, it is the son Nathe who invests his money in this project. That comes as no surprise. Although he was once completely sceptical, he has also been following the process all the way. As a result, he has learned to see his father with new eyes, not as a loser, a petty thief with little perspective on a normal future, but as someone who is enthusiastic and dedicated to this new project. Like his father, Nathe comes to see the possibility in this project. In contrast, Nathe’s mother and the owner of the club do not ‘hear’ the new part that Gaz is trying to play; they clearly do not believe what Gaz tells them. ‘I can’t believe this,’ his wife cries, while the club owner would like to hear more about the project. However, Gaz is not prepared to tell him the full consequence of his new project, and to ‘come out’ as a stripper. The outside forms a mirror where entrepreneurs look into and experience what they have (not) yet become. The creative murders now come from outside, and they test how much the entrepreneurial team themselves believe in what they are saying.

Thus, the third quality – what we can call the HAHA-experience of the creative process – consists of an attempt to influence how other people, from investors to audience, can ‘buy into the concept’ but also to get outside feedback and critique. Spinoso et al. (1997: 167) point this out: ‘[t]he entrepreneur’s anomaly speaks, then, for a historical possibility that has not been recognised, but that, when it is recognised through a new shared practice, will be recognised by most people in roughly the same way.’ The HAHA-quality forms an intervention in the historical relations we have with a certain practice or style of living and often requires, as in a humorous action, that we turn around our usual conceptions and understandings of ourselves and the other: the idea that Gaz would become an entrepreneur would be almost comical if it were not also a bit tragic. However, this confrontation with external responses forms a necessary push through which new things can become visible and acceptable. New things play with the old habits and representations. The process questions all those who claim that they have always seen or done things in a certain way. The HAHA-experience complements the sensing and the sensemaking by dealing with all that is sensitive and by turning it around into a new sense that might at first look nonsensical. Entrepreneurs often have to work against prejudices or preliminary judgements, but at the same time this might also contain pertinent criticism or questioning that can inform the course of their project. An entrepreneurial breakthrough can only appear if the individuals can handle opposition, prejudice and critique. Thus these responses are crucial to finding out which is the ‘real historical possibility’
and whether the project can – with a loud laugh of ‘haha’ – oppose and question the dominance and colonisation of what is considered acceptable as practice. In turning around a historical relationship through creativity, we must expect some revolt, some uprising against the habitual ways of doing and seeing things – and we must make other people see this with us. For instance, the group in the film organises a sneak preview to which they have invited a few female friends so they can experience a ‘real’ audience and see how they respond. Crucially, the encounter with the women where Gaz oversells the group by suggesting the performance will include a ‘full monty’ shows that the core moments of the idea development happen in exchange with the future ‘customers’ or users of the performance.

For Koestler (1964), creativity is closely linked to humour and laughter as they also draw upon the bisociation where two frameworks collide. Through laughter, one allows for nonsense and for questioning the serious, whatever is considered important and habitual. For Koestler, laughter is a form of freedom; it creates revelation and freedom after confusion and misunderstanding. Humour is turning things upside down, or overdoing the expected. In a way, it makes strange connections no one would expect if they were reasoning logically. Humour, like creativity, requires lateral thinking, or going into the side paths of life.

As one laughs, one can let go of tensions. Laughter forms an important feeling to make creativity ‘work’. Much more than through reasoning and arguing, laughter makes things possible and acceptable for others. Laughter is a form of communication that ‘speaks’ more than words. But laughter and humour are not just there to smooth things out. Humour, irony, persiflage, caricature, pun, satire, impersonation, parody and nonsense are as dangerous as poisoned daggers: they no longer take reality for granted and turn it upside down. In a way, the HAHA-experience can be compared with the practice of graffiti, where one literally inscribes another reality on the dominant use of a space or building. Graffiti is indeed what people have to write as protest in toilets and on walls as it is not heard within the established frames.

Let me summarise the HAHA-quality. Here, we meet a third kind of freedom: the freedom to oppose, to change the way things are. Humour, laughter and graffiti are important practices for lightening the tensions around a new reality so they eventually become acceptable. Entrepreneurship implies such a HAHA-quality. It involves laughing and poking at the ways things are done and simultaneously bringing in an alternative way. This kind of outsider position is difficult in many organisations, societies and cultures as it implies caring about what happens in the margins. One must use the HAHA-quality to gain credit and credibility from the sceptics.
CONCLUSION

To wrap up the understanding of the creative process of entrepre-
neuring, let me emphasise three elements. First, engaging with this
entrepreneurial process entails identity work based on a sociocultural
process of creativity (Glaveneau 2011): on the social level, identities
are reframed as the protagonists change their relationships to them-
selves, to each other and to other significant social groups (such as
women). Meanwhile, on the cultural level, existing artefacts (such as a
Chippendale show) are altered as the actors create a new material reality
by developing a new artefact: the ‘full monty’ version of a strip perform-
ance. Therefore, as a subtext in this chapter I have argued that the film’s
title, *The Full Monty*, also expresses the fact that creativity is always a
matter of ‘doing’ a full monty. There is no such thing as a little bit of
creativity; one must go all the way. Although creativity can be easily
instrumentalised, I have proposed instead that habitual understandings
and practices will be altered and that this will eventually alter concep-
tions of selves and worlds. The entrepreneurial process consists not only
of the start-up process of the stripper group; it is, simultaneously, about
tackling new gender relations and sexual identities. In the final scene of
the film, it comes as no surprise when Gaz refuses to go on stage before
a full house, one where some men have also sneaked in. After all, as the
comic anti-hero, he

. . . has to grapple with the serious limitations of male masculinity in a world
where feminism has empowered women, changes in the workplace have altered
dominant conceptions of masculinity, and queer models of gender seem far
more compelling and much more successful than old fashioned heterosexual
models of gender polarity. Confronted with the failure of the masculine ideal,
the male hero must accept economic as well as emotional disappointment and
learn to live with the consequences of a shift of power, which has subtly but
completely removed him from the center of the universe. (Halberstam 2005:
136)

Second, through this processual understanding of entrepreneuring, I
have emphasised that creation is not a process that proceeds *ex nihilo*;
rather it starts from existing practices, ideas, (self-)concepts and artefacts
which form resources that, together with other resources, are used in a new
combination during the creation process. The creativity of entrepreneur-
ing, which draws upon a freedom to be free, has been sketched through
three processes which are summarised in Table 9.1 and which intertwine
practices of sensing, sensemaking and addressing the sensitive head on by
allowing nonsense. Thus, creativity is about creating a place for three kinds
Table 9.1  The AH-, AHA- and HAHA-qualities of entrepreneuring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities of creative process</th>
<th>AH</th>
<th>AHA</th>
<th>HAHA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koestler’s dimension</td>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Humorous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption of Koestler’s dimension</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Historical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus</td>
<td>Sensing the anomaly in how things are enacted traditionally</td>
<td>Holding on to anomaly and living with it intensively</td>
<td>Finding broad recognition as a new shared practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core practices</td>
<td>Opening for the possible, sensing new worlds, being receptive to the vague</td>
<td>Sensemaking, finding focus and making it feasible in the team through hard work</td>
<td>Addressing the sensitive head on and provoking the taken-for-granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notion of freedom</td>
<td>Freedom to wander around (instead of being purposeful) and to begin something</td>
<td>Freedom to rehearse and make mistakes (instead of achieving results)</td>
<td>Freedom to oppose and revolt (instead of achieving results)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team dynamics</td>
<td>Developing curiosity and being open to cross unknown or unpleasant boundaries</td>
<td>Developing trust in each other, supporting each other to take risks, joint learning</td>
<td>Testing one’s core assumptions and standing up to external critique and opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements</td>
<td>A talent for chaos and disorganisation, being hospitable to new ideas, using one’s intuition and imagination, letting go of inhibitions and resisting disbelief</td>
<td>A talent for improvisation, rehearsal and bricolage, an engagement with material translations and embodied practices, experiences of early success</td>
<td>A talent for humour, for opposing dominant practices, for learning from feedback and critique, for testing ideas and for convincing others of one’s odd ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of freedom in the entrepreneurial process: the AH-freedom to wander around and sense something different; the AHA-freedom, which allows for collective experimentation and rehearsal; and the HAHA-freedom, which allows people to turn historically achieved practices upside down. In a nutshell, the creativity of entrepreneuring consists of opening up to the possible, making it feasible in a team and making it acceptable for others.

Third, I have situated the process of entrepreneuring in an urban context, making it into a form of urban entrepreneurship (Steyaert and Beyes 2009). The hypothesis I have elaborated concerning this entrepreneurial process is that The Full Monty team, if it wanted to succeed, had to change the city or, in fact, its relationship to the city. The context needed to be reframed as one where entrepreneurial modes of identity-making and its different forms of gendered practices were altered. This is probably best symbolised by the name of the show, ‘Hot Metal’, through which the worthless rusty girders seen at the beginning of the film have been turned into an invaluable, hot show. This urban frame, of a devastated Sheffield against which this process of creativity unfolded, can be said to anticipate one of the core and by now commonplace changes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century: creativity is connected with an urban context through the concept of the creative city and the creative class (Florida 2002). The promotional clip used at the start of the film, a clear example of what is now called urban boosterism, clearly illustrates how entrepreneurial initiatives are closely linked with urban regeneration and governance (Steyaert and Beyes 2009). Thus the film illustrates a change towards a post-Fordist understanding of work and its meaning, which is related to (a change in) gender and class position. Before, work meant manual labour in a factory, which gave way to a dominant understanding of masculinity symbolised by steel and hard bodies (Halberstam 2005), but now the men experience loss and ambiguity, and the women have the jobs in the (upcoming) service industry and seem to have fun in their spare time, by attending shows in the Working Men’s Club, of all places. According to Halberstam (2005: 17), the outcome of the change process is quite clear as the movie ‘humorously foregrounds the relationship between alternative and dominant masculinities, and surprisingly credits alternative masculinities with the reconstruction of the terms of masculine embodiment’. It is against this changed urban context that we can say that entrepreneuring is about historic change. Not only will these men no longer be unemployed, but the city will know men who are less macho and also made it a slightly more diverse place.
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How might the AH, AHA and HAHA stages be applied to your own experiences of entrepreneuring?
2. How has an entrepreneurial venture in your own city or community led to a change in attitudes to work, class or gender? And how has the experience of living in (or ‘wandering around’) the city or community shaped the entrepreneurial process?
3. What else can fictional descriptions of creativity and entrepreneurship add to our understanding?
4. Spinosa et al. describe entrepreneurs sensing and disclosing ‘anomalies’ in our experience of the world around us, and using these to reconfigure the way we conduct our affairs. Can you identify any such anomalies in your own experience? How might these lead on to entrepreneurial ventures?

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