
6. Performing affirmation: autoethnography as an activist approach to entrepreneurship

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EPIPHANY 1

A chilly November Wednesday. A small town. People flocked to the big church on central square carrying chairs with them. Inside a large U-shaped empty table awaited its visitors. The sound of greetings filled the space: old and new friends met in an anticipative atmosphere. Shuffling and searching, they each found a spot and marked it by placing their cutlery and plate brought from home in front of them. The table was set. A man jumped on top of it, wearing a colorful suit, displaying an air of playfulness. He addressed the audience – all artists or people affiliated with art – in a stern voice: “We need more creativity, more collaboration, more disruptive innovation in this town!” Then the band started playing and the guests opened their first bottles of wine. Two tall young women climbed the table on high heels, each parading one arm of the U-shaped table. They carried the number 1, indicating that it was time for the first course. A dozen waiters appeared – dressed as nuns and monks – and distributed small plates with hors d’oeuvres. A feast of impressions.

The evening continued, with more music, more conversations, more food, more wine and the “table misses” becoming more and more beautiful. Then – at course four – suddenly one woman took her place in the middle of the table (Figure 6.1). Sporting red curly hair and a magenta colored dress, she positioned herself between the misses and seized the microphone:

Tonight I want to invite you to use your imagination and to envision how we will make, wear and compost our clothes in the future. Like this top made from funghi that Leontien is holding and that is fully biodegradable. Think of a day that you wake up, brush your teeth, have breakfast and get ready for work. On your way to work you drop your garbage at a waste collection hub. At the end of the day you pass by the hub again to pick up the cellulose 3D filament that has been created out of your waste. You go home and do a body scan in front of the mirror to measure your exact sizes. Then you quickly design your dress online and soon enough your 3D printed outfit is ready to wear: off to the party! I understand that this might sound utopic to you, but it will be the future: we need radical change in the fashion industry – FUCK FAST FASHION!

The audience cheered, partially in shock: did she just say ‘fuck’ in church?



Figure 6.1 Presenting WUR Circular Fashion at the Tafel van W¹

INTRODUCTION

So that was me in November 2017. Twenty years after I had started fashion design school. Twelve years after I had started my first fashion business. Nine years after I had embarked on a PhD. I was nervous that evening stepping on the dinner table in my magenta dress. Wondering: would my message come across? My message: the driving force of my life the past 20 years.

This chapter aims to capture the story of how I arrived on that table and to answer the question of “What have I been doing all my life?” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 1). I start with a conceptualization of my understanding of an affirmative approach to entrepreneurship (Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009) in the context of entrepreneurship-as-practice (Johannisson, 2011). I then position autoethnography as “more than method” intricately connecting personal experience with societal change. Through a triptych of *mimesis*, *poiesis* and *kinesis* (Holman Jones et al., 2013), I analyze the past 20 years from *becoming* a fashion student to a serial entrepreneur in sustainable fashion up to who I have become now: an entrepreneurial academic putting sustainable fashion at the core of her research and teaching activities. Growing up in the visual arts, images accompany the key moments in that journey. The first layer of *mimesis* acts as a mirror inquiring about the engagement of reflective, embodied being (Bochner

2013). The second layer of *poiesis* acknowledges a sensitivity and commitment to the power and responsibility of world-making and representation (Goodall, 2013). The third, but not final, layer of *kinesis* conceives autoethnography as a practice that “does not simply describe the world, but offers great possibility for changing it” (Madison, 2019). In the discussion, I reflect on why I propose autoethnography as “more than method” for studying entrepreneuring as it lays bare the affects and intensities of entrepreneurial theory and practice. I conclude with proposed challenges and contributions of this methodological approach.

THEORETICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

Taking a relational “affirmative” approach to entrepreneurship (Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009), I conceive it as creative world-making, an ongoing movement of inventing and relating between humanity and materiality. This view of entrepreneurship radically contrasts dominant perspectives that put the entrepreneur center stage (Steyaert, 2007a) and focuses on economic outcomes of entrepreneurial ventures. Table 6.1 shows an interpretation of how the affirmative view could be compared to functionalist, interpretive and critical approaches of entrepreneurship. I shortly elaborate on all four approaches in order to contextualize affirmative entrepreneurship.

IT’S JUST LIKE GETTING DRESSED

In the past two decades a growing body of literature has moved away from a functionalist perspective of entrepreneurship: instead of asking how entrepreneurs create utility, scholars started asking how entrepreneurs create new patterns of meaning and understanding (Gartner, 1990, 1993). The interpretive approach spotlights everyday practices and how actors interpret and reflect on these activities. It could be seen as a response to the failures of functionalist studies to broaden the definition of entrepreneurship beyond the social and economic opportunity, to address the unsuccessfulness of most entrepreneurs and to wrongly predict situations where entrepreneurship may arise (Jones and Spicer, 2009: 12). In order to expand on the notion of entrepreneurship, scholars drew on process theory and a Deleuzian ontology of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). In this view, entrepreneurship should be used as a verb (Weick, 1995), stressing the process of “becoming” (Steyaert, 2007b). “Entrepreneuring” then becomes conceptualized through daily activities and interactions (Steyaert and Katz, 2004). To be able to make sense of

Table 6.1 *Functionalist, interpretive, critical and affirmative perspectives of entrepreneurship*

Question	Literature	Epistemological foundation	Focus/unit of analysis	Favored research methods	Mechanisms	Critiques
How do entrepreneurs create economic or social utility? ^a	Schumpeter (1994); Shane (2003)	Positivist	The successful entrepreneurial capitalist	Qualitative; Quantitative	Structures that facilitate entrepreneurship; Creative disruption; Personality traits; Firm-level/ field-level and policy-level factor	Neglect of all the 'other entrepreneurs'; Unsuccessfulness; Infancy of the field; Predictions fail
How do entrepreneurs create meaning and understanding? ^b	Gartner (1993); Hjorth & Steyaert (2004); Down (2006)	Social-constructionist	Everyday activities associated with entrepreneurship	Qualitative; Narrative/discourse analyses	1. How do entrepreneurs make sense of the social world around them? 2. How do entrepreneurs make creative use of language and perceptual schemas in their day-to-day activities? 3. How do entrepreneurs create meaning in the course of their personal activities?	Ignorance of political and economic questions; Neglect of inclusion/exclusion dynamics

Table 6.1 (continued)

Question	Literature	Epistemological foundation	Focus/unit of analysis	Favored research methods	Mechanisms	Critiques
How can we question the regimes of domination that are constructed and perpetuated under the name of the entrepreneur? ^a	Jones & Spicer (2009); Hjorth & Steyaert (2009)	Critical theory	Entrepreneurship is seen as a discourse, a set of statements mobilized by actors to (re) produce political and economic relations	Qualitative; Critical reflexivity	Critiques of: 1. Representation 2. Effects 3. Structural limitations 4. Agency	No-saying / judgmental mode obstructs creativity of the entrepreneurial process and limits possibilities of life
	How do entrepreneurs engage in creative world-making as an ongoing movement of inventing?	Dey & Steyaert (2010); Weiskopf & Steyaert (2009)	Post-structuralist/ neo-material ontology	Qualitative; Visual/multi-sensorial ethnographies	Becoming; Creating; Connectivity; 'Perception of entrepreneurship as a <i>creative process</i> of folding and refolding material' (Weiskopf & Steyaert 2009: 193)	Increases confusion and complexity? Ethical/aesthetical considerations? How to problematize societal issues?

Notes:

- a. Most of the content for this approach is adopted from Jones and Spicer (2009), pp. 11–12.
- b. Most of the content for this approach is adopted from Hjorth and Steyaert (2004).
- c. Most of the content for this approach is adopted from Jones and Spicer (2009), pp. 14–25.
- d. Weiskopf and Steyaert (2009), p. 15.

the process of entrepreneuring, language plays an essential role: activities become verbalized in stories and these narratives become fixed into wide-spread discourses. The conceptualization of entrepreneurship can thus be seen as a mundane occurrence (Steyaert, 2004) – similar to getting dressed, which is also a daily, ordinary activity.

ANOTHER F-WORD

Calás et al. (2009) build on the conceptualization of entrepreneurship as everydayness and reframe entrepreneurship “from positive economic activity” to “entrepreneurship as social change” through a critical feminist lens. A feminist lens on entrepreneuring suggests that “gender destabilizes interpretive categories and encourages a plurality of meaning” (Poldner et al., 2011: 160). This is useful as traditional approaches to entrepreneurship tend to obscure important questions on freedom, emancipation and societal impact (Verduyn et al., 2017). A critical view of entrepreneurship focuses on discourse, a set of statements mobilized by actors to (re)produce political and economic relations (Jones and Spicer, 2009). Critical approaches embrace the complex, heterogeneous and even dark nature of entrepreneurial activity (Verduyn et al., 2017). Tasked with this heavy duty, often little room is left for playfulness while that is exactly the *critique nouvelle* Daniel Hjorth proposes – “Entrepreneurship identifies limits of the present and expands the crack so as to create space to play: free movement *before* principles of discourse and rationality invade” (Hjorth, 2017: 49 – italics added by the author). In my interpretation, this entails that I could play even before or while I ask critical questions: my tendency is to experiment, try out and create new possibilities, hence the focus on an affirmative view of entrepreneurship in this chapter.

AFFIRMATIVE ENTREPRENEURING

Grounded in an ontology of becoming, an affirmative approach views entrepreneuring as a practice of (un)folding, rather than a rational exercise of accumulating information, values and resources (Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009: 196). Entrepreneurs are thrown into the world and are connected with its different elements in an ongoing process of creating and becoming. Indeed, “entrepreneurship is then seen as a process that trans-forms (cultural) materials/practices and (re)connects, disassembles and reassembles them” (Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009: 193). This relational-material

approach to entrepreneurship is not about entrepreneurs, it is about relations with *other* “bodies,” whether human (Jones, 2003) or non-human (Law, 2008). An affirmative approach invites scholars to be open and creative like a child (Johannisson, 2011): to play, explore, experiment and take risks (Hjorth, 2017; Germain and Jacquemin, 2017) – attributes often ascribed to entrepreneurs. In other words: an affirmative approach empowers scholars to become more entrepreneurial.

This affirmative approach focuses on practices of (self-)formation and (self-)creation (Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009: 199) and relates it to wider societal change. Entrepreneurial self-identities are crafted “by connecting the discursively available world ‘out there’ with ‘inner selves’” (Phillips, 2012: 794). I argue that in order to more profoundly comprehend the entrepreneurial process and its impacts, we need to develop a better understanding of self and how it is constituted because “when human beings produce change, they change themselves as well” (Spinoza et al., 1997: 38). Especially the kind of entrepreneurship that aims to transform society – social, sustainable and eco-entrepreneurship – has made us aware of the emancipatory potential of what entrepreneurship is and can bring about (Rindova et al., 2009; Phillips, 2012). The paradoxical question is how we can affirm (entrepreneurial) life while we try to de-subjectify it. My answer is to use an autoethnographic approach to capture processes of entrepreneuring and social change.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS MORE THAN METHOD

So far scholars have generally taken the “safe” outsider position in “only” studying entrepreneurship (Verduyn et al., 2017; Hjorth, 2017), while some have invited to shape the field through participating in it (Steyaert, 2011). Even the most outspoken enactive scholar has never started a real enterprise, but always operated as an entre-searcher within the safety net of his position as a professor (Johannisson, 2011 and 2018). Those that were real-time entrepreneurs even before embarking on an academic career have maybe been too discreet in sharing their reflections on becoming an entrepreneur and enacting entrepreneuring. It appears that even though we have advanced entrepreneurship studies by becoming more interpretive, or critical, we still prefer to take the “safe” outside-position instead of immersing us deep into entrepreneurial enactments. My aim with this chapter is to enter this mostly unknown territory that “un-dresses” the raw and vulnerable sides of “mystory” as a tool to affirm active forces and bring about change (Hjorth, 2017). I propose autoethnography as a method to achieve this.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that gives the author the chance to make use of personal experiences to equally enact and understand social phenomena. Originally autoethnography was a response to social science's ontological, epistemological and axiological limitations (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Questioning the scientific paradigm made room for the emphasis of sharing more unique and subjective stories of experiences, which help us to understand and reflect on the social world (Wall, 2008). Autoethnography combines two different methods of writing: autobiography and ethnography. When doing an autobiography, the author writes about personal and selective experiences that already happened. Those experiences are not planned to later write them together in a document, but are rather used through hindsight (Denzin, 1989). There are many tools that help the writer to recall memories, like interviews with others, diaries or photography. When writing an autoethnography, one is both: the subject of the narrative and the narrator of the story.

When researchers do autoethnography, they write retrospectively about selected "epiphanies," and then analyze those writings with the help of theory (Ellis et al., 2011). An auto-ethnographer must "look at experience analytically . . . why is your story more valid than anyone else's?" (Ellis et al., 2011: 276). An autoethnography should not result in mere stories, but frame them theoretically. Therefore, autoethnography is an inherently performative practice that commences with the life story of the author and then "moves outward to culture, discourse, history and ideology" (Denzin, 2013: 124). From the cartography of terms that circulate when describing autoethnography, the essence is about reflexively writing the self into and through the ethnographic thereby isolating that space where memory, performance and meaning intersect (Denzin, 2013: 125). In a relational-material sense, autoethnography is less about "humanizing" research processes and products – as it works to be more inclusive of how life is lived and how experience is storied (Holman Jones et al., 2013: 673) – but to enable the researcher from "within the action" to trace the material and immaterial lines that co-produce entrepreneuring. This chapter, therefore, proposes autoethnography as a "method of in(ter)vention" (Steyaert, 2011) as a way to enact and engage with affirmative entrepreneuring. I now turn to a "rough" re-counting of the past twenty years of my entrepreneurial journey in sustainable fashion. Materials such as photos, memories, blogs, academic publications and diary entries help to re-site, re-cite and re-sight the multiplicity and fluidity of this story (Pullen, 2006). While narrating, I will intervene with theoretical reflections on entrepreneuring life, loss and growth. Even though anxiety comes with such endeavor, I feel brave enough to step into a safe space where

scholars can move back and forth between the personal and the societal (Denzin, 2013: 139) in order to learn from each other. Sharing my – also painful – experiences can support the quest for a more activist approach to entrepreneurship.

BEHIND THE SCENES

In 1998, I started studying at the Amsterdam Management and Fashion Institute (AMFI). I felt attracted to this school as it had a curriculum not so much focusing on becoming an autonomous designer, but rather offered a combination of business and fashion design (Figure 6.2). I remember saying to my mom while watching graduation shows of the different art schools we visited: “Finally the models are not showing art installations, but clothing that you can actually wear in daily life.” I wanted to make dress practical and not just an art form.



Note: I often served as a model for senior students. As art students we were supposed to keep ‘dummies’, little notebooks in which we would sketch and collect inspiration, such as photos and flyers of exhibitions we visited.

Figure 6.2 Behind the scenes at an AMFI graduation show

After I passed the assessment with my portfolio, I started the journey of how to *become* a fashion designer. Except that I did not really want to become a fashion designer. But what then?

So, in the second year, I embarked on an MSc in organization and cultural theory in the evening hours next to my day program in design school. My teachers were enraged: how did I dare to study fashion design “part-time”? I defended myself by quoting the work of Ted Polhemus: his anthropology of clothing explained the visual expression of societal developments and inner values (Polhemus, 1978a, 1978b). To study social and cultural sciences made so much sense to me as it connected what I designed during the day with theoretical framings. So, I went on this double path, and found myself studying at night. In my memory, I was spending more hours in the library studying Polhemus’ books than bent over a sewing machine as I was “supposed to do.” My love for books almost dominated the practice of “doing fashion design” – drawing, cutting, sewing – and eventually I graduated in 2002 with an MSc.

UN-DOING YOI

In 2003, I started to work as a project coordinator for the international development organization “Move Your World.” My job really *moved my world* as I immersed myself in learning about sustainability and social issues through organizing campaigns around biodiversity, fair trade and the impact of HIV/Aids on emerging economies. I recall feeling very misplaced on the day the Iraq war started: while my colleagues were demonstrating on the Museum square in Amsterdam, I found myself backstage at a fashion show. Sitting endlessly still on a chair, a hairdresser straightened my hair, a make-up artist painted my lips and a nail artist was “doing my nails.” I remember walking that show with mixed feelings: even though the glamor of the industry was still enticing, I felt I had a different purpose (Figure 6.3).

During these campaigns to move young people throughout the country to become active citizens, I also kept pushing my own borders. Together with my best friend from fashion school, I initiated “hiphonest” fashion to highlight that fairly produced clothing could look sexy and beautiful. I became a frustrated *intrapreneur* when my employer declined to support my project on sustainable fashion, which pushed me to resign and start my own business. Albeit subconsciously, Polhemus’ influence with his “body as a medium of expression” (Benthall and Polhemus, 1975) must have inspired me in setting up this first enterprise – named YOI (Figure 6.4).



Figure 6.3 Even though I was not on the barricades that day, I was styled for it

YOI was the abbreviation of “Your Own Identity” and became the first platform for sustainable fashion in the Netherlands. We presented at trade shows, organized events in avant-garde locations such as the Van Gogh museum and spread stickers with our logo all over town. We traveled to London, Paris, New York and Los Angeles to meet sustainable fashion pioneers whose designs we brought back with us to show in Amsterdam (Figure 6.5). We were invited by international organizations such as Textile Exchange to be keynote speakers during their conferences, inspiring CEOs of big brands and retailers. National media wrote about us as “green is the new black.”

After opening the store, I found myself stuck between four walls trying to sell the clothes and realized this was not what I wanted to do. I broke up with my long-term boyfriend, sold our house, handed the company over to my friend and left to live in West Africa.



Figure 6.4 Presenting YOI at a trade show with my best friend Annouk, the creative director of the company

FROM BECOMING AN ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEUR TO AN ENTREPRENEURIAL ACADEMIC

In search of my “self,” I spent a year in Africa (setting up a car business as my new lover was crazy about cars, but this failed miserably) and then moved to Rio de Janeiro. Here I worked with Modafusion, a small organization learning about the value chain behind a sustainable fashion brand. I was not so much the entrepreneur who started the organization, but initiated writing a business model for the two founders and I raised money for them through Dutch NGOs as I knew that landscape well. In the meantime, I started developing an eco-accessories collection with a friend of mine from fashion school who had become a well-known couture designer. He designed the jewelry and I collaborated with communities in Brazil that crafted the pieces from ecological and recycled materials such as Amazonian seeds and banana plaque from the waste of banana trees (Figure 6.6). I found myself trying to sell these accessories at a trade event realizing once again that I was not interested in “just”



Figure 6.5 YOI guerilla campaigning around Amsterdam

selling as it was too mundane to me. Therefore, I started wondering: I am not a fashion designer and I'm apparently also not into "selling": what am I good at?

The answer was: writing, reading and learning. This reflection led to acquiring a PhD scholarship in Switzerland and starting yet another business – named Eco Fashion World, an online platform showcasing over 200 sustainable fashion brands and publishing a monthly e-magazine and daily news. At that time, I wrote 110 blogs for this website while learning how to build an online business with my partners located in three different countries (Canada, France and myself in Switzerland). About the experience of setting up a business in virtual reality I wrote the book chapter “Fashioning virtuality” (Poldner, 2016). While I took my PhD seminars, I collected data and blogged about sustainable fashion. I used the access I had to many sustainable fashion brands being the founder of one of the first online sustainable fashion platforms as a win-win: I often

EPIPHANY 2: BLOG “ODE TO ANNOUK” AUGUST 2008

It's a bit strange to see each other after such a long time. Strange and simple at once. Because we're still partners. Connecting souls you could call us.

Five years ago we found each other in a dream. A dream to show young and trendy people that eco clothes were no jute bags anymore. On the contrary, they could be very fashionable combining good quality with great design. We lived our dream and initiated one project after the other. Fashion shows, workshops, video projects, photo shoots and more. All with the same message: spread the word on eco fashion! We worked with TV, with magazines, non-profit organizations, schools and festivals. We co-developed a booklet for fashion students and most of all: we brought the first hiphonest eco labels to Holland. I know I sound like an old fool when I say we were proud to find and promote Howies, Loomstate, American Apparel and Beyond Skin at that time. Our network of creative young people grew day by day, because everyone adored what we did and we loved what we co-created with them.

Then the big guys came in along with some serious dollars. And before we knew it we were caught in a YOI ride. With a board of so-called “important” people, a lot of press and even more pressure. We traveled the world, found more labels and sold them in the first eco concept store in Amsterdam. We became guest speakers, lecturers and talk show guests. Everything went too fast and way too furious. And after one of the big guys stealing a big amount of money from our baby, issues became problems became dramas resulting in The Ultimate Clash between us.

YOI was not so much joy anymore. We were 25 and exhausted. And now we're sitting in our old hang out Café Katoen (which actually means Café Cotton, what a coincidence!) and talk and hug and cry.

It's sad to lose a business, but amazing to reunite with one of my best friends.

interviewed entrepreneurs and wrote an article for the website in return for giving them some visibility. For instance, I followed the entrepreneurs behind the successful sneaker brand Veja for several years and wrote an award-winning teaching case about them (Poldner and Branzei, 2010). In March 2012 I organized “Un-dress,” a full day event around eco fashion in St. Gallen, Switzerland. My motivation was a comment of my supervisor that PhD students delivered a written dissertation, but did not leave any other legacy after graduating. One of the richest cases for my PhD was designer Ada Zanditon whom I met and interviewed multiple times and who was a keynote speaker at Un-Dress. Two student organizations took collaborative ownership of “Un-dress” and have organized it annually ever since (for the sixth time in 2018).

In 2013, I obtained my PhD and went on for a post-doc at a design school in the textile department. One of the projects we worked on was Bambusigns: developing innovative products out of bamboo fiber. During



Figure 6.6 The eco-accessories collection created by women in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, worn on the catwalk in Amsterdam

my post-doc, I developed the award winning case study on Osklen, a luxury fashion house and pioneer in sustainability (Poldner et al., 2016b). I also developed a proposal for the Swiss National Science Foundation on “sustainable luxury.” Unfortunately I did not get any funding for this three-year research project and soon after, my family and I moved to the Netherlands.

FROM SUSTAINABLE TO CIRCULAR FASHION

Through collaborations within an EU funded project on women and social entrepreneurship, I was invited to join another EU project: on social and sustainable fashion entrepreneurship (SOFE). By then, it was 2015 and I was working at Wageningen University in the Netherlands as a lecturer and researcher. We developed an online incubator program for this group of entrepreneurs inspiring them with best practices of, for example, Rambler, a social fashion enterprise in Amsterdam. In 2016, a photographer approached me to capture my wardrobe that consists of only sustainable fashion items. Carefully curated over 20 years, my green closet contains vintage items and (sample) designs by many of the sustainable fashion designers I had met over time. Some of them I had bought



Source: Photo credit: Chantal Aimée Ehrhardt.

Figure 6.7 *My wardrobe depicted as part of the photography project “Out of the Green Closet”*

EPIPHANY 3: BLOG: FASHION FOR GOOD MARCH 2017

Twelve years ago, I read the book *Cradle to Cradle* (McDonough and Braungart, 2002) while traveling around the US and Europe to befriend the handful of pioneers in sustainable fashion. At the time, my friend Annouk Post and I were in the process of setting up and running the very first sustainable fashion store in the Netherlands.

Since then, the C2C philosophy inspired my thinking during the (ad)ventures that awaited me for the next decade. Last year, I started teaching Circular Economy and my horizons expanded once again. What struck me most is that whereas sustainability is about reducing negative impact and doing “less bad,” circular economy is about doing good. While linear thinking limits our imagination, circular thinking fosters creativity and helps us to perceive abundance instead of scarcity. Circularity helps to view waste as a precious resource that can be turned into valuable new products. It also spurs open innovation, collaboration and community building.

Yesterday, I was privileged to attend the festive launch of Fashion for Good in Amsterdam. A partnership between the C&A Foundation, accelerator Plug and Play and impact investor Circularity Capital, amongst many others. Cradle to Cradle co-founder (and co-author of the book), William McDonough, addressed the audience saying: “Let’s put the ‘re’ back into resources, by remaking, re-using, retaking.” He also “re”framed the word competition going back to its Latin roots “competere,” which means “coming/striving together.” During the event, the very first C2C certified golden standard T-shirts were presented and will hit C&A stores around the globe in June. The excitement that I felt in the room – boosted by energetic moderator Sally Uren of Forum for the Future – outperformed the lovely Spring weather outside. It was as if the Californian sun was solely shining on Amsterdam for these few wonderful hours.

What’s more, after the break, a range of startups pitched their radical innovations. From Amadou mushroom leather, to Mycotex, from Dropel and Reblend to textiles made out of food crop-waste developed by S3. Prince Constantijn – brother of the King of the Netherlands – dropped by to receive a standing ovation by saying that he was happy to see many women at a startup event. I myself was pleased to see a range of suits in a colorful crowd of fashionistas. And suddenly it all made sense to me: how technologies that my life science colleagues in Wageningen invent can disrupt the textile industry. How there is an eco-system in place now to support these pioneers and match them with the big retailers and brands. How my story of David and Goliath is finally being materialized in a physical space downtown Amsterdam and a global community with the key players on board. I have not felt this excited since the opening of the YOI store in 2005 when we felt we were part of a revolution. That movement has grown tremendously and changed the face of the industry. But now it is time to take change to the next level and make Fashion for Good. I’m ready (Figure 6.8).



Figure 6.8 Launch of Fashion for Good, March 2017, Amsterdam

while traveling and collecting my PhD data, others were sent to me as a gift when I was editor of *Eco Fashion World* (Figure 6.7).

Early 2017 I was feeling a bit disappointed with sustainable fashion. After having acted for almost 20 years in the field, I felt so little progress had been made in real industry transformation. The launch of Fashion for Good in March 2017 changed my view and I realized: circular fashion is the future! I wrote a blog about my epiphany on *Eco Fashion World* (see p. 118).

By then some of my students in the course circular economy had taken the initiative to organize a circular fashion symposium, which took place in June 2017. As a visual illustration to the symposium, we organized an exhibition of my wardrobe (Figure 6.9).

Following the symposium, I developed a strategic collaboration with ArtEZ University of the Arts. Together we organized the Fashion Colloquium in June 2018 parallel to the main fashion exhibition in the Netherlands that takes place every four years: *State of Fashion*. The overarching theme was “Searching for the new luxury” with a focus on all things circular in fashion. The preparation consisted of five educational research projects with WUR/ArtEZ students, designers and professors



Figure 6.9 Three of my outfits showcased during “Wear I am”, an exhibition of my wardrobe

combining technology with arts/design and knowledge of circularity and enterprise to come to innovative new solutions to make the fashion industry more circular.

CLOSING THE LOOP

Back to where I started: on the table cursing in church. This event marked the launch of the WUR Circular Fashion Lab: a place where we bring together all the activities we’re enacting related to circular fashion (Figure 6.10).²

During the evening, the table misses crossed the dinner table announcing the seven courses. Each time they were dressed in “circular” outfits: from kombucha grown “second skin” to an alternative to leather created from mycelium or 3D printed cellulose derived from paper waste. Together, these outfits were a visual illustration of the research we are doing at Wageningen University.

I could never have imagined that my life would unfold the way it has. I had no ambition to be a fashion designer, nor an entrepreneur, nor



Figure 6.10 Launch of WUR Circular Fashion during Tafel van W dinner event in Wageningen

a professor. But here I am, a professor in the business of sustainable fashion, having a blast! And as I am immersed in this beautiful reality of putting circular fashion on the map in research, education and practice, the next phase is awaiting me. Where will my entrepreneurial becoming take me next: will I stay at the university or maybe start my own business again?

A TRIPTYCH: ENGAGING, WORLD-MAKING, CHANGING

After this storytelling depicted here in text and images, I analyze the selected “epiphanies” of my journey. I draw on the philosophical concepts of *mimesis*, *poiesis* and *kinesis* to unravel how my entrepreneurial becoming can be viewed as an activist, affirmative performance. The first layer of *mimesis* acts as a mirror inquiring about the engagement of reflective, embodied being (Bochner, 2013). The second layer of *poiesis* acknowledges a sensitivity and commitment to the power and responsibility of world-making and representation (Goodall, 2013). The third, but not final, layer of *kinesis* conceives autoethnography as a practice that “does not simply describe the world, but offers great possibility for changing it” (Madison, 2019: 167). Together, this triptych discloses why I consider autoethnography such a powerful and engaging method for embodying “entrepreneurship as social change.”

MIMESIS: ENGAGING WITH “THE SIMILAR”

Mimesis originally means “to imitate.” Mimetic activity can be viewed as adaptive behavior (prior to language) that allows humans to make themselves similar to their surrounding environment through assimilation and play. “Autoethnography is a form of inquiry, writing and/or performance that puts questions and ‘issues of being’ into circulation and dialogue” (Bochner, 2013: 38). Mimetic activity relates to social practice and interpersonal relations rather than as just a rational process of making and producing models that emphasize the body, emotions, the senses, and temporality.

Mimetic activity has clearly been the straightforward part of my entire journey: from studying side by side with other fashion designers “to be” to bringing YOI into being with my best friend. From being immersed in the daily reality of Modafusion’s founders and living a life similar to them to “doing an ethnography” of dozens of ethical fashion entrepreneurs around the globe. And as I engaged with all these people, I saw myself reflected in them. Often they were women between 25 and 45 years who care deeply about personal, community and planetary health and well-being (Emerich, 2011). Just like (many of) them I seek to constantly re-invent myself through spiritual practices next to indulging in worldly pleasures such as (eco)travel, organic foods and ethical design. Speaking a similar (bodily) language, using a known vocabulary and being “driven” by a common purpose of transforming the fashion industry made us

instant friends. Especially in the early years when sustainability was not mainstream as it is (becoming) today, it was always such a feast of recognition to meet with other ecofashionistas in the most remote corners of the planet.

There was also a downside to the joy of mimesis: the loneliness of not being able to relate to “those that are dissimilar.” During the process of building the YOI team we hired people that were much less impassioned about sustainable fashion and perceived their job of occupying the YOI store merely as “selling clothes.” In other entrepreneurial endeavors, it was always complicated to build a good team as we had to look for complementary people while it was so easy to preach to the converted. As a fashion student, nobody understood my choice to study organization theory in the evening hours. As a PhD student, I was often the “funny fashion girl” to my strategic management colleagues. And amidst the economists at the department of management studies where I work, I tend to shock people with my “disruptive” aesthetic approaches. It makes me sad, but also smile to write this – as I would not want to have it any else. And that is where mimesis as “the mimicking of lifestyles” and the “relating to the Other as the Self” unfolds into poesis.

POIESIS: FASHIONING NEW REALITIES

If mimesis focuses our attention on reflection and engagement, poesis asks us to consider autoethnography as a creation that makes something happen (Holman Jones et al., 2013: 38–39). Poesis is etymologically derived from the ancient Greek and means “to make.” Ethical fashion, just like fashion, is about *fashioning* or *making* and is thus about a process of creation. This layer becomes enacted in how I have co-created the sustainable fashion discourse the past twenty years by being an active participant in the movement. For instance, as a founder, writer and editor of Eco Fashion World, texts and images were woven together to story brands, people and events. Or, actors and materials came together during an event such as Un-Dress crafting novel realities at a business school where ethical fashion was unheard of amongst Louis Vuitton-morphed students. Or, beautiful people on the streets of Amsterdam were invited to parade the stairs and corridors wearing YOI brands during the annual nocturnal opening of the Van Gogh museum. It is through affective atmospheres (Michels and Steyaert, 2017) such as these that my identity becomes mimicked in the outside world as if the external reflects exactly my purpose in life. The circular fashion symposium in June 2017 is another example when time, space and actants came together in a seemingly serendipitous

way. That day it was as if time stood still; as if twenty years of my life culminated into that one very moment of crafting a new reality.

Next to the aspect of world-making (Jones and Spicer, 2009), representation is the second important aspect of poiesis (Beyes and Steyaert, 2011). Autoethnographers share a fascination for the subjective experience of existing as a corporeal being in the physical world (Allen-Collinson, 2013). The flesh-and-blood human bodies should be perceived as agentic and mediate any undertaking that aims to foster impact. In my dissertation I did not include any photos of myself – I kept my own embodied *becoming* out of the equation. In later work I increasingly explored the dialogue between text and image experimenting with aesthetic approaches (see for example Poldner et al., 2016a; Poldner et al., 2015), including this chapter. Over the years I have given many of the entrepreneurs I studied “a face” through including images of them, often in relation with their designs. But I myself remained most of the time anonymous. How come I suddenly, but purposively, put myself front and center? As Douglas and Carless suggest when we encounter autoethnography (Douglas and Carless, 2013: 89):

The self appears,
The textual self appears,
We, writing the self
And then
The body appears.

As a feminist autoethnographer I am eager to explore my lived-body experiences as a gendered being (Pullen, 2006), including as an entrepreneur, academic, spouse and mother (Allen-Collinson 2013: 282). And not just by the force of writing but also through the cinematic intensities of images. Going back to the question I commenced with: “What have I been doing all my life?” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 1), answering it also includes my body.

Analyzing the self-images I have included in this chapter – in a similar way in which I have analyzed images of other entrepreneurs before (Poldner et al., 2019) – I see the naivety and receptivity of the 20-year-old student (Figure 6.2). Open to sensing what was out there in the world, I connected my passion for fashion with sustainability in becoming an entrepreneur (Figure 6.4). My body enacted the practice of sensing: through my embodied and visceral experience, I could identify and make sense of ethical issues *that were directly relevant to my life and life-style* (Poldner et al., 2019). In Figure 6.3, it is noticeable that I was not always at ease with a role that did not embody my purpose and felt forced posing without a smile. “Body as multiplicity” (Poldner et al., 2019) is almost

literally disclosed in Figure 6.7: through modeling twenty different outfits my body performs as a bricoleur, making sense of different ethical issues. About each outfit I can explain where I bought, found or was gifted the clothes and accessories that I am wearing. More importantly, I can tell you in detail how every item is produced, who has designed it and what sustainable material it is made of. My body posture reveals how complacent I am in each outfit: with sneakers I can run while (tormenting) stilettos empower a glimpse of elegance. Whereas the “body as bricoleur” creates an assemblage of (fragments of) ethical issues, the “performative body” is very much about putting those pieces of the puzzle together in a radical new way that ends up transforming who I am – becoming (Poldner et al., 2019). Figure 6.8 already indicates that “I am (coinciding with and becoming) the movement,” but the radical re-integration and self-transformation that comes with the force of a performative body is strikingly unveiled in Figure 6.10. In assembling the two models and me, for a moment, we perform circular fashion.

KINESIS: CHANGING POTENTIALITY

Kinesis is a dynamic practice that creates movement and change (Holman Jones et al., 2013: 39). According to this distinction, kinesis is movement having an end outside itself and is incomplete until its end is achieved. My “story” does not stop with this chapter, it is ongoing, changing, flowing. By reflexively writing the *mystory* through “stings of memory” and images of self it might become too much a personal mythology or a theatric performance instead of an assemblage of moments, memories, and movements. Indeed, “the mystory is a montage text, cinematic and multi-media in shape, filled with sounds, music, poetry and images taken from the writer’s personal history” (Denzin, 2013: 133), but it is also a disruptive practice: The mystory is always ideological and utopian as it begins from a progressive political position stressing the politics of hope (Denzin, 2013: 134). It blossoms from and interacts with a multiplicity of discourses and affects that circulate in wider society.

My story is set against the backdrop of an ethical fashion (r)evolution that took place the past two decades. In my PhD I have distinguished three dominant discourses that fueled this transformation: the popular culture discourse, the industry discourse and the creation discourse (Poldner, 2013). In Table 6.2 I provide a quick overview of how these ten key moments described and visualized in *mystory* align well with certain events that can be categorized under the three discourses. The cursively written key moments under ‘Mystory’ are the actual enterprises

Table 6.2 *Mystory captured in ten key moments, each placed in the context of three “events” within the three macro-discourses*

Year	Mystory	Popular culture discourse	Industry discourse	Creation discourse
1998	AMFI	Sustainable fashion has a granola reputation.	Nike publicly commits for the first time to abandon child labor.	A handful of pioneers dubs themselves as eco-design (i.e., Howies, People Tree).
2003	Move Your World	Vivienne Westwood uses her brand to campaign for less consumption.	In 2002 Organic Exchange is launched (later becomes Textile Exchange). Other new certification organizations such as Made By, BCI and Cotton Made in Africa follow suit.	Fashion design schools start introducing sustainability into their curriculum.
2005	YOI	American apparel makes sweatshop-free popular with their sexy advertisements.	Launch of Ethical Fashion Forum (UK), the first community for eco-minded designers and brands.	Fashion houses such as Versace show eco designs during NY fashion week.
2007	Modafusion/ Eco-accessories	In 2008, four books on sustainable fashion were published, followed by one new book in every subsequent year.	Ethical fashion show is in 2004 founded in Paris and is followed by a range of other ethical trade shows.	Fashion weeks are sprouting around the world advancing local heritage and design.
2008	Eco Fashion World	In 2009, Livia Firth launched the Green Carpet Challenge bringing green glamour to Hollywood.	Launch of Clean & Unique focusing on collaboration between small sustainable fashion brands.	Handicrafts are no longer tagged as ethnic, but become “the new luxury.”

2012	Un-Dress	In 2011 Greenpeace launches the Detox campaign addressing the toxic water pollution in China.	In 2011, the Sustainable Apparel Coalition is launched, a conglomerate of 30 industry giants.	The year of the 3D printer expanding to a techno-utopian sustainable fashion future.
2014	Osklen case	The collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013 leads to founding Fashion Revolution in 2014.	Collapse of Rana Plaza leading to companies such as H&M getting heavily scrutinized.	Track and trace systems connect consumers with the people who created their clothes.
2016	Green closet	The amount of ecofashionista blogs explodes.	Organic Cotton Accelerator is launched.	“Made in” becomes more important fostering local economies.
2017	Wear I am	Lena the fashion library makes borrowing clothes desirable.	Ellen McArthur Foundation publishes circular fiber initiative report.	Consumers become cre-sumers co-creating their fashion favorites.
2018	WUR circular fashion	Sustainable fashion has become mainstream with big brands launching special eco collections (H&M Conscious, Mango Committed, Zara Join Life).	Textile exchange conference takes place during Fashion Colloquium.	State of Fashion showcases cross-pollinations between life sciences and the arts to craft new material design.

I have initiated, the others can be viewed as other key *moments* in my entrepreneurial becoming. The mystory assumes that the social order needs to change if problems are to be successfully resolved (Denzin, 2013). If it is maintained, if only actors and not the social order changes, then the systemic processes producing the problem remain in place. We are left then with just our stories. My view is that (human and non-human) actors *are* the social order and when actors change, the social order will change with it. Maybe this is one of the reasons I write this autoethnography: to situate and learn from my part in the assembling of that social order – that only change and paradox prevail in co-creating the future.

DISCUSSION: AEP FOR EAP?

It is time to reflect on why autoethnographic performance (AEP) can be a “more than method” for studying entrepreneurship-as-practice (EAP) as it lays bare the affects and intensities of entrepreneurial theory and practice. While doing so I make the case for an affirmative view of entrepreneuring because when looking back at my activities from an affirmative perspective, what connects the stories is the desire to affirm; to see the beauty in everything and everyone. My (ad)ventures follow each other as a serendipitous unfolding of one “event” after the other, they connect me with the people I met, the texts that I wrote and the businesses I created.

Entrepreneurial Activism

First of all, I could argue that my journey is also one of entrepreneurial failure that led me to where I am today (Shepherd, 2013). For instance, none of the three businesses that I started were successful as they did not generate (enough) revenue: YOI relied heavily on funding and the store never became profitable (my friend had to close its doors two years after I had left for Africa). The main investment in Eco Fashion World was the blood, sweat and tears of me and my three co-founders (Poldner, 2016). Our vision to become the *Huffington Post* for sustainable fashion never turned into a reality. As such I could propose that some of the failures and the disappointments they caused (Khelil, 2016), led me to pursue my activism through other avenues.

Entrepreneurial activism has been championed by scholars such as most notably Bengt Johannisson (2018). His form of enactive research requires that the researcher becomes genuinely involved as an entrepreneur and activist, but there are other routes possible in my view, not in the least through autoethnography. What I consider a specific strength of

autoethnography as illustrated in my heartening mystory is an ontology of *becoming*, interweaving activities, affects, materialities and discourses. It allows to emphasize the affect, embodied practice and experience that comes with entrepreneurship. An affirmative view on autoethnography is formed in the middle of activities that a researcher undertakes to make a difference: by acting as entre-searchers (Johannisson, 2018), autoethnography enables us to continuously inquire into our own practices of entrepreneuring life, career and how we can bring about societal impact. As activist scholars who engage in valorization activities next to teaching and research. As young PhDs who simultaneously run a business and write an autoethnography. It requires a responsibility of taking care of yourself – or rather a multiplicity of selves, and while doing so, we can (un)fold through a triptych of mimesis, poesis and kinesis into a movement that extends “just” ourselves into a collective force. In that sense, autoethnography truly adds to our palette of apparatus to play with.

Polishing

Even though I experienced my time in Africa as a break from being an entrepreneur, I soon realized that I never quit *entrepreneuring*. The stories I kept collecting about sustainable fashion entrepreneurs blended with my own story to merge into an activist collective and a movement of “entrepreneuring as social change” (Rindova et al., 2009). The transition from entrepreneur to academic was guided by an “unconscious desire” (Hoyer and Steyaert, 2015) to keep on adding value to the sustainable fashion landscape. Feeling connected with all those (mainly) women entrepreneurs in sustainable fashion made me conscious of the gendered nature of entrepreneurial practice (Bruni et al., 2004). If I was no longer an entrepreneur in a functionalist view, acting as an entre-searcher allowed me to unravel the value of apparently marginal entrepreneurial practices. The responsibility as a critical researcher to be sensitive to dominant discourses (Ahl, 2006, 2002) and co-construct social reality together with my research subjects led me to experiment with ethnographic methods (Calás et al., 2009). “Entrepreneurship as social change” might then also include examining what I am doing, for whom and for what as I undertake entrepreneurship research (Calás et al., 2009).

When recounting mystory, a lot of “angry white women” surface that haunt me and with that, feelings of exasperation to not be determined enough to continue with neither YOI, nor the eco accessories collection nor Eco Fashion World. Disappointment about fleeing in academia as a safe haven with a fixed salary, which somehow felt like a sell-out. Being not confident enough in making more “strategic” career choices that would

have probably pushed me and my husband over the edge of near-divorce that we approached several times. I could write an autoethnography about the impossibilities of “work/life balance” within the very workplaces that expect women to hide their maternal identities, but thankfully this has already been done (Shoemaker, 2011). Discomfort is not my best motivation, so I am happy to leave the “Geist der Schwere” of critique (Verduyn et al., 2017; Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009) and offer you the somehow sugarcoated version of the last twenty years. I acknowledge that this is exactly the trap Johannisson warns us of for telling “war stories” rather than the everyday practice of entrepreneuring (Johannisson, 2018). But this is what I can offer you at this point: Mystory is a polished performance, affirming how my life unfolded in an act of activist entrepreneurship (Germain and Jacquemin, 2017), as Chris Steyaert proposes.

Affirmative Autoethnography as Survival

I have to see the beauty in things. *I need to* view my life through the eyes of a child (Johannisson, 2007): to open up, to be non-judgmental and to move beyond the no-saying mode (Verduyn et al., 2017). An affirmative approach stresses the process of creation and the folding and unfolding of different materials to create novel realities (Deleuze, 1995: 158). In that sense, mystory forms a play of interactions, occurrences and endeavors – catalysts for an ongoing becoming or bringing into being of creation (Hjorth, 2017). That allows me to be grateful I had to re-route to Wageningen as it helped me to overcome the angry white woman and receive all the struggles of the past years as gifts of growth. Through trying out, through opening our hearts and minds and playfully following our intuition, we can make creative connections that can shed new light on entrepreneurship (studies). Such an affirmative perspective will challenge us to ask different aesthetical and ethical questions and inquire anew about the ways we have formulated the role of entrepreneurship within society (Hjorth, 2017; Germain and Jacquemin, 2017; Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009). Just like affirmation is a means to embrace life with all its vitality, so does autoethnographic performance become a way to survive uncharted waters (Shoemaker, 2013: 534). Inclusion of aesthetic, art-based practices can further support the change making effects of AEP as long as we are courageous enough to share them and make room for more stories (Adams and Holman Jones, 2011: 114). Bringing bodies – and their capacities of sensing, assembling and performing – in as a medium of expression and creation (Benthall and Polhemus, 1975) adds value to the stories we want to tell and the change we want to make.

Perceived Contributions

Autoethnographic practice has been characterized by feminist, queer, indigenous and dialogic sensibilities (Holman Jones et al., 2013: 673), which I would like to inscribe in how to understand autoethnography in the context of entrepreneurship theory and practice. First, this piece of work can be viewed as feminist as it puts my lived, personal experience at the center in appreciation of beauty and interdisciplinarity. By positioning entrepreneurship as an unfolding emergent journey, it brings focus to the lived practices of “becoming an entrepreneur.” The affirmative perspective is perceived as uplifting, offering transformative potential: concepts of success and failure are malleable – a matter of interpretation – thus unfolding events may be seen as destabilizing or affirmative.

The second characteristic of autoethnography is that it is queer as I attempt to fill a gap in social and academic discourse on entrepreneurship by taking an activist-oriented, critical sensibility to understanding experience. As illustrated, it is not about me as “the entrepreneur” in this mystory (Gartner, 1988), but rather about entrepreneurial practices in the context of societal change. As Hjorth argues: “Knowing when to risk deformation, become affected, intensify one’s relationship with the world, is not an individual decision. The *kairos*, the right time, is relationally constituted” (Hjorth, 2017: 50). Cracking open entrepreneuring is all about the power to affect and be affected driven by passion “a simultaneous sensitivity and receptivity and intensity of going beyond the self” (Deleuze, 1995 in Hjorth, 2017: 49). It is not about myself, but about overcoming oneself “to invent new possibilities of life” (Deleuze, 1995: 91). Coming back to the Deleuzian question I posed at the beginning of this chapter: what have I been doing all my life? My embodied activities form a channel for societal transformation that can only bring about that change and be changed in relation with others. Mystory is an illustration of how individual and societal change are intertwined and co-create each other.

The third characteristic of autoethnography is that it is indigenous in the multiplicity of ways it focuses on the ethics of representation by means of not just academic text, but also epiphanies, blogs and images (Holman Jones et al., 2013). In a performative-affirmative understanding we need to see every writing as an act of world-making (Hjorth, 2017). In my performative act of writing, images were included, to further connect and materialize mystory with readers – increasing also the transformative potential that comes with every entrepreneurial story. It embraces the conversation between text and image as an arts-based performance of autoethnographic work (Holman Jones et al., 2013). I would argue that the interplay of different modes of representation contributes to

imagination as “the mode of thought most precisely suited to the differentiating vagueness of the virtual” (Massumi, 2002: 134). As Hjorth proposes: “It is for this reason that a description of the formation of a new company that centers on narrative performances rather than on a business plan will always be more realistic” (Hjorth, 2017: 50). I would add that a narrated description does not suffice – as we see in the incubator landscape and in entrepreneurship education: embodied performances and the inclusion of imagery and artifacts make often the difference in convincing potential investors.

Finally, it is dialogic in the method’s call for collaboration and its emphasis on finding ways to give back to others. Hjorth proposes: “In contrast to a fault-finding criticism from an assumed outside-position, the ethos of critique is affirmative of a differentiating virtuality, a newness that opens up practices and enhances our possibilities of living” (Hjorth, 2017: 50). Therefore, it respects that becoming is always becoming with others and thus opens up for collaboration: in autoethnography, there is no self-imposed burden of having to do everything “by myself.” By sharing and co-creating mystory and connecting it to the larger discourse of transformation in the fashion industry, AEP becomes a collective changemaking act, as eco-fashioning is only possible as a community of practice through collective activism.

Challenges

There are several downsides to autoethnography, both for the researcher as well as for the scientific community. First of all, working with one’s own experience as form of data creation means that the researcher is acutely aware of the complexities and subtleties of the situation. Autoethnography does not position the researcher outside of societal dynamics, but instead immerses her in an ambiguous world (Duarte and Hodge, 2007). Hereby the problem can be that the researcher/writer drowns herself in nuances, which confuse readers (Blenkinsopp, 2007). Incomplete recall and retrospective biases can affect the quality of the study. Second, anonymity and confidentiality are difficult to protect since the narrative tells a story about real people, locations and situations (Blenkinsopp, 2007). In addition, autoethnography is very time consuming and thus costly. Another problem can be that exposing the self can cause personal and professional risk and, in some cases, can be considered the most dangerous fieldwork of all (Lee, 1995; Rose, 1990). In that sense, AEP holds a double bind in that it allows the researcher to express herself while serving science.

Issues of visibility and vulnerability also pose problems to the scientific community, especially for those who perceive science as a fundamentally

objective endeavor while “clean and reasonable scholarship about messy, unreasonable experiences could be viewed as an exercise in alienation” (Tamas, 2013). It requires a large amount of trust in the researcher and in her effort to let the empirical observation remain untainted by any theoretical aspirations or research ambitions. Performing an autoethnography is in essence an act of risk taking as autoethnographic manuscripts do not abide by conventional review processes (Holt, 2003). As a junior scholar, AEP might not be the most straightforward path towards tenure. Nevertheless, this autoethnographic performance has enabled me to intervene in many situations challenging my capacity to ontologically engage in the world (Hjorth, 2017) while aiming to answer the call for “authentic qualitative research” (see for example Bansal and Corley, 2011).

CONCLUSION: ENTREPRENEURING LIFE

This text has become a performance of (affirmative) entrepreneurship. This is done by a set of writing (and methodological) techniques: autoethnography, the triptych of mimesis, poesis, kinesis and a life journey that forms the base of the chapter. As such, this text challenges some well-known shortcomings of entrepreneurship research such as being enacted by a distant observer/writer, decontextualized accounts of entrepreneurship and disregard of creativity and playfulness. The main contribution of the chapter is methodological, in its broadest sense (Steyaert, 2011): I propose autoethnography as “more than method” for engaging with processes of (affirmative) entrepreneuring that speak to the increased attention for narrativity and playfulness in entrepreneurship (see for example Hjorth, 2017; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Gartner, 2007; Johannisson, 2011). The autoethnographic story offers an engaging and relevant account of the practice of entrepreneurship and provides rich emic insight into the socio-materiality of lived experience. It also highlights the temporality of entrepreneurship – both in terms of *chronos* (continuous flow of time) and *kairos* (taking advantage of the “right moment”) (Johannisson, 2011). And as I continue performing affirmations, I am curious how you are *entrepreneuring* your life – tell me.

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NOTES

1. All photos shown throughout this chapter have been made by or depict the author.
2. More information on our activities can be found on: www.wur.eu/circularfashion.

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