The Novelist as Entrepreneur, the Novel as Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

We look at the potential of novelists to be producers of entrepreneurship and the novel as a potential carrier and product of entrepreneurship. Our argument is that some novelists challenge established norms and institutions and that some novels can be seen as products that aim to destroy the old, or at least improve the old, and give way to something new. We draw on the work of a classic Swedish novelist Carl-Johan Love Almqvist, and his novel – Why Not! (Det går an!, 1839). We combine a narrative approach with an interpretive framework from institutional entrepreneurship and literary theory. Almqvist uses the novel as a form of representation and carrier of ideas that challenge the established roles of women in society and economy. While contemporary literature on institutional entrepreneurship tends to focus on representations of accomplished change, our focus on narrative fiction also allows an emphasis on representations of change opportunities. Concentrating on the opportunity to change and taking a narrative approach, we put creativity and time at the heart of the process of institutional entrepreneurship, rather than merely action and change.

Keywords: Institutional entrepreneurship, novel, narrative approach, institutional change

Introduction
Schumpeter (1934) saw the entrepreneur as an individual who combined existing resources in new ways to change creatively the established and often taken for granted order of things. The result of this ‘creative destruction’, he argued, was economic development and progress. In this paper, we take Schumpeter’s notion of entrepreneurship as our starting point as we interpret the potential of novelists to be producers of entrepreneurship and the novel as a potential carrier and product of entrepreneurship. Our basic argument is that some entrepreneurs and novelists have in common the creative act necessary to challenge established norms and institutions. As the carrier or result of entrepreneurship, it follows that some novels can be seen as a product that aim to destroy the old, or at least improve the old, and give way to something new. We thus introduce the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship as an analogy to advance an interpretation of the novelist and the novel as representations of organizational and institutional change. To make our case, we draw on the work of a classic Swedish novelist Carl-Johan Love Almqvist, and his most famous (and infamous) novel – *Why Not!* (*Det går an!*) 1839.

Our interpretation draws on the concept of institutional entrepreneurship (Garud, Hardy & Maguire, 2007; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Koene 2006; Maguire, Hardy & Lawrence, 2004). We are, in other words, interested in entrepreneurship as initiating and contributing to societal change (Steyaert & Katz 2004); and the creation of new *social* enterprise and development, rather than being restricted to new *economic* enterprise and development (Davidsson & Wiklund 2001). In this endeavour, we take support from Czarniawska-Joerges and Guillet de Monthoux (1994), who argue that narrative fiction such as novels can offer

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1 *Why Not!* is the translation of the title used in the only existing English translation of Almqvist’s novel (Mermaid Press, Seattle, WA, 1994).
understandings of social and institutional changes in a way that traditional research methods and empirical material cannot. In paying attention to the historical, political and institutional context in which the novel was written, we analyze how Almqvist and his novel represent ideas of institutional change in at least two ways.

First, we show how Almqvist, the novelist, can be seen as an entrepreneur in the sense that he uses the novel as a form of representation and carrier of ideas that challenges the established and routinized way of organizing the society he lived in, and creatively suggests a (radically) new way of organizing. Second, we discuss how in the novel Almqvist makes the heroine Sara Videbeck an independent entrepreneur to represent the possibility of wider institutional changes regarding the roles of women in business and society. Almqvist challenged the lack of both social and economic freedom for women by attempting a creative destruction of the dominant way of organizing both the relationship between men and women into a marriage of unequals, and the dominant way of organizing economic relationships into a guild system that constrained free enterprise and restricted the business participation of women. In this regard, Almqvist and his novel can be seen as representations of a vision and of creative destruction intended to trigger institutional change. This notion of entrepreneurship is in line with the recent narrative approach to entrepreneurship (Hjorth & Steyaert 2004; Gartner 2007), which also is associated with an increasing interest in novels, literary frameworks and narrative methodologies in the broader discipline of management (e.g. Czarniawska 1999).

The paper initially lays the theoretical ground for our readings of institutional entrepreneurship as a catalyst for change and then proceeds to discuss the novel as an act of entrepreneurship and the power of fiction to instigate change. Then we move on to Almqvist and Why Not. Our readings of the novel comprises of two themes, the
Budding Entrepreneur and Voicing Discontent, where we strive to illustrate how institutional entrepreneurship is at play on various levels of the novel. The paper concludes with reflections and implications on the potential of novelists to produce entrepreneurship, and the novel as a potential carrier or product of such entrepreneurship.

The ‘Schumpeterian’ Novelist and Institutional Entrepreneurship

Schumpeter (1934:92) depicts the entrepreneur as more individualistic and egoistic than other persons since s/he relies “less than they do on tradition and connection and because his characteristic task – theoretically as well as historically – consists precisely in breaking up old and creating new, tradition”. Entrepreneurs are seen as individuals who do not refrain from using creativity to challenge the established and the taken for granted in life. Some entrepreneurs run into problems because society is not yet ready for their innovations. This resistance “manifests itself first of all in the groups threatened by the innovation, then in the difficulty in finding the necessary cooperation, finally in the difficulty of winning over consumers” (Schumpeter 1934: 87).

It is in Schumpeter’s notion of entrepreneurship as an act of challenging and creatively destroying the old by giving voice to new ways of thinking and organizing that we see our analogy. Our argument is that some novelists are, like the archetypical entrepreneurs, creative agents who want to challenge the circular flow of life (Iser 1989). It follows that the novel can be seen as both the carrier and the product of this process of the creative destruction that according to Schumpeter interrupts the circular flow of both social and economic life. In order to translate these ideas more directly to
the realm of social and institutional change we take support in the emerging literature on institutional entrepreneurship.

Institutional entrepreneurship is commonly referred to as how actors pursue conscious projects of institutional change (Koene 2006). It can be defined as ‘the activities of actors who have interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones’ (Maguire, Hardy & Lawrence 2004: 657). We see institutions as performance scripts that provide ‘stable designs for chronically repeated activities sequences’, deviations from which are met by sanctions or are costly in some manner (Jepperson, 1991: 145). As rules of the game, they define the choice set of actors, their roles in society and economy as well as patterns of activities. For example, with regard to entrepreneurship, institutions such as laws and regulations and societal attitudes govern entrepreneurial activities by defining possible areas of opportunities as well as generally allowing for labor market participation. Moreover, in the form of societal norms they contribute to the emergence of overall accepted role models, thus legitimizing or restricting entrepreneurial actions, because such role models have an influence on the recognition of entrepreneurship as a viable career option.

Scholars of institutional entrepreneurship typically focus on actual or accomplished change in norms, values and belief systems. Garud, Jain and Kumaraswamy (2002: 196), for instance, talk about institutional entrepreneurs (our novelist) as actors who ‘create a whole new system of meaning that ties the functioning of disparate sets of institutions together’. DiMaggio (1988:14) argued that institutional entrepreneurship (our novel) leads to new institutions as organized actors with enough resources see in them an opportunity to ‘realize interests that they value highly’. Since institutions can be seen as a textual affair (Munir & Phillips 2005) and
as created and maintained through discourse (Ogbor 2000; Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy 2004), we suggest that narratives play an important role in the formation and change of institutions. A narrative approach, therefore, allows taking a more dynamic, fluid and less final view on institutional and organizational change (Phillips et al. 2004). The focus here is on the novel’s power to achieve potential institutional change through representing creative and visionary, perhaps even utopian, opportunities regarding what could be changed rather than what is or will be changed. Such a notion of entrepreneurship is in line with the narrative approach’s interest in readings of texts that can give way to changing styles and ‘create new socialites in which we relate to people and things in new ways’ (Hjorth 2007: 722). Thus, also institutional entrepreneurship is about creating the new (Davidsson & Wiklund 2001) through the process of intentionally and creatively attempting to destroy (Schumpeter 1934) the old, the established and the fermented, and proposing a new alternative reality.

**A Novel Approach to Entrepreneurship**

In management theory, it is well established that narrative fiction, such as novels, can serve as a basis for the development of scholarly knowledge (e.g. Waldo 1968; Czarniawska-Joerges & Guillet de Monthoux 1994; DeCock & Land 2005; Czarniawska 2006). Narratives are processes of creating realities that are relational in nature, that is, they are stories that are formed and represent a plot or an idea in interaction with certain historical, political and cultural contexts (Czarniawska 1999). The interest in narrative fiction is however not in its potential exact correspondence with reality, as sometimes assumed when so called realist novels are in focus (DeCock & Land 2005). Rather, as literary theorist Wolfgang Iser argues, novels are
human beings’ extensions of themselves and as such ways of world making: ‘The
fictionality of literature is not identical to the results it creates, but is rather a modus
operandi that manifests itself in distinguishable acts. These acts are marked by the fact
that they are boundary-crossings’ (Iser 1989: 23). This means that narrative fiction is
of most interest when it does not necessarily make a claim to mirror or imitate reality,
but rather suggests alternative plots, accounts and representations, which may go
against dominant ideas and beliefs in society and business. It is thus in building
alternative realities that may seem more or less “realistic” or “utopian” that novels can
generate new readings of topics such as entrepreneurship (Hjorth & Steyaert 2004)
and institutional change (Czarniawska 1999).

Like in a more conventional entrepreneurial act, such as starting a new
organization, or rejuvenating an old one, there is potential power in the novel and the
novelist to change norms, values and beliefs that are seen as constraining social
development. ‘The narrative of entrepreneurship is the generation of hypotheses of
how the world might be: how the future might look and act’, Gartner (2007: 624)
contends. Hjorth (2007:718) further suggests a notion of entrepreneurship ‘as creative
social energy, as a desire to become the other.’ To us, this creative and visionary
element of entrepreneurship is a key reason for introducing the analogy between the
novelist as entrepreneur, or producer of entrepreneurship, and the novel as the product
and reflection of entrepreneurship. Following Hjorth, (2007: 727), entrepreneurship as
narrative gives a way to think of both the novelist and the novel as ‘carrying
transformative power of creating new worlds.’

In Iser’s words, the fictional text has “anthropological implications” (Iser
1989) meaning that fiction and function are interlinked. Fiction is, like Gartner (2007)
notes, about narrative understandings or entrepreneurship, an ‘As-If, indicating
hypothetical presuppositions’ (Iser 1989: 269). As will be soon illustrated through the voice of the female heroine in Why Not, ‘[literature] establishes its otherness in relation to the situations that have conditioned it. In this manner it adumbrates new regions that it inscribes into the already charted topography of culture’ (Iser 1989: 282). First, however, we will describe the author and the content background of the novel Why Not in the next section.

**The Novelist as Entrepreneur: Carl Johan Love Almqvist**

During his life, the Swede Carl Jonas Love Almqvist (1793-1866) had varied career ambitions. He was a scholar who aspired to become a professor; he worked as a teacher and was the principal of a Stockholm school; he was a priest; a prolific novelist, poet and journalist; and a farmer. From early on he voiced ideas that challenged contemporary notions of society, morals and marriage. His pioneering spirit, and an eagerness to put his ideas into practice, guided him, among many other things, to build a self-sufficient community of farms. This farming community did not last long but it illustrates Almqvist’s alternative views of society.

The defining moment for Almqvist’s authorship came with the publication of Why Not [Det går an 1839]. The issue of female personal and professional emancipation treated in this novel stayed central to his later works and thoughts as well. Almqvist’s demands for social reform, proposed bills and social value propositions, broadly outlined in Europeiska missnöjets grunder² [1838; 1850] and exemplified in Why Not, were momentous attacks on the then dominating female role

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² Europeiska missnöjets grunder (henceforth Europeiska) was Almqvist’s broad program declaration. The title can be translated The foundation of the European Discontent (official translation is missing).
in society, but they also offered new visions that would make better use of the trapped potential of women.

The literary and social radicalism and realism of Almqvist is captured in the characterization of Sara Videbeck, the heroine in *Why Not*, and her road to personal and professional emancipation. Many readers of that age were shocked by the main character’s unflinching embrace of her own productive and entrepreneurial capabilities. That a female character was let to exercise her own judgment and responsibility in arranging her private and professional business was seen as a challenge to well-established notions of the female role in the family, state and church, that is, the pillars society at that time rested on. In *Europeiska*, which was intended to be published simultaneously with *Why Not*, these three ‘columns’ form part of the hierarchies which Almqvist blames for the derailment of civilization, not humans. He contends that one cannot moralize over mankind’s wickedness and depravation; rather, one has to reform social contexts and societal institutions.

Indeed, Almqvist identifies a stable but to him unfair (socio)-economic equilibrium, which has created a marginalized, largely disempowered and politically voiceless part of the population, namely women. Almqvist’s institutional entrepreneurship aspirations are obvious in devising plans and identifying opportunities for change in this unjust state. His female protagonist in *Why Not* came to typify and personify the author’s calls for granting women a declaration of majority and their right to earn their own living. In that sense, the novel is also an appeal to abolish the guild system. Almqvist’s ideas on female social, marital and economic emancipation, which were voiced by Sara in *Why Not* and illustrated in her role as entrepreneur, would occupy much of his time in the years to come. The author envisioned a more equal (love) liaison between man and woman, which prompted him
to outline bills for societal reforms to foster female emancipation in *Europeiska* (Westman Berg 1962). However, the novel that would gain Almqvist most ill-repute and cause massive protests was *Why Not*.

**The Novel as Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurship in the Novel: *Why Not***

The plot of *Why Not* centers around a young man, Albert, and a young woman, Sara Videbeck, who become enamored with each other during a steamboat trip on the lake Mälaren. Sara is a young, energetic and creative woman full of ideas on how to develop the glazier business that her mother has inherited from Sara’s father. Sara’s mother can retain her husband’s guild rights until her death; after which Sara can no longer keep or seek these rights and will therefore have to liquidate her father’s glass cutting workshop and the guild rights will be handed over to a local craftsman.

A woman ending up in her situation at the turn of the 18th century would have to seek marriage or live at the mercy of relatives. Therefore, when during a business travel back from a visit in the capital, Sara meets Sergeant Albert, she is currently living in an interregnum typified by professional and personal freedom, which began with the death of her father and will end with the death of her mother. At the end of the trip back to her hometown, Sara convinces Albert to live with her in her house, but remain unmarried and have separate households in order to keep their freedom. This voyage marks the beginning of Sara’s road to personal and professional emancipation.

In the following, we will discuss the novel with focus on two themes, the budding entrepreneur and voicing discontent.
The Budding Entrepreneur

Almqvist’s *Europeiska* is generally considered as his major bold manifesto. It paints the radical societal backdrop to *Why Not*, and details a thorough reorganization of society, with extensive reforms of societal institutions such as the family, the congregation and the state, which together comprised the state. Focusing on family and marriage, Almqvist envisions a society organized individuals, where freedom and happiness is the birthright of everyone, irrespective of sex or class.

*Europeiska* is perhaps the most vivid liberal 19th century organizational system building in Sweden – a daring utopia with both rational and subversive structural components (Svedjedal????). However, the social organization of plot, setting and characterization in *Why Not*, with the female entrepreneur Sara as the protagonist, further subverts contemporary social institutions, not to mention custom and practice in novel writing: Women were as uncommon in entrepreneurship as in main character positions. What we will see in the following is how the mere presence of Sara points to both society and fiction as narrative constructs that can be retold, a “re-employment”.

What is interesting with Sara is that she evades definition. She transcends the roles usually attributed to early 19th century women of all social strata. Where Albert is caught in a genteel society, Sara’s approaches life in a businesslike way. When Albert asks what will happen to when Sara loses her mother’s guild rights, she tells him about her “business plan” which includes both “Schumpeterian innovation” and “related diversification” based on her “core competencies”.

“I’ve thought out how a girl like me without parents or brothers or sisters can manage to live – and live well”, she said. “I already have more than enough linen and wearing apparel for years to come and don’t wear things out very fast, which doesn’t happen when you’re careful. When my mother dies, I won’t be allowed to cut windowpanes
and to putty work in the big houses or new buildings – that’ll be for the master of the
guild to do. But there’s a unique skill, mind you, which nobody in Lidköping has,
expect for me, because I have myself invented it: mixing chalk and oil in the proper
dimensions – no, proportions – you talk about dimension in regards to the length and
width of the glass itself, but you talk about proportions in regards to the proper mixture
and quantity of chalk and oil together; both words are used only in our trade, and you
don’t understand them, Albert. Well, now I only want to say that I’ve discovered a
proportion for this mixture which nobody else knows. Such a strong putty is made from
it that the most bitter autumn rain can’t dissolve it. That is what I’m going to make and
sell to all the masters of the trade, for as son as they find out about it, they’re going to
want to buy it in Lidköping, Vänersborg, and Mariestad, too. And they already know
about it, because I’ve had my boys make a commotion about it on their trips. I’m
selling it at home out of my room”.

“But as an unmarried woman you’re unprotected, and – ”

“We’ll see. On the other hand, with a boozing, difficult husband like my mother had, I
would be defenseless and miserable. No, to be sure, I’ll get along just as I am. We own
the little farm on the Lida River ourselves. It’s a rather small wooden house, just like
those up in Strängby – Sträng – how was it – hm – “

“Strängnäs”

“And when mama dies, I’ll inherit the farm. My poor mother! But she’ll probably still
live for a couple of more years. All the same, I know from what the mayor has said that
with a house and lot I won’t need any other protection when she does die, although I’m
unmarried. The house doesn’t rent for much, but all the same, I can rent out a couple of
rooms upstairs and live on the first floor myself. But I don’t want to sit there by myself
all the time, since I’m used to having fun and being with people. So I plan to open a
store – a little store – with the kind of trade women take care of, something which
hasn’t been put under the guild. I intent to sell boxes in my store – pretty, delicate
boxes made of glass with colored paper placed underneath them, like the ones I’ve
made for several years – people are raving about them throughout the entire
surrounding countryside. And besides that, lanterns; and I’ve learned to put foil on
glass, and from that I’m going to make little mirrors for the parishioners. Maybe I’ll also take in all kinds of odds and ends to sell in my store on commission, things like woven fabrics, linens, handkerchiefs, scarves and homemade goods, as long as I watch out for silk, which is controlled by the guild. It won’t be such a little store if I’m nice to folks at the counter. And I’ll sit in my store from ten in the morning to five in the evening; it’s not worth sitting there any longer. Before ten in the morning, before I open the doors to the store, I’ll make all my boxes and things for the glass. It will be a good business and a happy life!” (Almqvist 1839/1994:34-35).

This excerpt illustrates how Almqvist narrates Sara’s entrepreneurial mind and vision. She thinks creatively and comes up with a new solution that breaks with her present situation; to work against the constraining guild right system through innovating a new kind of putty. But also by diversification, i.e., opening a store and renting out rooms, she manages to build on her unique knowledge to create both new products and ways of marketing/selling these products.

Moreover, there are no clear boundaries between Sara as a private person and Sara the entrepreneur. For example, later in the novel when she is negotiating with Albert the terms for his stay in her house, it is obvious she is interested in building a relationship of a more intimate kind. However, the final 20 pages of the novel describing this matter reveal an anxiety in Sara to keep her business up-and-running, and indeed expanding, and in her control. A marriage between the two would force Sara to hand over her business to Albert. Thus, Sara’s refusal to marry does not only concern her wish for personal but also for professional independence. To see to it that her business remains in her control, she makes two important entrepreneurial decisions.

Firstly, her father’s decay and subsequent death forces her sick mother to carry on the trade, but eventually the corporation will put an end to the business. Sara,
however, undermines the business as prototype and its “consensual validation” of trade as male by aiming to make the trade guild members dependent on her window putty. Secondly, she negotiates the terms of her relationship with Albert. When he agrees not to marry her, he, in effect, agrees not to interfere in her business vision and entrepreneurial ventures, so that Sara keeps her personal and professional independence:

“Sara, let’s arrange it so that each one of us takes care of our own things. I’m not going to let you manage mine, just as you’re not to give me any power over yours. We’ll only share our love” (Almqvist 1839/1994:96).

Sara’s desired independence and entrepreneurial mind and ambitions are crucial for her challenging dominant norms and values. Her character becomes an inextricable nexus of personal and professional elements. Sara’s eagerness to distance herself from the conventional life that she is expected to live and, even more stronger, from the life of her father and mother, illustrates a process of distancing from the dominant norms, beliefs and values regarding how she ought to behave in love and work. Sara is greatly inspired by the opportunity of starting up a business that will earn her personal and professional freedom and when she is in possession of a creative solution, the window putty, she takes direct action.

Sara is represented as a creative and independent entrepreneur who does not hesitate to draw on male resources in the sense of “I’ve had my boys” in order to make way for her venture ideas. Looking at the entrepreneurship literature of today, it is still not common for women, such as daughters and wives to be represented as entrepreneurs or visionary leaders (Ahl 2004; Ogbor 2000). Freudenberger et al. (1989) attribute this partly to a lack of individuation and separation. That is, when
women assume business roles, they remain in their confining family roles if they do not individuate and separate from their families. This is exactly what Sara does in renewing and expanding her father’s business. She also individuates from role expectations in the wider society.

If we analyze Sara through an institutional entrepreneurship lens, what we see unfolding is a character who eschews the normative behavior and stereotyping which would effectively have forced her to give up the business to the guild at her mother’s death and subsequently marry, to attain some kind of security. Instead of embracing the established institutional prototype (young orphaned unmarried women), she shuns family/husband altogether and, instead, attempts to break with the expected behavior. What we thus witness is how she acts in contradiction and tension with dominant institutions of her time and place, thus similar to what contemporary research defines as an institutional entrepreneur (DiMaggio 1988; Garud et al. 2007).

Sara’s story represents an “anti-narrative” to societal expectations. Not only does she draw up alternative narrative space but also subverts and exposes commonly held beliefs and institutions by treating them as narratives, that is, they can be edited. This is further discussed in the next.

Voicing discontent

The second theme relates to that we see as the novel’s institutional entrepreneurship in its identification and voicing of an unjust equilibrium. Here, the novel challenges the hegemony of this equilibrium by pointing to opportunities apparent in this state and finally, in that it devises a new equilibrium which better caters for releasing trapped potential. The common way of looking at women and men at the time when Why Not
was published was that they had separate spheres of activities. This division of spheres was seen as in line with reason, providence, and above all Nature. A woman who challenged this division through earning her own living by running a business not only behaved unnaturally, but unwomanly.

Wottle (2003) contends that the trade guild rights and privileges equally served as a protection of the bourgeois world as male. Even though young unmarried women, like Sara, were allowed to sell small wares and trinkets, they had no obvious rights to do business. Women who tried to shun the system and become independent were ostracized. The gender order was established in the links between property and privileges (Wottle 2003). It was increasingly difficult for unmarried women to support themselves within the realm of the home, which was losing its place as the main production unit in society. In effect, this development would later usher in not only a social division of spheres between home and work but also between male and female.

Before Why Not was published³ the issue of majority for single women was not topical. What is more, in the proposed civil law bill for the 1840 parliament, declaration of majority for married women was not even mentioned. Almqvist had already in Europeiska proposed institutional changes in the form of bills that abolished statutory cohabitation, that is, marriages that were entered and maintained irrespective of the couple’s feelings for each other. Why Not made the issue of both single women’s and married women’s declaration of majority the subject of heated and extended debates. At a time when liberals showed little interest for women’s legal inferiority problems, the issue became an incentive for Almqvist to use his authorship to find alternative visions of socio-economic solutions and forms of organizing the relation between man and woman. Business ownership issues, morals and marriage

³ Until the publication of Why Not, this issue had not been covered in articles and brochures, or in fiction (Qvist, 1960).
were societal structures that came under fire in the novel’s attacks on contemporary social and economic hierarchies.

In the following quote, Sara confuses Albert because she does not let herself be placed easily within the borders of the dominant social and professional roles:

A glazier’s daughter from Lidköping – that’s a small town far, far away from Stockholm. A young lady? Yes, in a way. A middle class girl, but lower middle class. Something in-between, remarkable and captivating! Not a country girl, not at all a farm girl – but not really a member of the better classes. What are you to think of someone like that? What do you call them? This area in-between is somehow so obscure. Let’s see – bring me a beefsteak! (11).

Albert’s dumbfoundedness prompts Sara to outline her ideas of equality, property and entrepreneurship. The unveiling of Sara’s entrepreneurial character is done step-by-step and it is completed in the famous last words of the novel:

“Will all of this be all right, Albert?”
He still didn’t say anything – but his answer could be read in the entire expression on his face:

“Why not!” (115).

What is unveiled in the novel, in relation to institutions and institutional entrepreneurship, is a narrative on freedom and equality, on marriage and enterprising, all of which challenge existing norms and values defining women’s roles in economy and society. To Butler (1990a), discourse is the limits of acceptable speech - or possible truth, and through Sara’s voice the novel does exactly that: it explores the limits of possible speech or possible truth. Spivak’s (1988: 289) notion of “epistemic violence” is useful in this context; it refers to the constitution of the “Other”, and the impossibility of self-representation of the subaltern within the
hegemonic discourse. But Sara’s voice permeates the narrative and when she outlines her ideas, Albert often responds through being silent. Also, when he answers in the affirmative in the final line of the novel, he conveys this through non-verbal communication.

Notions of institutional change are present on many different levels in the text. As has been shown earlier, contemporary women were at the time allowed to express themselves only through a dependence on authorized male voices, both in reality and in fiction. At the heart of the production and preservation of narratives of male authority and rights to enterprising at the time *Why Not* was published we find marriage, which really forms the main target of *Why Not*. When Sara later in the novel estranges herself from the idea of marriage, she also undermines the defining role of women as “othered”; the idea of the wife helped to define manhood as its contrasting image, imagery, idea, and doctrines (of separate spheres). Indeed, still today the theory and practice of (man)aging and (man)agement is seen as the ‘real’ whereas ideas of irrationality and vulnerability occupy the ‘other’ (Whitehead 1999).

The text’s ‘subversiveness’ of gender roles takes place through repetition in very different contexts from those in which they have hitherto been used and considered appropriate (e.g. Sara as entrepreneur/independent/main character/main voice). Sara’s entrepreneurial commitment to formulate her own norms, values and beliefs for her personal and professional life, which would seem absurd in her contemporary society, thus prompts issues that not only concern the audience of that time but, following Iser (1989), calls for a need to “refigure” norms of identity in present society and entrepreneurial life. In this way, Sara gives voice to a narration of the opportunity to create an alternative future (cf. Hjorth 2007) thus indicating and living manifold ways of how women’s roles could be changed and adapted.
The critic Peter Brooks points to what he calls “the anticipation of retrospection” something he says is “our chief tool in making sense of Narrative”. In other words, “we read in a spirit of confidence, and also a state of dependence, that what remains to be read will restructure the provisional meanings of the already read” (1985: 23-25). Organizational and institutional socio-scientific narratives has a distinct representational function and is structured as something factual, which also typifies Almqvist’s Europeiska. However, it is here that literary texts operate differently from social-scientic texts. Both Europeiska and Why Not strive towards creating change in the real (cf. DeCock & Land 2005) but the literary text has the power to make use of “the anticipation of retrospection” to open up readers to alternative plots and characterization. This in exemplified in the novel’s use of in-betweeness. In terms of setting, the story takes place during a voyage from one shore to another. Also, as has been established earlier, Sara finds herself in an interregnum typified by professional and personal freedom, but this interregnum is also visible in society in general, which changing from a mercantile into a industrial society. What is more, the main female character also escapes definition in the sense that explicitly defines her as something which is in-between and hard to define and grapple (see page 17, quote).

Narratives serve to make sense, explain and represent events and actions into a fathomable, digestible, and manageable whole. In the words of Roland Barthes, narratives are ‘international, transhistorical, transcultural’ (1977: 79). ‘Institutional narratives’, that is stories of origin, continuing legitimation, and collective identity formation, act to perpetuate, ‘sanction and sanctify’ existence and actions (Bourdieu, 1992: 119). In her capacity as protagonist and female entrepreneur. Sara disrupts and
transgresses contemporary institutional narratives and performs new social enterprise and development.

However, *Why Not* does not only represent a trangressional space for the main character, but in the act of reading and through the shared emplotment between the text and the reader, the reader is prompted to “configure” the text (Ricoeur 1991: 26). By remplotting the text and creatively generating new readings, the literary text goes beyond socio-scientific narratives as a fundamental method for enabling the passage of time in human experience to be understood and explained (Ricoeur, 1984). Literary texts can together with the reader carve out alternative plots and spaces and not only explain but create transgressive spaces.

**Final reflections**

In this paper, we have taken Schumpeter’s (1934) notion of entrepreneurship as the starting point to interpret novelists as potential entrepreneurs, and the novel as a potential carrier and product of entrepreneurship. We should stress that not all authors of fiction, or the products of their work, are agents of institutional ‘creative destruction’ as interpreted in this paper. Indeed, many novels are written in a very conservative fashion and often for economic purposes rather than for reasons of societal change. Our purpose has been, however, to advance the argument of the potential of some novelists and their work to play a role as institutional entrepreneurs by challenging established structures and to suggest alternative ways of organizing life and new, perhaps utopian, visions of the future.

We have shown the representation of entrepreneurship first through Almqvist’s work as an author of fiction where he deliberately used the novel’s narrative form to develop and communicate new ideas on how social and economic life could be organized that challenged the established way of organizing social and
economic life. Second, we have analyzed how the author makes the heroine Sara Videbeck an independent entrepreneur to represent the possibility of wider institutional changes related to women’s roles in society and economy. Almqvist thus attempted a creative destruction of two dominant institutions: marriage and the traditional guild system, both of which restricted women’s societal and economic freedom. Almqvist ran into strong reactions from the establishment as result of his work, including resistance among the people that felt that their worldviews and comfort zones were threatened by Almqvist’s social innovations. Experiencing, as many entrepreneurs, not just ‘difficulty in finding the necessary cooperation’ (Schumpeter 1934: 86-87) to implement his ideas in reality, he met outright hostility even among his friends. Contemporary scholars of institutional entrepreneurship have noted that meeting strong reactions from the social environment is common for institutional entrepreneurs (e.g., Garud et al. 2007).

What we further have unraveled through our focus on narrative fiction is acts of institutional entrepreneurship on various levels. On one level, we have seen how the author lets the novel carry thoughts, which challenge predominant institutions regarding women’s roles in business and society. Indeed, the novel represents alternative visions of social and economic freedom, thus capturing the potential of entrepreneurship to initiate institutional change. In addition, Sara challenges established norms, values and beliefs regarding business by her mere female presence and her ‘desire to become the other’ (Hjorth 2007: 727). By creatively destroying presuppositions regarding the professional and personal organization of society just by being and acting, that is performing, she undermines prevalent gender roles. This is indeed very novel also in relation to the contemporary entrepreneurship literature,
where the norm is that the entrepreneur is a man and the female entrepreneur is the “other” (Ahl 2004, 2007; Ogbor 2000).

As seen here, another level of institutional entrepreneurship in the text regards how the novel can prompt entrepreneurship and institutional change. Here, Ricoeur’s notion of life as a quest of narrative is crucial as a theoretical backdrop. The significance of a narrative, such as a novel, has its origin in the ‘intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader. The act of reading thus becomes the critical moment of the entire analysis’ (Ricoeur 1991: 26). In light of our analysis in this paper, what Ricoeur suggests is that the text is not confined to itself but when we read a text, we ‘unfold the world horizon in it’ (Ricoeur 1991: 26), which include the story’s actions, characters and events. In the creative act of generating new readings of topics (Hjorth & Steyaert 2004; Czarniawska 1999), the text relies on the reader, in other words, “emplotment” is a joint effort between reader and text, and it is only when the reading is performed that the work is ultimately “configured”. Ricoeur’s insights allow us to see the power of novelists and their work to produce and transport creative ideas of institutional change.

Expanding on this line of thought, we would argue that while contemporary literature on institutional entrepreneurship tends to focus on representations of accomplished change, our focus on narrative fiction let us emphasize representations of change opportunities. For change to actually occur, entrepreneurial efforts need to gain legitimacy within the relevant social groups that are affected by the deviation from the dominant norms, values and beliefs that the entrepreneurial act challenges (Garud et al. 2007). In the case of Almqvist and his novel Why Not, it is clear from our analysis that his entrepreneurial efforts did not receive the legitimacy actually needed to produce the represented change even during his lifetime. Some of his ideas
are realized today, whereas others seem to be even too modern for some of today’s societies.

Concentrating on the opportunity to change, rather than the accomplished change, and taking a narrative approach, we put creativity and time at the heart of the process of institutional entrepreneurship, rather than merely action and change. The representations and attempt of organizational and institutional change inherent in Almqvist narrative work is, we contend, in line with Hjorth’s (2007: 719) notion of entrepreneurship ‘understood as affecting the field of practices so as to open up for new styles that is new bases for everyday practices’. The attention to narrative fiction, and the novel, thus allows us to visualize not just the manifold facets of institutional change (Czarniawska-Joerges & Guillet de Monthoux 1994; DeCock & Land 2005), but also the role of time for entrepreneurship. Indeed, the power of creative novel discourses lies in that they harbor ‘utopian possibilities of new worlds, new figures of speech, new interpretations and new ways to be in the world’ (Kaplan 2003:61), and their creative energy seeps from the intersection between ‘the potentialities of the “real” past and the “unreal” possibilities of pure fiction’ (Ricoeur 1988: 192).
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