

Put Your Style at Stake

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Document Version
Accepted author manuscript

Published in:
Organization Studies

DOI:
[10.1177/0170840617717551](https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840617717551)

Publication date:
2018

License
Unspecified

Citation for published version (APA):
Johnsen, C. G., Olaison, L., & Sørensen, B. M. (2018). Put Your Style at Stake: A New Use of Sustainable Entrepreneurship. *Organization Studies*, 39(2-3), 397–415. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840617717551>

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Download date: 20. Jul. 2024



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Journal article (Accepted manuscript)

CITE: Put Your Style at Stake : A New Use of Sustainable Entrepreneurship. / Johnsen, Christian Garmann; Olaison, Lena; Sørensen, Bent Meier. In: *Organization Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2-3, 2018, p. 397-415.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840617717551>

Uploaded to [CBS Research Portal](#): January 2019

Put Your Style at Stake: A New Use of Sustainable Entrepreneurship

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Abstract. This article uses the concept of style to rethink sustainable entrepreneurship. Our point of departure is the conceptual distinction between organization as style made durable and entrepreneurship as the disruption of style. We show that style is not simply an aesthetic category, but rather what ties different social practices together. While organization makes the connections between social practices durable, entrepreneurship disrupts such patterns. We further elucidate how organization and entrepreneurship are two intermingled processes – those of durability and disruption – that together enable the creation of new styles. In order to conceptualize this creative process, we explore how play can create disharmonies within the organization, but we also maintain that any new practice will remain marginal without a collective assemblage capable of adopting it. On this basis, we argue that sustainable entrepreneurship consists of making an environmentally friendly and socially conscious style durable, but also of disrupting such a style. In order to illustrate our argument, we use the example of the sustainable smartphone producer Fairphone. In conclusion, we argue that the concept of style may strengthen the dialogue between entrepreneurship studies and organization studies.

Keywords entrepreneurship, organization, play, style, sustainability

Introduction

In 2015 The Next Web (TNW) hosted Tech5, an online competition to find the fastest-growing tech startups in five European countries. Fairphone, a sustainable smartphone producer, made it to the finals in the Netherlands. The awards ceremony video available on the TNW website shows a crowd of contenders, including Fairphone's CEO and founder Bas van Abel, standing in excited anticipation as the winner is about to be announced. However, when the loudspeakers blare out 'Fairphone' as the winner to carry the title of 'fastest-growing tech company in Holland', van Abel's facial expression radically changes. His happy and forthcoming smile disappears, giving way to a look of disbelief and an almost palpable sense of displeasure. An earlier statement by the CEO explains this odd reaction: 'Fairphone is *not* about high-tech innovation. Fairphone is about using the technology for the *social* innovation' ('Tech5 Amsterdam', 2015). While Fairphone ostensibly promotes social change, in this instance van Abel finds himself in a competition premised on economic parameters. This is a risky moment, because receiving a prize for being a fast-growing, high-tech company puts Fairphone's style at stake – its manner of promoting fairness within the electronics industry. At the same time, however, winning the prize has the potential to disrupt the electronics industry and thus achieve durable social change. Against this backdrop, van Abel seeks to conserve Fairphone's style of fairness, insisting that the company promotes 'social innovation' rather than 'high-tech innovation'. Nevertheless, the style of fairness that van Abel promotes becomes disrupted. As this episode indicates, the style of an enterprise can be rendered at once durable and open for disruption.

In this article, we explore how style has the capacity both to conserve an order that interconnects different practices and to disrupt that order (Spinosa, Flores, & Dreyfus, 1997). Conceiving of organization as the conservation of style, we conversely consider entrepreneurship to be a process involving the disruption of style. We further argue that organization and entrepreneurship are two interrelated processes – durability and disruption, respectively – that together enable new styles to emerge. Using this approach, we advance a relational, contextual and social understanding of entrepreneurship (Verduijn, Dey, Tedmanson, & Essers, 2014; Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009; Welter, Baker, Audretsch, & Gartner, 2016) by developing a philosophically informed concept of style. Although we understand organization as style made durable, we maintain that play can return that which is conserved to a new use (Agamben, 2007).

We also show that for a disruption to gain persistency, a collective assemblage that can adopt new practices is required (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). As such, we introduce the concepts of play and collective assemblage in order to clarify the relationship between organization and entrepreneurship.

Informed by the concept of style, we intend to challenge the conventional manner of conceptualizing sustainable entrepreneurship. Sustainable entrepreneurship is predominantly understood as the creation of products, services and production methods that are both environmentally friendly and competitive on the market (Dean & McMullen, 2007; Hall, Daneke, & Lenox, 2010; Kirkwood & Walton, 2010; Schaper, 2005). As an alternative take, we argue that sustainable entrepreneurship not only consists of making an environmentally friendly and socially conscious style durable but also includes the disruption of such a style. In other words, we propose that sustainable entrepreneurship should be located in the creation of styles that change our very conception of what is sustainable, for this is where we can find alternative ‘environmental responses’ (Painter-Morland & ten Bos, 2016). To illustrate our argument, we use the example of the sustainable smartphone producer Fairphone. Contrary to the conventional conception of sustainable entrepreneurship as being tied to environmentally friendly solutions competitive on the market, we show that Fairphone is marked by a particular style of fairness. This style makes the relationship between different practices durable, but it also opens up for a discussion about what constitutes fairness.

The article is divided into five parts. In the first, we briefly review the literature on sustainable entrepreneurship, locating the potential pitfalls of combining sustainability and entrepreneurship: an inherent heroism, a dogmatic optimism and a neoliberal ideology that remains embedded in the concept. In the second part, we introduce the concept of style in order to develop an alternative to the conventional view of sustainable entrepreneurship. We go on to argue that while organization is style made durable, entrepreneurship is the disruption of style. We use the third part to further develop the link between style and entrepreneurship by looking at how play creates disharmonies within a durable style. We also introduce the concept of the collective assemblage, in order to show how a new style may become durable. In the fourth section, we use the Fairphone example to illustrate the conceptual connection between style and sustainable entrepreneurship. In this context we show how Fairphone conserves a style of fairness that interconnects different practices, including the use of conflict-free minerals, recycling

programmes and local forms of production. Yet, we also show how this environmentally friendly and socially conscious style becomes the target of disruption. In the final section, we discuss the implications of linking style and entrepreneurship, showing how this conceptual framework can enable us to overcome some of the weaknesses inherent in the existing conceptualization of sustainable entrepreneurship. We conclude with a call for a closer dialogue between entrepreneurship studies and organization studies.

Sustainability and Entrepreneurship

In recent years, entrepreneurship has emerged as a means of addressing problems related to ecological degradation, including global warming, water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources (Cohen & Winn, 2007; Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011). While carbon-dioxide emissions from industrial, fossil-fuel-based production have evidently spurred global warming, among other things, many today believe that a new breed of environmentally oriented entrepreneurs can offer products, services and production techniques that will reduce the negative impact of economic activities on the climate (see Dean & McMullen, 2007; Hall et al., 2010; Kirkwood & Walton, 2010; Schaper, 2005). Typically, ecological degradation has been conceived of in terms of risks. For example, overexploitation and pollution might threaten accessibility to a natural resource; a poor environmental performance could lead to lawsuits against companies or jeopardize their brands; rising sea levels and violent weather conditions could impede production (Lash & Wellington, 2007). However, Cohen and Winn argue that such developments might equally ‘create entrepreneurial opportunities for the introduction of innovative technologies’ (2007, p. 31). For example, the waste generated by a production process represents an environmental challenge, but in the eyes of a sustainable entrepreneur, waste also shows that the production process could be better calibrated to utilize resources with maximum efficiency. This makes the environmental problem of waste an ideal opportunity for using technologies that can more efficiently exploit resources by either recycling them or reducing the amount of residue they leave.

For Cohen and Winn (2007), ecological degradation affords business opportunities that entrepreneurs can entertain (Hall et al., 2010). As such, entrepreneurship should be seen as ‘a solution to, rather than a cause of environmental degradation’ (York & Venkataraman, 2010, p. 449). While there are several different conceptions of sustainable entrepreneurship, most definitions revolve around the idea of using entrepreneurship to create products, services and

modes of production that provide a profit-making opportunity while also caring for the natural environment. Thus, the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship does not see environmental challenges as a threat to be tackled by restricting corporate activities, but rather highlights how the ecological crisis is ‘opening up opportunities for new entrants’ (Hall et al., 2010, p. 441). Consequently, far from limiting the scope of business, the ecological crisis enables sustainable entrepreneurs to create ‘environmentally sustainable products, services and institutions’ (York & Venkataraman, 2010, p. 449). In this way, Cohen and Winn (2007) believe that entrepreneurship can help propel a transition towards a greener economy.

Although the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship is receiving greater attention, seeing entrepreneurship as a means of achieving sustainability is rife with potential pitfalls. First of all, making the entrepreneur responsible for solving what are essentially collective and global problems risks individualizing the massive ecological challenges we face today (Wright, Nyberg, De Cock, & Whiteman, 2013). Thus, Hall et al. warn against what they call the *Panacea Hypothesis*, which consists of placing unlimited belief in the idea that ‘entrepreneurs will save the day’ (2010, p. 441). Along similar lines, O’Neill and Gibbs note the tendency within the sustainable entrepreneurship discourse to reproduce the myth of the ‘entrepreneurial hero’ (2016, p. 1731). What is more, the idea of sustainable entrepreneurship relies upon the overly optimistic assumption that the conflict between economic growth and ecological sustainability within the current economic system can actually be transcended (see York & Venkataraman, 2010). Promoting entrepreneurship as a solution to sustainability, therefore, fails to acknowledge what Böhm, Misoczky, and Moog identify as ‘fundamental conflicts between capitalism and environmental sustainability’ (2012, p. 1626). Thus, advocates of sustainable entrepreneurship overlook how sustainability and entrepreneurship in practice might be ‘inherently incompatible’ (Phillips, 2013, p. 795; see also Anderson, 1998). For example, Shepherd, Patzelt, and Baron show that many sustainable entrepreneurs, despite their commitment to green values, end up acting ‘in ways that result in harm to the natural environment’ (2013, p. 1251). Finally, the optimistic reading of sustainable entrepreneurship is problematic because it is grounded in a neoliberal ideology (O’Neill & Gibbs, 2016) that refuses to acknowledge the need for government to regulate environmental policies (for an example of such refusal, see York & Venkataraman, 2010, pp. 451, 460). This kind of belief in business enterprises is, to use Banerjee’s words, ‘laced with liberal doses of evangelical rhetoric’ (2003, p. 165) and grounded in the ideology that ‘the only solution to the problems of capitalism is more capitalism’ (Nyberg,

Spicer, & Wright, 2013, p. 450). On this note, we believe that sustainable entrepreneurship suffers from some of the same *inherent* dangers identified by critical scholars in concepts such as ‘corporate greening’ (Crane, 2000), ‘corporate environmentalism’ (Wright, Nyberg, & Grant, 2012) and ‘sustainable development’ (Banerjee, 2001).

Entrepreneurship as the Disruption of Style

Instead of dismissing the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship entirely, we propose an alternative approach to the phenomenon by developing the concept of style. Spinosa, Flores, and Dreyfus (1997) originally connected the concept of style to entrepreneurship in *Disclosing New Worlds: Entrepreneurship, Democratic Action, and the Cultivation of Solidarity*. This conceptual connection has subsequently been developed in entrepreneurship studies by Weiskopf and Steyaert (2009), Hjorth, Johannisson, and Steyaert (2003) and Popp and Holt (2013), among others. We attempt to further develop Spinosa et al.’s (1997) concept of style in order to rethink the relationship between sustainability, organization and entrepreneurship. In this context, it is important not to confuse the concept of style with the more superficial fashion. Following Deleuze, Colebrook (2002, p. 45) situates style as the production of social relations that organize society. Put differently, style concerns how we conduct ourselves and the way in which we think, talk, act and behave within social settings. It is along such lines that Spinosa et al. insist that all our ‘activity is organized by a *style*’, because style is ‘the way all the practices ultimately fit together’ (1997, p. 19, emphasis in original). To illustrate this point, Spinosa et al. (1997, p. 61) use the example of how the advent of the cellular phone has changed the nature of work by intensifying communication practices. In the cellular phone we have attained not only a technological device but also a set of new practices that make us constantly available for work because we can always get in touch with our colleagues and be reached by our bosses. As such, the cellular phone has changed the style of work. Spinosa et al. therefore specify that style concerns the ontological dimension of living itself: ‘style is not an aspect of things, people, or activity but, rather, constitutes them as what they are’ (1997, p. 19). No subject possesses a style, because style is what gives form to our lives and mediates our social relations. In other words, style is not, following the vocabulary of Cooper (2005), a matter of the identity of things, but of the relations that constitute them. For this reason, the style of work created by the cellular phone must be located in the relationships between the user, the device and other users.

According to Spinoza et al. (1997), style has the capacity to both stabilize practices as well as to change them (see also Popp & Holt, 2013). We would like to connect these two features of style – its stabilizing and its disruptive dimensions – to organization and entrepreneurship, respectively. While we associate the stabilizing aspect of style with organization, we associate the disruptive aspect of style with entrepreneurship. On one level, Spinoza et al. maintain that style acts as ‘the basis on which practices are conserved’ (1997, p. 20). To borrow the words of Spinoza et al., we consider organization to be a space wherein different sets of ‘practices for dealing with oneself, other people, and things’ are organized into a ‘self-contained web of meanings’ (1997, p. 17). In this setting, the style interconnects different practices. We call this conservation of practices ‘organization’. To gain consistency, any style must achieve durability. As Arendt argues, it is precisely ‘durability that gives the things of the world their relative independence from men who produced and use them’ (1958, p. 137). Such durability is what ensures that the pattern of practices within an organizational setting is relatively consistent over time, allowing organizations to attain stability, independence and persistency (Scott, 1992). In some cases, according to Scott, what we recognize as organizations ‘can achieve a kind of immortality’ (1992, p. 33) because their practices are conserved regardless of possible changes among their members. Consider, for example, Microsoft and Bill Gates. Bill Gates is celebrated as Microsoft’s creator and continues to be seen as indispensable to the enterprise even though he has not been involved in day-to-day operations or strategic decisions for quite some time. In fact, Microsoft has attained a certain style that persists independently of his presence. This gives Microsoft a durability that cannot be reduced to those originally involved in establishing the enterprise.

Paraphrasing Latour (1990; see also Parker, 2007), we therefore consider *organization as style made durable*. Within an organizational setting, one can find various practices that might appear unrelated at first glance, but whose common style ultimately ties them together. Hence, we can interconnect different practices but also distinguish them from each other because they either share the same style or have different ones. Take the Basque Mondragon Corporation (‘Mondragon’, 2016). Established as a local worker cooperative in 1956, the Mondragon Corporation today counts over 250 subdivisions that engage in a wide variety of activities, including industrial production, finance and retail. Yet, across all these different activities, the corporation implements collective practices like participatory management, democratic participation based upon the right to vote, and wage distribution according to principles of

solidarity. All these practices are arranged into a web of meanings that is conserved and made durable within the organizational setting. What distinguishes these practices is that they diverge from conventional industrial standards. As a result, the corporation is characterized by what we might term a 'Mondragon style' that makes its diverse activities fit together. This style has achieved a durability that today marks the Mondragon Corporation as a particular enterprise. Organizational settings, in the words of Spinosa et al., are 'spaces held together by particular styles' (1997, p. 68).

Beyond this, Spinosa et al. also insist that style acts as the 'basis on which new practices are developed' (1997, p. 20). Thus, according to them, style does not simply stabilize practices but additionally has the capacity to create new sets of practices. This disruption of a durable style is what we call 'entrepreneurship'. For Spinosa et al. (1997), entrepreneurship is a process that consists of changing the styles that tie our everyday activities together. For new sets of practices to transpire, we have to change the style that organizes our lives. To accomplish this, Spinosa et al. (1997) maintain that entrepreneurs must locate 'disharmonies' and 'anomalies' within any given style – for example, instances in which the routines managing a certain task are rendered obsolete, irregularities within conventional habits occur or the procedures for performing an operation collapse. In these cases 'style is stuttering', 'identity is threatened' and 'breakdown occurs' (Chia & Holt, 2006, p. 649). Instead of calling for a restoration of the conserved style that ensures its durability, Spinosa et al. (1997) suggest that the occurrence of ruptures enables new practices to be developed. By being sensitive to disharmonies and anomalies within a style, 'entrepreneurs contribute to reconfiguring the practices of society' (Spinosa et al., 1997, p. 68), thereby creating new ways of thinking and acting. This is why any disruption of a particular style opens up to an 'infinite plane of other styles' (Colebrook, 2002, p. 55). As Deleuze learns from Nietzsche, a social setting will always hold opportunities for 'inventing new possibilities of life' and instantiating novel 'styles of life' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 91). Thus, the entrepreneur does not singlehandedly create the new practices; they emerge in the relationship between the entrepreneur and the disharmonies and anomalies that he or she encounters within any given set of practices.

Play, New Use and the Collective Assemblage

So far, we have conceptually distinguished between organization and entrepreneurship. While we consider organization as style made durable, entrepreneurship is viewed as the disruption of

style. However, although we have conceptually separated organization and entrepreneurship, we have yet to clarify the relationship between these two tendencies. In the following, we will therefore elaborate on what allows a durable style to be disrupted, but also what enables a disrupted style to gain durability. For these purposes, we introduce the concepts of play and the collective assemblage. On the one hand, we use the concept of play to show how networks of conserved practices can be returned to a ‘new use’ (Agamben, 2007), thus allowing for disruption to take place. In this configuration, we situate play as what creates disharmonies and thus releases a given practice from the style that makes it durable. On the other hand, we use the concept of collective assemblage to show how new practices can be manifested in a new style. While collective assemblage makes new uses available across a variety of practices, organization ties these practices together in a new style. Taken together, the following section therefore addresses how organizations become disrupted and how these disruptions are made durable. Ultimately, we show how new styles are created.

Organizations with a high degree of durability will have an inherent remoteness that protects their style and isolates sets of practices from change, similar to the way that museums tend to preserve historical objects behind glass to remove them from use (Agamben, 2007). In this manner, the meaning of concepts or the function of objects is taken for granted in our everyday dealings. This is why our habits tend to assume that mundane objects have only one use, and therefore refuse to acknowledge other ways of deploying them. However, any organization will contain cracks that reveal disharmonies within its style. As Deleuze and Guattari emphasize, ‘there is no social system that does not leak from all directions’ (1987, p. 204). While a social system tends to seal off its leaks, it cannot avoid putting its style at stake. We call this putting of style at stake ‘play’. Play, then, expresses ‘that which is always “more than” a specific form or meaning; that which cannot be contained or limited’ (Cooper, 1986, p. 320). The activity of play, according to Agamben, affords alternative ways of perceiving and dealing with the world. Thus, play enacts new possibilities that were previously unavailable. Agamben insists that play enables a return ‘to a new, possible use’ (2007, p. 85) of that which is conserved and crystallized. Consider, for example, the legal order. Within the legal order, documents and objects are assigned specific functions. A paragraph of the law, for instance, can be used to either free or incarcerate citizens. However, although specific uses of the law are assumed within the legal order, play can open up for new uses. When children play, Agamben notes, they can ‘make toys out of things that also belong to the spheres of economics, war, law, and other activities that we

are used to thinking of as serious' (2007, p. 76). In the hands of the child that plays, a legal document can be transformed into a paper airplane. This renders the previous use of the document 'inoperative' for legal purposes, and the document is brought to a 'new use' (Agamben, 2007, p. 82).

The movement of play, then, affords artefacts, concepts and practices new forms of use, thus enabling play to create what Spinoza et al. (1997) call disharmonies and anomalies within a conserved style and paving the way for entrepreneurship. Take the practice of the little drummer, Oskar Matzerath, in Günter Grass's (1961) novel *The Tin Drum*. Listening to a military orchestra playing marches at a highly organized Nazi rally, Oskar hides under the stage where the orchestra stands. There, he beats a rhythm on his tin drum out of time with the military orchestra, causing disharmony and anomaly within the dominant melody. The collective assemblage eventually picks up this disharmony as it spreads throughout the crowd, whose orderly lines gradually dissolve while, two by two, the masses of people begin to waltz (see Sørensen, 2005). While play creates such disharmonies and anomalies, its results cannot always be anticipated, since play proceeds of its own accord (Kavanagh, 2011; Sørensen & Spoelstra, 2012). This is why play involves risk because disharmony can cause disarray (Butler, Olaison, Sliwa, Sørensen, & Spoelstra, 2011). By the same token, a new style cannot be developed unless the organization is able to absorb the new use of an object or concept, so the disharmonies and anomalies must be translated into new practices for a style to materialize. For Agamben, play only 'has an episodic character, after which normal life must once again continue on its course' (2007, p. 87). In some instances, a new style holds together the 'normal life' that supersedes play. Spinoza et al. term this 'articulation', which consists of making 'some marginal aspect of the practices coordinated by a style become dominant' (1997, p. 25). For Spinoza et al., the entrepreneur makes this articulation possible as he or she 'reconfigures a domain of practices by remaining true to the anomaly that he or she uncovers in his or her activities' (1997, p. 143). While this view assigns great responsibility to the entrepreneur, Deleuze believes that any new set of practices will remain 'marginal, or little used until there exists a social machine or a collective assemblage capable of taking it [up]' (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 70). Deleuze insists that the creation of a new style is made possible only by a collective assemblage that incorporates the new practices.

A collective assemblage, according to Deleuze, is a heterogeneous arrangement of symbolic relations that produces modes of thinking, speaking and acting (Buchanan, 2015). Deleuze's

(2011) example of Björn Borg aptly illustrates how the collective assemblage is able to transform marginal practices into a dominant style. Until the 1950s, tennis was an upper-class sport. In the aftermath of the 1968 youth revolt, which wove disharmonies and anomalies into the social fabric of society, Borg was able to develop a new set of practices that, according to Deleuze, contributed to a ‘proletarianization’ of tennis. As such, the 1968 youth revolt created disharmonies and anomalies that Borg could sense and articulate into a new practice. This new practice was characterized by the way Borg positioned himself in the back of the court close to the spectators, his manner of spinning in place and his high shots over the net. Taken together, this playful practice disrupted the prevailing style of tennis. Importantly, Borg’s style sharply contrasted the predominantly aristocratic style of playing tennis, which cultivated virtues like distance to the masses, highly controlled exchanges on court, an orthodox dress code and so forth. Borg thus not only represented a disruption of known techniques but also blazed the trail for a new style that allowed players to get closer to the audience and thereby make tennis accessible to the masses. Yet, to achieve durability, Borg’s style first had to be adopted by a collective assemblage that enabled the new style of tennis to transpire across the globe. Hence, Borg did not invent a new style of tennis, but his style was a form of play integral to prior disharmonies and to a subsequent adoption by the collective assemblage, all of which eventually gave way to a new, durable organization of tennis.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between organization, play, entrepreneurship and the collective assemblage. The importance of this figure lies not in the individual concepts but in the relationships between them. Hence, we should not understand entrepreneurship and organization independently of each other, but rather explore how a new style emerges at the intersection between disruption and durability. The point here is that real-life organizations do not exclude the possibility of entrepreneurship, insofar as possibilities for disruption are present. Hence, in any organizational setting, we are more likely to find both ‘organization’ (*style made durable*) and the seeds of ‘entrepreneurship’ (*disruption of style*) present to a greater or lesser extent depending on the specific circumstances. As Cooper (1986) reminds us, organization is inherently connected to disorganization, and we are better served by looking at how order and disorder are intermingled rather than mutually excluded. Following Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes, an organizational reality should be conceived as a ‘space in between order and chaos’ (2005, p. 147; see also Linstead & Thanem, 2007). With the concept of style, we can therefore look at entrepreneurship and organization as two different tendencies, both of which are required

to create a new style. While entrepreneurship disrupts prevalent styles of living, organization allows for such disruptions to achieve durability. In this way, entrepreneurship and organization become two intermingled processes – those of disruption and durability – that together enable the creation of new styles. Creating a new style takes more than fuelling disruption, because that which is created will eventually lack durability. Likewise, any style that remains stagnant will eventually wear out its durability. Therefore, entrepreneurship and organization are mutually important in the creation and maintenance of styles.

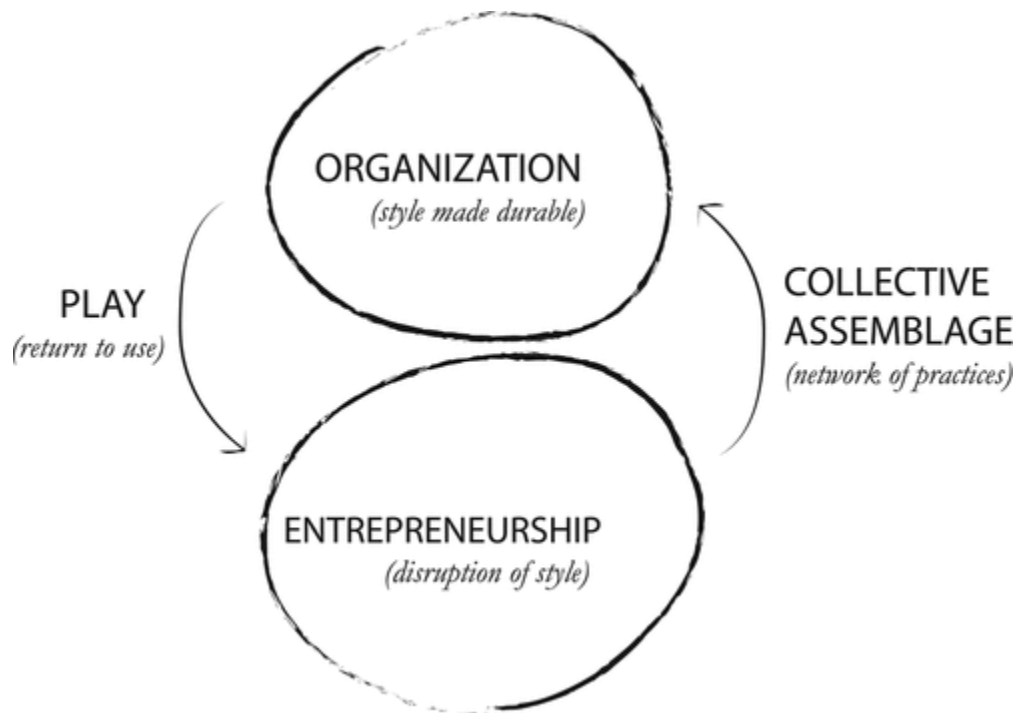


Figure 1. Style, organization and entrepreneurship.

The Example of Fairphone: Putting ‘Fairness’ at Stake

In the following section, we show how the concept of style can be used to understand the practices of the sustainable smartphone producer Fairphone. Rather than using an inductive approach that searches out general patterns in the case material, we use Fairphone as an illustrative example that can help us develop the concept of style in relation to sustainable entrepreneurship. Such a methodological approach, according to Costas and Fleming, can be ‘a useful tool to give empirical depth to developmental concepts’ (2009, p. 364). We will show how Fairphone attains a specific style of fairness that includes social and environmental concerns. At the same time, Fairphone attempts to disrupt what is ‘fair’ through its proposed style, thus

creating new styles of sustainability. By putting its own style at stake, Fairphone also exemplifies how fairness can be put into a new use. In documenting the example, we describe how Fairphone presents itself online, including on its website (www.fairphone.com), on other social media sites (e.g., Facebook) and in sustainability-oriented online magazines (e.g., *Ethical Consumer*). Here, we draw attention to the exchanges between Fairphone managers and online users.

Making the style of fairness durable

Fairphone began in 2010 as an information campaign, raising awareness about the use of minerals from conflict-ridden areas as well as about the growing problems of electronic waste in the global economy. As the campaign team saw it, the electronics industry had failed to take responsibility for the entire product supply chain, including the negative environmental consequences of resourcing, the widespread existence of poor working conditions, energy-intensive production processes that harm the climate and the failure to recycle scarce minerals. Three years into the project, however, Fairphone realized that raising awareness around these issues was not enough. Chief Communications Officer Tessa Wernink explained: ‘You can campaign and create awareness, but phones aren’t going to go away. If people don’t have an alternative, then campaigning doesn’t really make sense’ (*Ethical Consumer*, 2013). In 2013, Fairphone therefore decided to manufacture a ‘fairer’ smartphone ‘to change the relationship between people and their phones’ (‘Fairphone’, 2015). For Fairphone, producing a ‘fairer’ phone was an attempt to disrupt the prevailing style of production and consumption within the electronics industry. At the same time, through this disruption, Fairphone also made a particular style of fairness durable.

The first generation smartphones developed by Fairphone were based on a model produced by their Chinese manufacturer, Guohong, in Chongqing, but they contained a series of modifications designed to overcome environmental and social challenges in the electronics industry. These modifications encompassed the use of conflict-free materials (tin and tantalum) from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, worker welfare, a replaceable battery, an e-waste programme and an open source software system (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Fairphone’s style of fairness.

Using the concept of style, we can see that the below diagram both disrupts and makes durable. On the one hand, the diagram reveals the truth behind what is printed on an iPhone: ‘Designed by Apple in California – Assembled in China’ by drawing attention to the processes underlying designing and assembling, such as mining and wasting. Instead of conveying only the aesthetic façade of the phone, the diagram highlights the social processes and the components it contains. In this way, Fairphone endeavours to disrupt the style involved in the life cycle of a mainstream smartphone by ‘opening up the supply chain and creating new relationships between people and their products’ (‘Fairphone’, 2015). Fairphone wants to change the unsustainable way that smartphones are normally produced by making an entrepreneurial disruption in the purely marketing-oriented style that dominates the mainstream electronics industry. On the other hand, the diagram also comprises and makes durable a particular style of fairness that draws together Fairphone’s different practices. Thus, this style of fairness connects different practices, including a focus on worker’s welfare, the use of recycling (e-waste programme), the use of conflict-free tin and titanium, a dual SIM card option and a rootable operation system (‘Fairphone’, 2015). While recycling and worker welfare might not immediately be related, Fairphone’s style of fairness unites these two practices. The diagram unites different practices by fixating on what Fairphone considers to be the relevant themes of fairness. In doing so, the diagram conserves a set of practices and makes them durable. Such durability is what allows Fairphone’s style of

fairness to achieve distinctness. However, this style also excludes alternative practices that could be related to fairness.

Disrupting the style of fairness

Although Fairphone makes a style of fairness durable through various practices, including activities that involve user interaction, such practices might also open up for disruption. As Akemu, Whiteman and Kennedy (2016) show, the entrepreneurship of Fairphone cannot be reduced to the achievement of the venture's founders, but must rather be located in the collective processes pertaining to the enterprise. One example of this is the Design A Day competition ('Design A Day', 2014). Over a five-day period, members of the Fairphone community could 'submit ideas for the new case design using the online Design A Day platform' ('Fairphone, press release', 2014). Selected ideas were printed on protective cases manufactured using biodegradable plastics and local 3D Hubs. At the first Design A Day competition in July 2014, one of the selected slogans was 'World in Your Pocket', with a map of the world printed on the cover ('Webshop, Fairphone', 2015). On its Facebook page, Fairphone announced that 'Today's 3D case is all about the connected world we live in!' ('Facebook, Fairphone', 2014). In this way, the slogan conserves the already durable style of fairness that had marketed the initiative in the first place, because it could be easily incorporated into Fairphone's style of fairness.

The second Design A Day competition, however, followed a different trajectory. An active member of the Fairphone online community, Eric Lee, submitted a proposal under the heading 'an even fairer phone' ('Design A Day', 2014). In the proposal Lee highlighted what he considered to be 'one of the biggest problems with the Fairphone', namely that 'fair should also mean workers' rights for the people who make the phone. The right to join a trade union is a fundamental human right' ('Design A Day', 2014). In his design, Eric Lee suggested the following slogan be written on the cases:

This would be an even fairer phone if it were made by a union member

Immediately after posting his proposal, Lee began receiving massive support from other members of the Fairphone online community. For example, user Nkiru Philips wrote: 'Trade union membership is a basic right of a worker, so for a company calling themselves "fair", they can't be called fair if the workers are not allowed their basic right' ('Design A Day', 2014). In

total, more than 266 comments were posted under the comments field of the proposal, sparking a debate about whether Fairphone was fair or not. Simultaneously, various users started to repeat Lee's slogan in the comments field of the other proposals submitted in the remaining days of the competition. Herein lies the play, as these comments open up for a different understanding of fairness. In turn, Fairphone's style of fairness is put at stake through the critique directed towards its initiative. Such play is creative, but also risky, because it allows the question of 'fairness' to be disputed. One user directly accuses Fairphone of being cynical:

To use the word 'Fair' is a marketing strategy. That's absolutely fine if you can substantiate the claim that it is truly 'Fair'. Ethical consumerism is a powerful way to make change happen, but you are hoodwinking your potential customers if you claim this phone to be 'Fair' if workers are denied the right to union membership. ('Design A Day', 2014)

Here, we can see that the participants are beginning to play with the style of fairness that Fairphone expresses and to imagine alternative ways of perceiving fairness. Instead of taking Fairphone's style of fairness for granted, the users engage in the fairness debate, and thus 'return to use' the concept of fairness assumed by Fairphone (Agamben, 2007). While Fairphone's style of fairness involves a concern for 'worker's welfare' (see Figure 1), the comments in the comments fields create the opposite impression: Fairphone is accused of being unfair because it fails to support the unionization of its employees at the Chinese factory. Such interventions disrupt the Design A Day initiative. This turn of events clearly diverged from management's expectations, as the Design A Day initiative developed into a critique of Fairphone's style of fairness.

A new use of fairness

Although some online users questioned Lee's proposal, stating that 'if they would try [to introduce unions in China], they would probably immediately be eradicated' ('Design A Day', 2014), the disruption of Fairphone's style of fairness called for a reaction. At the end of the second day of the competition, Fairphone published a short statement by Tessa Wernink, the communications director: 'It's truly overwhelming how so many of you have commented on this post and are committed to the rights for the people who make the Fairphone. We like the lively

discussion and want to join in tomorrow’ (‘Design A Day’, 2014). The next day, Bibi Bleekemolen, responsible for impact development at Fairphone, posted the following message:

Eric, thank you for starting this discussion and your case design; and thanks to everyone who has participated so far. We agree and recognize that the right to organize and collectively bargain is the most effective tool to realizing decent work... But in the absence of [a well-functioning union climate], we believe that increasing worker representation and voice is a step in the right direction. (‘Forum, Fairphone’, 2014)

Lee’s proposal was selected by Fairphone for manufacture on the second day of Design A Day, resulting in a protective cover featuring the text ‘This phone would be even fairer if...’.



Figure 3. New cover design.

Here, we see how the play initiated by Lee's comment creates disharmonies within the Fairphone style. These disharmonies, in turn, make it possible to sense a disruption. The new cover design, with the inscription 'This phone would be even fairer if...' opens up for new understandings of what counts as fairness. In this way, the ellipsis marks the style of fairness as what Cooper calls an 'open field' (1976, p. 1001), thus allowing for debate around what count as environmentally friendly and socially conscious practices. Instead of remaining marginal, this disruption is taken up by the collective assemblage by being made available within the organization and to its users, thereby gaining durability. At the same time, the cover design also conserves the Fairphone style by warding off the potentially fatal version of fairness: 'This phone would be even fairer if it didn't exist'. This is achieved through a managerial intervention by Fairphone and the decision to produce the protective cover.

Arguably, a 'fair' smartphone based upon environmentally friendly and socially conscious principles has yet to be produced. Viewed from this perspective, Fairphone still exposes itself to the critique that it has failed to achieve its ambition of changing how 'things are made' ('Fairphone, press release', 2014). One could therefore accuse Fairphone of engaging in 'greenwashing' – that is, constructing 'green symbolism without taking the radical steps required to deliver a full measure of green substance' (Adler et al., 2007, p. 144). However, the difference in this instance lies in the style. Fairphone does not assume that it has managed to produce a fair smartphone, assessing instead that the first generation of phones produced was only about 15% fair. Launched in 2015, Fairphone's second generation smartphone further attempts to disrupt what is considered fair by focusing on Fairtrade gold, again improving working conditions, reducing electronic waste and so forth. Fairphone is well aware that it has accomplished neither the goal of changing the electronics industry nor of producing a truly fair smartphone.

This illuminates two simultaneous tendencies: one towards a conservation of style and one towards a disruption of style. Thus, Fairphone oscillates between a *style made durable*(organization) and a *disruption of style* (entrepreneurship). Fairphone not only makes its style durable but also puts itself at stake, thus enabling disruption to take place. Contrary to the conventional conception, Fairphone is not a sustainable entrepreneur because it has managed to produce a smartphone that offers a 'win-win solution' (Cohen & Winn, 2007, p. 34) encapsulating both environmental friendliness and economic competitiveness. Rather, Fairphone is a sustainable entrepreneur because it attempts a new style of fairness. This style makes the

relationship between different practices durable, but also puts the notion of fairness into play. In this process, what should be considered ‘fair’ is put at stake.

Discussion: A New Use of Sustainable Entrepreneurship

We can now return to the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship. Painter-Morland and ten Bos suggest that instead of focusing on ‘sustainability management systems’ operating in large corporations, ‘we may do better to study the emergence of alternative forms of organizing, which allow for new forms of sociality and environmental responsiveness to emerge’ (2016, p. 559, see also Johnsen, Nelund, Olaison, & Sørensen, 2017). Along these lines, we maintain that sustainable entrepreneurship should be located within processes of disruption and durability that allow for new styles to emerge. We should thus ‘recognize the complex and contentious nature of green entrepreneurship’ (O’Neill & Gibbs, 2016, p. 1727). Exponents of sustainable entrepreneurship often rely upon the definition of sustainable development outlined by the UN: ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (WCED, 1987; see, e.g., Hall et al., 2010, p. 440). Thus, sustainable entrepreneurship should support sustainable development. However, although this definition is often assumed, it is important to emphasize that sustainability is ‘contested terrain’ (Starkey & Crane, 2003) and that the concept lends itself to many different interpretations. For this reason, critical scholars have been concerned that some organizations adopt a conception of sustainability that allows the preservation of practices that are actually harmful to the environment (Adler et al., 2007; Böhm et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2013). As such, the concept of sustainability legitimizes environmental degradation rather than enabling the creation of environmentally friendly and socially conscious styles of living. For example, Wright et al. suspect that ‘some corporations uphold an illusion of compromise between the environment and the market by adapting the meaning of concepts such as “CSR” and “sustainability” to fit existing corporate agendas’ (2013, p. 654). To avoid this, the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship must acknowledge the importance of constantly challenging what are considered to be environmentally friendly and socially conscious practices. In turn, sustainable entrepreneurship should therefore not be grounded in a preconceived concept of sustainability that assumes that environmentally friendly and socially conscious practices are available. Instead, sustainable entrepreneurship consists of disrupting current understandings of sustainability, thereby creating new environmentally friendly and socially conscious styles.

Our approach to sustainable entrepreneurship informed by the concept of style has a twofold consequence. On one level, we must remain sensitive to how the concept of sustainability is employed within an organizational setting. We should not take our point of departure in a preconceived conceptualization of sustainability against which organizations are evaluated (Caruana & Crane, 2008). On the contrary, we should explore how sustainability interconnects different practices. Spinosa et al. note that ‘many of today’s new social movements (such as the ecology movement) consist of many related organizations, each with its distinct style’ (1997, p. 28). The fact that different organizations with a green, social profile will have distinct styles necessitates an attentiveness to how such styles make certain practices durable. Consequently, we need to look at how the concept of sustainability is used within an organizational setting. Beyond this, we should also be sensitive to how the style within an organization with a green and social profile can become the target of entrepreneurial disruption, allowing for new sets of practices to emerge. For this reason, we do not view sustainable entrepreneurship as the successful merger between green values (environmental sustainability) and economic values (profit maximization). Instead, sustainable entrepreneurs must always remain open to how they can create new forms of practice that push our understanding of what is environmentally friendly and socially conscious. Therefore, sustainable entrepreneurship consists of developing new styles that disrupt the prevailing notion of what environmentally friendly and socially conscious sets of practices are (e.g., Houtbeckers, 2016).

Within a particular organizational setting, we might find a specific approach to sustainability that is conserved. Sustainability thus becomes a durable style – a style that designates certain practices as environmentally friendly and socially conscious. Despite being made durable within the organization, this style might nonetheless be disrupted. In this instance play can serve to liberate the conserved style, thereby allowing for entrepreneurial disruption. Playing with sustainability therefore involves putting the concept at stake, opening up for alternative environmentally friendly and socially conscious responses. Hence, in cases where the concept of sustainability is conserved, play might enable a new use of the concept and a new understanding of what is environmentally friendly and socially conscious. However, such disruptions will remain marginal without there being a collective assemblage capable of adopting these new practices and an organization able to make them durable. As a result, organization is required for a new environmentally friendly and socially conscious style to achieve durability.

Using the concept of style, we can address the weaknesses pertaining to the conventional conception of sustainable entrepreneurship within the literature. First, the conventional conceptualization of sustainable entrepreneurship tends to individualize the ecological crisis we are witnessing (Hall et al., 2010, p. 441). The concept of style enables us to shift the focus from the individual entrepreneur to the processes involved in the creation of style – processes that are enabled by play, disruption, the collective assemblage and durability. Second, the conventional conceptualization of sustainable entrepreneurship assumes that it is possible to reconcile economic growth and ecological sustainability (Hultman, Bonnedahl, & O’Neill, 2016). Using the concept of style, we can develop an account of sustainable entrepreneurship that is undistorted by such optimistic assumptions and instead allows us to see how every organization with a green profile operates on the basis of a style, although this style is not in itself a stable hallmark of sustainability. On the contrary, such a style might be disrupted, opening up for alternative environmentally friendly and socially conscious practices. Finally, an optimistic reading of sustainable entrepreneurship is problematic because it is grounded in a neoliberal ideology. This logic presumes that only market-oriented activities can solve the environmental problems generated by industrial capitalism. Without doubt, the current problems related to environmental degradation are situated as a political problem within an organizational landscape that consists of various actors, including state regulatory agencies, civil society, international organizations, soft law, standards and so forth (de Bakker, den Hond, King, & Weber, 2013; de Bruin, 2016; Wittneben, Okereke, Banerjee, & Levy, 2012). With the concept of style, we can shift the focus towards entrepreneurship as a social phenomenon embedded in wider contexts (Daskalaki, Hjorth, & Mair, 2015; Popp & Holt, 2013; Steyaert & Katz, 2004; Weiskopf & Steyaert, 2009).

In addition, we want to call for a closer dialogue between entrepreneurship studies and organization studies. In entrepreneurship studies, entrepreneurship has predominantly been placed in opposition to organization (Stevenson & Gumpert, 1985), similar to the way in which organization studies tend to contrast agency and structure (Reed, 1988). In turn, organization and entrepreneurship remain sequentially divided, because the ‘organization life cycle’ (Smith & Miner, 1983) is assumed to destroy any ‘entrepreneurial impulses’ (Stevenson & Jarillo, 1986, p. 10). In an effort to re-establish the connection between entrepreneurship and organization, however, Gartner directs attention towards the ‘behaviors involved in creating organizations’ (1990, p. 16; see also Katz & Gartner, 1988), where entrepreneurship amounts to the

establishment of an (emerging) organization with distinct properties. Later, Gartner and Brush (2007) discard the life cycle model of organization and instead conceptualize ‘entrepreneurship as organizing’. This account is outlined with reference to Weick’s (1979) model of organizing that involves the three steps of enactment, selection and retention. However, Gartner and Brush (2007) modify these three steps into emergence, newness and transformation. While this view has the advantage of connecting entrepreneurship and organization, it risks making the two concepts of entrepreneurship and organization so closely assimilated that the boundary between them blurs and they become difficult to tell apart. In this light, we believe that organization and entrepreneurship must be neither isolated from each other nor equated. Instead, we should explore the tension between them.

To this end, we take inspiration from Cooper, who maintains that we should refrain from looking for the identities of concepts – a move that tends to isolate them from each other – and instead focus ‘on the division or boundary *between* them’ (1986, p. 306). We have sought to follow this advice in conceptualizing style in terms of the two tendencies of durability and disruption.

Viewed from this perspective, a social arrangement making up an organization involves at any given moment a specific style that is expressed by its manner of connecting, conserving and making durable different practices. However, although organizations tend to make their styles durable, this does not imply that styles are always fixed, ordered and homogeneous across time and space. On the contrary, a style may undergo change, it may evolve, or it may itself be the object of alteration, because that which is made durable eventually ‘wears out’ (Arendt, 1958, p. 137). In turn, entrepreneurship can be considered to be just such a disruption of style. However, the isolated individual often designated as the entrepreneur is not the creator of a new style, but rather occupies the relation between the new use that play affords and organizational practices. Here, the collective assemblage serves to pick up the new use and make it available within and beyond the organization. In this way, we have offered the concept of style to advance a relational, contextual and social understanding of entrepreneurship and organization.

Conclusion

To rethink sustainable entrepreneurship, we have described style in terms of two oscillating tendencies present in any social field. On the one hand, style has the capacity to make practices durable by interconnecting them. On this basis, we have described how organization involves making style durable. On the other hand, we have also shown how style has the capacity to

change practices. On this basis, we have argued that entrepreneurship is a process that disrupts style. Using the concept of style, we can see how organization and entrepreneurship involve two closely related and yet distinct processes. While organization makes style durable, entrepreneurship disrupts it. This does not mean that we should henceforth ignore organization and celebrate entrepreneurship. Rather, we believe that the conceptual distinction between organization and entrepreneurship can be analytically useful for understanding how sustainable practices unfold and develop within organizational settings. Moreover, we have introduced the concepts of play and the collective assemblage in order to explain the relationships between organization and entrepreneurship. Without play, the style of an organization will remain stagnant. However, without the collective assemblage, the entrepreneurial disruption will fail to achieve durability within the organization. Instead of conflating or contrasting entrepreneurship with organization, we should explore how these two processes are intermingled. Taking a point of departure in the conceptual distinction between organization (*style made durable*) and entrepreneurship (*disruption of style*), we have sought to challenge the conventional way of understanding sustainable entrepreneurship.

Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 10th Organization Studies Summer Workshop at Crete, at the 31st EGOS Colloquium in Athens, and at the *ephemera* conference ‘Whither emergence?’ in Moscow. We would like to thank the participants at these events for their valuable inputs. In addition, colleagues at Copenhagen Business School, Denmark, and Linnaeus University, Sweden, have provided generous feedback at seminars. We are also grateful to Nick Butler for his commentary. Jorge Luis Zapico deserves credit for assisting with design of the figure. Susan Ryan and Steven Sampson have provided indispensable language editing support. Finally, we would like to thank the editors of the special issue and the four anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticism and helpful suggestions. The article has benefited immensely from the review process.

Funding

The authors have received financial support for this research from the Velux Foundation, Denmark, and from the Bridge Program at Linnaeus University, Sweden.

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