

The Flight of the Bumblebee: Reflections on method entrepreneurship

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In the field of music, there is sometimes talk of the ‘difficult third album’ syndrome. The idea is that the first two albums released by an artist or a band tend to be innovative and stem from a kind of divine contact with the muses, but that creativity begins to wane once it’s time for the third album. Musicians then experience writer’s block, performance anxiety or perhaps even acedia.

Although music history is full of extremely successful third albums, this idea has gained momentum. Musicians tend to recognise themselves in the phenomenon and identify with the agony that particularly follows a successful debut and its direct follow-up. The idea of the difficult third album is probably also relevant for other types of artists and performers who are active, as ‘serial entrepreneurs’, in the so-called creative industries, and I assume researchers are no strangers to the phenomenon.

As I put the finishing touches on the third issue of *Art, Culture & Entrepreneurship*, I am delighted to note the absence of any signs of the difficult third album syndrome. Instead, I experience an energised and growing community of scholars and artists devoted to the journal’s aim and scope, as well as an editorial team bursting with creative ideas I expect to be materialised in upcoming issues. I think this calls for some general reflections on what we – the editors, contributors and reviewers – do, how we do it and why we do what we do. More specifically, what is it that has kept the difficult third album syndrome at bay?

Such reflections are not least important from the perspective of the ‘publish or perish’ logic that researchers – in almost every research area – are increasingly forced to abide to and that puts heavy pressure on researchers to only publish in highly ranked journals. From this viewpoint, it is essentially futile to start a journal from scratch, without academic provenance to legitimate the initiative and without backup from prominent international publishers; it is also more or less impossible to attract contributors. The competition on the market for journals is simply too fierce. Moreover, if the journal, like *Art, Culture & Entrepreneurship*, is cross-disciplinary, dedicated to both science and art, and determined to uphold academic excellence and relevance, then it will most certainly not endure for long. The area it covers is simultaneously too broad and too specialised to represent a viable niche in the market.

Yet here we are! The journal is alive and kicking. It receives contributions – not many, but enough to publish a volume per year; most importantly, it is being read. Since the journal went public with its first issue in December 2023, over 12,000 readers have accessed the journal and its articles at the time of writing this editorial; two articles have each exceeded 1,000 views (abstracts and file downloads); and the journal has a positive reading trend (see figure 1).

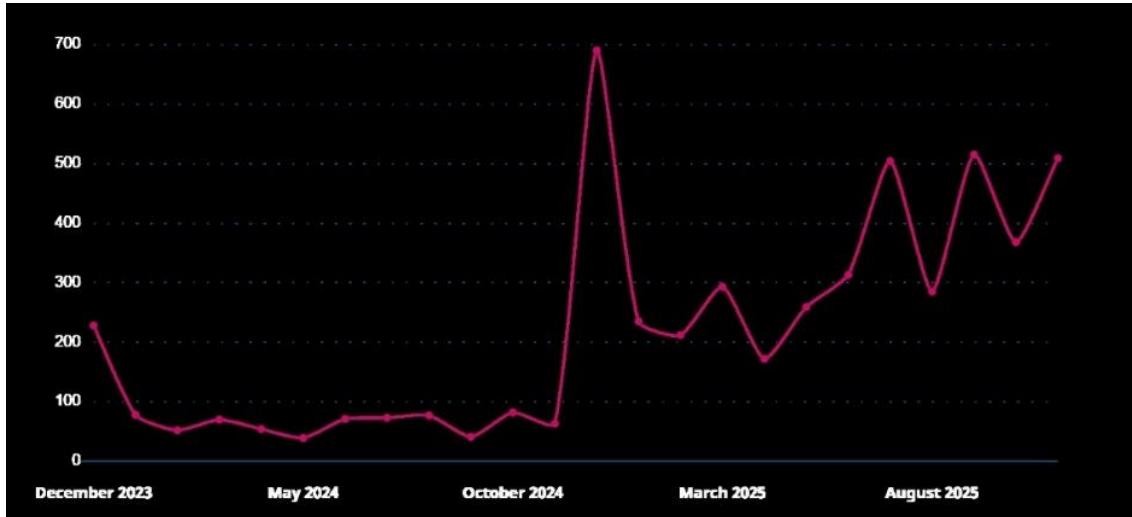


Figure 1. Article downloads per month from December 2023 to November 2025.

The journal is also beginning to acquire academic credentials. In September of this year, the Direktoratet for høyere utdanning og kompetanse – that is, the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research in Norway, which is tasked with approving and keeping a register of legitimate scientific publishing channels known as the ‘Norwegian list’ – awarded *Art, Culture & Entrepreneurship* Level 1 status. Having such a status is extremely important, since many research institutions in Scandinavia use the Norwegian list to assess their researchers’ scientific contributions.

It thus seems that, after all, *Art, Culture & Entrepreneurship* represents both relevance and excellence. Like the once-doubted bumblebee, it should not be able to fly but does so anyway.

An Intriguing Conundrum

Struggling uphill, proving disbelievers wrong and making ends meet despite very limited resources can be motivational per se, of course, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit or even an underdog mentality. In the same way, positive feedback from authors and readers and being part of something new and exciting can be inspiring. And all this is certainly contributing to shielding *Art, Culture & Entrepreneurship* from the difficult third album syndrome. But there is also something else that makes me, as an editor, tick and that lights a spark in my eyes – something I believe lies at the core of the journal’s *raison d’être*: the journal promotes a very specific type of meta-learning regarding its subject matter, which intrigues and attracts us.

This meta-learning is grounded in a peculiar circumstance; namely, that the journal itself, in terms of the way it was created and continues to operate, is an example of the type of initiative we have chosen to focus on in the journal. In my first editorial, this focus was defined as follows: “*ACE’s focus is on initiatives within the art and cultural sector that aim to establish new forms of organized practices*” (Ericsson, 2023, p. 2). That is, we direct our interest and curiosity towards ourselves and the ways in which we establish new forms of organised practices. And, by doing so, we become our own empirical material, so to speak. We thus learn about ourselves as we facilitate learning about and for others.

I believe that this meta-learning not only tickles our senses but also evokes an intriguing epistemological conundrum. Paraphrasing Graham Wallas’ (1926) famous maxim, it could be posed something like this: how can I know what I think about entrepreneurship in the field of art and

culture until I see how I act as an entrepreneur in the field of art and culture? Epistemologically-wise, I believe this conundrum is fruitful to explore in at least three different ways.

Firstly, it is of some importance that what we do depends on how we do what we do, and vice versa; that is, the product and the process are tightly interwoven. One can of course argue that cultural products and their underlying processes are always linked to another, at least in theory and to some extent empirically as well, but I believe we are dealing with a particularly strong relationship between the journal (the product) and its underlying processes in this case. Not only are the journal's content and all the different processes behind it (writing, editorial work, reviewing, etc.) intertwined, but they are also mutually constitutive, perhaps even mutually reinforcing.

This relationship does indeed affect our meta-learning, as both entrepreneurs and researchers on entrepreneurship in the field of art and culture. On the one hand, it stimulates the development of a kind of systemic knowledge, a know-how regarding the whole's relation to its parts; on the other hand, it encourages us to pay close attention to the unintended consequences of our various initiatives, from setting up the journal to every editorial decision we make. All in all, I believe this type of meta-learning imposes a moral obligation on the journal's editorial staff: to perform our academic duties in accordance with what we know, teach and preach about art, culture and entrepreneurship; and to treat others – specifically, the contributing researchers and artists – accordingly. While this is demanding, it is also fundamentally challenging in a positive manner. It forces us to try to practice the theories we hold dear, to experiment and to challenge our very assumptions about both theory and practice. Instead of cultivating a stale 'this is how we do it' approach, we embrace a creative 'what if...?' logic.

Secondly, I find it fruitful to acknowledge that, both in and through our initiative to found *Art, Culture & Entrepreneurship*, we have been acting into entrepreneurship in the field of art and culture, making us subjects of our own interest of knowledge. Within entrepreneurship research, this method of acting into a knowledge domain is well established in terms of interactive research, for example (Johannesson, 2005). As it happens, we have two telling examples of this method in this issue. Researcher Pär Strandberg follows an existential path as he decides to become a cultural entrepreneur and create music based on Vilhelm Moberg's novel *A Time on Earth* (Din stund på jorden) (1963) together with musician/producer Ola af Trampe (Strandberg & af Trampe, 2025); and writer Carola Mikaelsson (2025) engages in method writing to immerse herself into her stories' characters. Inspired by the latter, one could very well translate acting into entrepreneurship as a sort of method entrepreneurship – or, rather, *method entrepreneurship*, to accentuate the processual character of our endeavour.

Method entrepreneurship arguably evokes a very special form of self-reflexivity as the researcher or the artist experiences the conditions and processes of entrepreneurship first-handedly, so to speak, from within and through the body. These experiences make the assumptions one makes about oneself and one's work visible and brings them up for debate; it also triggers an active problematisation of the ontology of entrepreneurship. Such self-reflexivity, in turn, promotes the quality of research and artistry, although it also constitutes a kind of corrective against self-fulfilling prophecies (see Cinque & Ericsson, 2024). As such, it opens new and inspirational vistas for both researchers and artists to explore.

The third avenue to examine involves taking note of the fact that the journal can be seen as an allegory of its own mediation. This allegorical approach has followed me since I first read literary scholar Magnus Ullén's (2003) interpretation of the Swedish crime writer Liza Marklund's 1998 book *The Bomber* (Sprängaren) some two decades ago. In Ullén's reading, the book appears not only as fiction (a crime novel) but also as a text that ultimately deals with the task of fiction: as

in a mirror, the relationships between the book's hero, perpetrator and victim reflect the relationships between reader, author and text; moreover, as in a mirror, the fiction about a journalist reflects journalistic fiction.

I believe there is a great deal to the thesis Ullén formulates based on his interpretation of The Bomber: "*a text can always be read as an allegory of its own mediation*" (2003, p. 208, my translation). In other words, every text, on an almost normative metaphysical level, is about how readers and authors establish a relationship in and through the text. If we follow this reasoning and translate it into the activities of *Art, Culture & Entrepreneurship*, our journal emerges as an allegory of its own mediation, and the relational and processual aspects of the journal and its texts come into focus as well – especially the initiatives that aim to establish new forms of organised writing and reading practices. In other words, the allegorical approach reveals that the cultural entrepreneurship we are interested in is ultimately situated within the relationship between the editors, authors and readers of this journal.

New Vistas for Art, Culture and Entrepreneurship?

So, what have we learned thus far about entrepreneurship in the field of art and culture in and through our self-reflexive and allegorical method entrepreneurship? What emerges from our tickled senses and our embodied knowledge of taking initiative within the art and cultural sector to establish a new journal on art, culture and entrepreneurship? From my point of view, I have learnt two things above all: that entrepreneurship in the field of art and culture is paradoxically wicked and that there are certain things I would like to know more about.

Regarding the paradoxes we have encountered in the editorial team, most are somewhat elemental to organisation theory and practice, being about striking a balance between inner and outer efficiency (i.e. doing things right vs. doing the right things), centralisation and decentralisation, individualism and collectivism, chaos and order, and/or exploitation and exploration. Other paradoxes we have encountered may be more associated with life in academia, such as those between excellence and relevance and between understanding and explanation. Yet others have concerned cultural and artistic issues, such as overinterpretation and under-interpretation, and subjective and objective expressions. Taken together, all these paradoxes form a unique assemblage that has forced us to act and live while remaining on the fence, embracing 'both and' instead of taking 'either or' sides.

Remaining on the fence can be a painful experience, of course, especially if you believe in the possibility of finding a single best solution to the paradoxes you encounter. That belief could lead to a depressing stalemate, a never-ending quest for something to hold onto or even a 'difficult third album' situation. However, if you acknowledge that the paradoxes of entrepreneurship in the field of art and culture are wicked, in the sense of "*wicked problems*" (Rittel & Webber, 1973) – that is, with no stopping rules and no ready-made and general solutions – then the situation becomes somewhat less painful. Remaining on the fence becomes a matter of judgement, 'good enough' decisions and – most importantly – a sense of maintained agency: you are neither subject to the whims of fate nor a victim of circumstances. You are the architect of your own fortune. And this is a forceful antidote to alienation.

Regarding the things I would like to know more about, two stand out. The first concerns the most troublesome issue we have had to deal with: the strong dichotomy between art/culture and entrepreneurship, where the latter is understood as 'business' in terms of sheer economic rationality and opportunism, bordering on some sort of predatory capitalism. This dichotomy has made some artists suspicious about the journal's aims and scope and hesitant about contributing to the

journal. Is the journal really nothing but another neo-liberal attempt to colonise the art world by pushing artists and artistic works onto the market and thereby forcing artists to sell out in terms of both their works and their artistic integrity?

Trying to disassociate entrepreneurship from business and thereby dissolve this dichotomy by repeatedly explaining the non-colonising intention behind the journal, I have learnt that the deeper an individual is positioned within the field of art and culture – or the greater distance one experiences between one's own identity and the identity of a generalised entrepreneurial Other – the stronger this dichotomy seems. But I have also learnt that it might not be the art/entrepreneurship dichotomy in itself that appears appalling. Rather, it is a similar but different dichotomy: the opposition between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (see also Ericsson & Strandberg, 2025). Not only are artistic values and integrity at stake; the communal, voluntary and non-instrumental aspects of artistic work processes also hang in the balance. This is certainly something worth studying!

The other thing I would like to know more about is related to the least troublesome experience I have had in the process of enacting a journal devoted to art, culture and entrepreneurship – namely, the embeddedness of our initiative. Contrary to our expectations, it was quite easy to set up the journal once the idea had arisen and we had begun to envision the journal. As it happened, our initiative was greeted with open arms by the librarians at Linnaeus University, who were able to provide us with both competencies and resources. A complete infrastructure and a professional network were at our disposal, guiding us on how to proceed and enabling us to realise our idea. You could say that they provided us with a trampoline, and all we had to do was jump into the unknown. For this support, we are truly thankful.

The embeddedness of entrepreneurship – as well as the importance of infrastructure and networks for entrepreneurs – is of course well-known in both theory and practice. In the field of art and culture, however, it seems less acknowledged, and I am curious to learn more about the field's different 'trampolines'. What do they compromise? Do they differ in different parts of the field? How do they function? Do they carry entrepreneurs with high-flying ideas, or do they restrain entrepreneurs' visions, keeping them close to the ground?

In the end, my reflections seem to lead to a kind of research proposal for a project dedicated to the study of method entrepreneurship in the field of art and culture, paying special attention to certain key facets of this topic: its inherent paradoxes; its communal, voluntary and non-instrumental aspects; and its embeddedness. Or, why not a research programme based on several different empirical studies? It is clear that method entrepreneurship comes in many different shapes, which are probably dependent on the specific institutional context. This in turn opens up a wide range of possibilities, including developing a differentiated theoretical framework, bringing art and culture closer to entrepreneurship, and vice versa. Would that not be a truly delightful programme?

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