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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Understanding Creative Entrepreneurs' Work Practices: The Varying Conversation between Artistic and Economic Rationales

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Abstract

Research on creative organizations often questions how artistic practices can be squared within the rational decision-making of economic thinking. This paper examines how the relational language, or conversation, between artistic and economic rationales unfolds for creative entrepreneurs. Through ethnographic work with a designer-entrepreneur, this paper presents a fine-grained analysis of the conversation the designer cultivates between artistic and economic rationales through work practices. We contribute to the literature about artistic and economic rationales at work, and more specifically to the concept of conversation. First, we show that high levels of conversing make way for low levels of conversing and vice versa. In the studio, the designer's engagement with either rationale varies as the creative process progresses. Second, on a more global dynamic, we demonstrate the conversation is continuous. It relies on its variations, which ensure the balance between rationales in the long run. We also contribute to the field of creative entrepreneurship research. We identify here one type of creative entrepreneur, with what we call a 'small is beautiful' attitude. Far from the mythical figure of the entrepreneur, this unconventional entrepreneur aims for sustainable use of creative resources rather than growth at all costs.

Keywords: *Creative industries; creative entrepreneurship; artistic; economic; conversation*

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Research and industry scholarship often underline the contention arising within creative companies, where artistic rationales have to be squared with economic ones (DeFillippi et al., 2007; Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Jones et al., 2015; Lampel et al., 2000; Linstead, 2010). Creative companies are organized around the production and circulation of 'non-material goods directed at a public of consumers for whom they generally serve an aesthetic or expressive, rather than clearly utilitarian function' (Hirsch, 1972, p. 641). Conflicts keep arising between the imperative of the relentless creation of new genres, formats, and products on the one hand, and economic viability on the other (DeFillippi et al., 2007; Eikhof, 2015). Most creative workers have to operate both within and by economic rules and boundaries to effect creative propositions. A lot is still unknown, though, about how they deal with artistic and economic practices in their work, and how these practices shape both their behaviors and organizations (Austin et al., 2018).

In research, two approaches currently prevail. Insisting on conflict, a first stream of literature presents the market's 'crowding out' of creativity. Consequently, creative individuals, or 'creatives', tend to resist or disregard economic concerns (Caves, 2002; DeFillippi et al., 2007; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; Glynn, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Jones et al., 2016; Linstead, 2010; Thompson et al., 2007). For others, conflict still exists but can be successfully managed, and the tensions between art and economy are seen as 'two sides of the same coin' (Davis & Scase, 2000; DeFillippi et al., 2007; Gotsi et al., 2010). The theoretical landscape is fragmented. Austin et al. (2018) propose a unified vision by looking at the tensions between art and economy as the basis of the work of creative types. Drawing on some fieldwork in a design company, and in line with some of the recent developments in this literature (Harvey, 2014; Jones et al., 2016; Montanari et al., 2016), they support a discourse approach where a relational language or *conversation* is established between the two rationales. A conversation is 'a way of dialogically

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relating conflicting concerns in creative companies' (Austin et al., 2018, p. 11). The economic and aesthetic, they say, can be constructively combined when able to converse. A 'space for collaborative creativity' (Austin et al., 2018, p. 13) might stem from their reunion, thanks to the openness, generosity, and acceptance of the need to 'live with' the other's otherness and the conflicting rationales. This paper posits that conversation is a key conceptual object for studying the interrelations between rationales. Still, as Austin et al. (2018) state, attempts to investigate empirically how this conversation unfolds in creative firms remain few and fragmentary. They call for more theory that is specific to creative work and at a variety of levels. Research explaining how artistic and economic rationales shape modes of work in creative processes is still scarce (see also Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007 or Jones et al., 2016). Answering their call, hence paying heed to the relational or 'living with' perspective (Austin et al., 2018; Harvey, 2014; Jones et al., 2016; Montanari et al., 2016), this paper investigates empirically how the conversation unfolds in the work of a creative entrepreneur.

This paper thus relates creative organizing and conversation to creative entrepreneurship. Previous research has approached the specific identity of creative entrepreneurs, which combines the artistic and economic value systems (Bérubé, 2019; Enhuber, 2014). The art/economic coupling is what makes creative entrepreneurship specific (Hausmann & Heinz, 2016; Horvath & Dechamp, 2020). Creative entrepreneurs embody this combination of rationales at work. They constantly juggle artistic design practice and economic decision-making while managing their business. For this reason, this paper posits they are especially interesting to observe when focusing on the conversation between rationales at an individual level. How this 'inner' conversation can be managed through work practices is not yet understood. On the ground, the conversation between artistic and economic rationales for creative entrepreneurs is nested within their work practices. In other words, the only way to access their 'inner' conversation at play is to observe the interrelations between their artistic and economic work practices. There is very little research focusing on creative entrepreneurship beyond the organizational (Loots et al., 2018; Scott, 2012), collective (Chen et al., 2015; Konrad, 2013), or strategic levels (Hausmann, 2010; Thom, 2016). Observing this type of tension when analyzing the day-to-day practices of the creative entrepreneur has potential for the relatively young field of creative entrepreneurship research (Hausmann & Heinz, 2016). Hence, the following research question: How do creative entrepreneurs make artistic and economic rationales converse through their work practices?

This paper unfolds as follows. First, there is a description of how current research discusses the organization of conflict between the economic and creative rationales for creative workers, and then there is a more specific focus on creative entrepreneurs. The research setting is presented and a

description of the everyday work of Elle, the creative entrepreneur in charge of the *Elle Fonta* fashion house. For this particular creative entrepreneur, the findings reveal two variations of the conversation. The first details the artistic and economic perspectives feeding each other and uniting – a high level of conversing with suppliers when purchasing fabric. The second reveals an erosion in the conversation. An imbalance between artistic and economic perspectives predominates – low levels of conversing when selling the collection to buyers. Variations, or consecutive high and low levels of conversing, ensure balance in the long run. Thinking through the variations allows the changes in the conversation to be identified and characterized. We contribute to the literature about artistic and economic rationales at work, as well as to the field of creative entrepreneurship research. Our findings bring to light one type of creative entrepreneur, who favors 'small is beautiful' over growth. This paper ends by opening the discussion on unconventional creative entrepreneurship, inviting reflections on today's heterogeneous ways of doing business for a creative entrepreneur.

Conceptual framework

Creative products and services are simultaneously artistic creations and economic outcomes, and this dual nature challenges work practices for creative entrepreneurs. Following a relational approach, we rely on the concept of conversation to better understand how such entrepreneurs deal with this challenge in their work practices.

From the challenge of combining artistic and economic rationales...

Many scholars looking at the practical business of creating and selling creative goods mention the gap between economic goods and creative values (for a selection, see Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006; Glynn, 2000; Guillet de Monthoux, 2004; Menger, 1999). If the traditional textbook view of management is to be believed, the economic world is dominated by rationality and planning (Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Koivunen, 2009), whereas creativity is connected with risk and randomness (Sutton, 2001) and is unpredictable in terms of financial gains (Flew, 2012). This creates tension between artistic ideals and the control needed for markets to work. Glynn and Lounsbury's work (2005) perfectly illustrates this; the slow decline of a symphony orchestra's artistic integrity once market influences are incorporated into decisions.

Following this conflict-oriented approach, creatives have such a far-divorced work *ethos* they are said to have a negative vision of management (DeFillippi et al., 2007; Paalumäki & Virtaniemi, 2009), often rebelling against efforts to direct their work toward economic objectives (Slavich & Svejnova, 2016). Koivunen (2009) reveals dualities between the two rival

figures of the 'genius' versus the 'manager' or the 'bohemian-artist' versus the 'conservative organization-person', as they share wholly different interests and priorities. In their work on public theaters, Eikhof and Haunschild (2007) insist the quantifiable economic rationale inevitably dominates the vague and nonmeasurable artistic rationale, as it is much stronger and robust (even when those theaters are publicly funded). The studies of Epstein (2005) and Mezias and Mezias (2000) on film studios, or Voss et al. (2000) on theaters, also tend to confirm this stance as they demonstrate the tensions between creative and financial plans are settled by the domination of one specific force, that is, the pursuit of financial security.

This challenge to reconcile artistic with economic considerations is perhaps even greater in today's 'creativity *dispositif*' (Reckwitz, 2014), where creativity and creatives have become such valuable assets. Since the late 20th century, the work of creatives has been increasingly situated within profit-oriented 'commercial bureaucracies' (Davis & Scase, 2000). The hype surrounding creative industries is embedded in a certain neoliberal political and economic paradigm involving increasingly intensive economization of creative practices (Jones et al., 2016; Linstead, 2010) and 'corporate colonization' (Aroles et al., 2021). This economization of practices in creative spheres is visible through constant rationalization efforts, defined by Tschang (2007) as 'a predominant focus on business interests or productivity-oriented production processes, usually at the expense of creativity' (p. 989). Approaching creativity through space makes it possible to delimit spaces that are conditioned, but some spaces emerge that are also less constrained than others (Leclair, 2023). Yet, the overall evolution of creative industries, Tschang (2007) insists, tends to be driven by a deeper, continuing tension between the forces for creativity and those for more economic interests, and this rationalization context has shrunk the creative scope of individuals. In this approach, 'managing by getting out of the way' ends up being the best option (Sutton, 2001, p. 1).

... to a possible conversation between them

Taking a step back, Linstead (2010) highlights the long history of challenge and duality between creative workers and their economic duties. He underlines an ambivalent relationship between economization and artistry that translates into a 'dilemma of commodification' for creative workers, who have always had to reconcile both values in their day-to-day practices. From this point on, the 'uncreative' activities surrounding creativity also become vital to the creative process (Becker, 1982; Bilton, 2011). The challenge, then, lies in finding the right balance between the two sides, understood as 'two sides of the same coin' (Gotsi et al., 2010, p. 799).

Reconciling aesthetic goals with economic needs is doubtless an ongoing effort, but following this stream of research, economics does not necessarily have to dominate, and ways of successfully

managing the conflict have been identified. Segregating roles in time and space through differentiation practices is one solution to the problem (Leclair, 2018), with another being integration through a temporary and synergistic meta-identity as 'practical artistry' (Gotsi et al., 2010). Here, the paradox is welcomed, and managing both rationales ends up being about welcoming the tensions arising from the confrontation. This acceptance of the conflict and the effort at maintaining the interaction is what drives the creative process forward. The same effort is noticed in Montanari et al.'s (2016) study, where the relational processes at work enable artists (in this case, choreographers) to gain organizational support for their artistic boldness. The relational approach unfolding here rests upon both/and thinking, denying insurmountable dichotomies, whereas the conflict-oriented stream of research implies either/or thinking and constructs the dilemma in terms of mutually exclusive opposites.

Austin et al. (2018) seem to propose a unified vision of the fragmented field by looking at the tensions between art and economics as the basis of the work of creative types. Both imperatives come together through creative work in what they call a 'conversation', which is 'a way of dialogically relating conflicting concerns' (p. 1511). This unlikely conversation is vital in creative companies, as it provides the context and frame to produce creative outcomes in a collective manner. It relies on four necessary 'circumstances' (Austin et al., 2018, p. 1516): (1) interaction; (2) shared roles; (3) conflict; and (4) pursuit of unity. A 'sharing commitment to norms of interaction' happens when daily interactions are fundamentally dialogical, meaning when they involve 'close and frequent association between different people, viewpoints, and methods' (Austin et al., 2018, p. 1508). 'Shared roles' means that roles are not confining, rejecting the idea that workers should stick to their professional roles (whether artistic or commercial). It involves an 'ethos of openness to commentary' (Austin et al., 2018, p. 1509), regardless of roles. Designers can criticize strategy, and strategists can comment on design. The third dimension focuses on 'conflict'. Here, differing viewpoints have to be heard and interactions have to be 'honest' (Austin et al., 2018, p. 1510). Discomfort is not avoided. Conditions are met to keep conflicting factors present within work processes. Finally, the 'pursuit of unity' means the overall ambition is about achieving a unity of outcomes that integrates both economic and aesthetic concerns, as conflicting as they may be. Choices and behaviors should reveal and demonstrate this concern.

The ultimate interest of this perspective lies in the new and liberating feeling of being comfortable in dealing with tensions. The diversity of viewpoints is understood as enriching, and welcomed as such. Within this form of conversation, artistic/economic interactions between the creative and commercial are not avoided but needed, and the conflict inherent to the work involved is accepted accordingly. The synthesis emerging in the form of outcomes does not resolve opposing tensions between

orientations within the organization (on this, see also George, 2007; Harvey, 2014). Tensions remain in play, without fundamentally polluting the creative work process. Once combined in creative work, conflicting rationales are nurtured through agents' generosity, courage (to play along), and openness to 'the other's otherness' (Austin et al., 2018). The ensemble formed is understood as a desired, enhanced state of collaboration that a group of agents with divergent ideas strives for and (sometimes) achieves. With that ambition, an open attitude toward 'living with' conflicting rationales is more productive than attempting to resolve the conflict. A theory of creative work based on conversation invites consideration of when and whether unity is successfully attained, or not. By the same premise, this paper is trying to deepen the conversation generated by the cohabitation of artistic and economic activities, rather than trying to understand the mechanisms of protection or cancelation of these conflicts. Creative entrepreneurs embody this combination of rationales (Bérubé, 2019; Enhuber, 2014) or conversations (Austin et al., 2018), and for that reason, it is especially interesting to observe them, complementing existing research.

The missing spot: Creative entrepreneurs

A creative entrepreneur generates revenue from a creative activity (Enhuber, 2014). Creative entrepreneurship is an area of study in itself (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). It is a research field specifically focusing on 'the individual activities undertaken to discover, evaluate, and exploit a commercial business opportunity within the creative industries' (Hausmann & Heinze, 2016, p. 17). Research to date has mostly been concerned with exploring success factors when putting artistry to the market (Dechamp & Horvath, 2018; Enhuber, 2014). Studies often underline creatives' lack of knowledge, skills or even interest in economic orientation, and advance solutions such as informal or formal cooperation with peers via social networking, art incubators, or joint ventures (Konrad, 2013; Loots et al., 2018; Scott, 2012). All in all, there is little analysis focusing on creative entrepreneurship beyond the organizational (Loots et al., 2018; Scott, 2012), collective (Chen et al., 2015; Konrad, 2013), or strategic levels (Hausmann, 2010; Thom, 2016).

Furthermore, the literature explains how organizations or teams succeed at a strategic level, without going into detail about what happens 'on the ground', where day-to-day social processes constitute the data (Glaser, 1978). Yet, the question of how settlement works between artistic and economic rationales is often nested within the 'on the ground' relationships between creative agents and commercial inputs (Austin et al., 2018; Caves, 2002; Van Iterson et al., 2017). Recent research thus encourages taking these paths, such as an individual focus and/or on the ground understandings of entrepreneurship, between artistic and economic imperatives (Bérubé, 2019; Enhuber, 2014; Horvath & Dechamp, 2020).

Thompson et al. (2007) have long pointed to this missing link that [leaves] a gap where concrete analysis of [creative] work should be (p. 625). More recently, Austin et al. (2018) also underline how, unfortunately, the art/economic analysis rarely extends to the level of work processes. For that reason, we decided to approach the work of an individual through her work practices.

By specifically choosing to address creative entrepreneurs' practices, this paper situates human actions as central to organizational outcomes, in line with increasing recognition of the importance of practices in the ongoing operations of organizations (Barley & Kunda, 2001; Corradi et al., 2010; Gherardi, 2017, 2022). Earlier research specifically calls for more studies approaching creativity through work practices (Bucic & Gudergan, 2004; Marechal, 2013; Van Iterson et al., 2017). *How do creative entrepreneurs make artistic and economic rationales converse through their work practices?* By engaging in ethnographic work in a small business in the fashion industry, we have been able to observe the conversation at play for a specific designer.

Research context and method

Elle Fonta is a small fashion house and brand in Paris, named after Elle, its founder. The studio consists of Elle and Ada, an assistant designer who helps with the design processes and everyday work. Elle also works with an accountant, a model maker, and three manufacturers in Paris whom she deals with daily. The company has been in business for 20 years in the very competitive market of high-end *prêt-à-porter* fashion lines. As a creative entrepreneur and the CEO, Elle continuously balances creative design practice with business management. Much of her job is about knowing how to manage an imbroglio of design projects evolving at different rates while carrying out many economic obligations.

Elle Fonta completes two collections per year (autumn/winter and spring/summer), each composed of about 60 pieces that are then produced to order (purchase) for retailers. The collections are sold in concept stores or small clothing outlets by retailers looking to work with innovative designers. Collections are sold to these retailers at trade fairs that take place twice a year: *Tranoi* (Paris) and *Designers & Agents* (New York). Elle has to get it right – the success of each collection dictates if and how the next one can be created. She produces an average of 2,500 pieces each season, most of which are exported to retailers in Europe, Asia, the United States, and the Middle East.

Data collection

The first author spent three¹ months in the studio of Parisian designer *Elle Fonta* as an intern, helping out with

¹ Three months is significant as it corresponds to the exact amount of time spent on the design of a new collection (the 2016 spring/summer collection).

various daily activities: drawing lines on pattern templates, cutting fabric, sewing buttons, and office work. She took notes about ongoing activities and interactions, as well as verbatim quotes from discussions and nondirective interviews with participants. This level of observation made it possible to access the individual conversation by observing the person *in situ* and be present, therefore, for the key moments. Every evening, the first author cleaned up her notes² and diarized her first thoughts and basic ideas about anything potentially involved in the various artistic – economic combinations.

To provide a fine-grained analysis of the relational language between artistic and economic rationales, clear-cut 'meeting points' or detailed moments that count (Courpasson, 2020) needed to be pinpointed. The challenge was to identify such key moments where cohabitation is explicit, making the observation and data collection sharper and more precise. Generally, zooming in on some parts of the whole image helps in finding the most interesting and incisive parts to work with and emphasize (Gioia et al., 2012; Nicolini, 2012). Two moments of this kind, of explicit economic contact with the market, exist: the purchase point (with suppliers) and sales (with retailers). As a fashion designer, Elle has to select and purchase stock or materials (mainly fabrics) for her business, but she also has to sell her designs to retailers. These two roles naturally stood out while collecting the data, following the first hints in the field about the particularly crucial, as well as representative, nature of the conversation at play the rest of the time. For these two emblematic moments, the next step is to more deeply analyze the conversation at play during them.

Data analysis

Close familiarity with the data came from the first author being deeply immersed and participating in it (Gioia et al., 2012). 'Rich and insightful descriptions' (Dumez, 2011, p. 49) from her diary constituted the data, showcasing the actors and actions. Together, the two authors then read and reread the transcripts of the field notes and the collected materials about purchases and sales. The analysis was based on an iterative process of reading and scrutinizing the data and constant reflection (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010; Madden, 2010) on what emerged as intelligible regarding the conversation, with a special focus on the four dimensions of Austin et al.'s (2018) conversation framework (interaction, shared roles, conflict, and pursuit of unity). During these exchanges, the authors progressively started talking about variations, to grasp the ups and

downs they could observe within the conversation in the data. The four dimensions were relied on to embody these high and low levels of conversing for the reader. These dimensions together with Table 1 help the reader understand the data treatment process and how the authors operationalized the conversation concept to build their variations.

Following the initial stages of analysis, 'cycling' (Gioia et al., 2012) was begun between the emergent data, themes (the cohabitation of rationales), concepts (the conversation and its four dimensions), and any relevant literature. The validation process of the verbatim quotes and diary extracts analyses was held during these exchanges between the authors. Upon consulting the literature, the research process evolved toward 'abductive' research, in that data and existing theory were now considered in tandem (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Gioia et al., 2012). In the following findings, diary extracts are used to provide an accurate picture of what happens in those moments where the artistic explicitly meets the economic.

Findings: The conversation's variations for a fashion designer

Elle enters the creative process when purchasing fabrics, meaning during an activity underpinned by economic stakes. The creative act supporting the designing activity starts as soon as she handles the fabric. She starts experimenting and interacting with it immediately, while coping with prices and costs. As will be demonstrated, the moment she buys the fabric is, overall, a moment of maximum creative potentiality, where difference and contradiction is welcomed. Through her daily actions, she makes artistic and economic rationales converse. Later, during sales, the presence of the artistic rationales is less and less visible, more and more silenced by the finish. Designers have to go to trade fairs to sell their line. Garments need to be wearable and resonate with potential buyers. This final step of the process, which usually comes with high levels of apprehension, also comes with low levels of conversing.

The following suite of variations characterizes the evolution of the conversation between artistic and economic rationales over time for this designer. The various actions Elle leads in the studio unfold to reveal *how* she makes artistic and economic rationales converse along with the two emblematic moments discussed.

First variation: High levels of conversing

At the start of each new collection, Elle orders small quantities of fabrics she likes for developing prototypes.

² In the end, the volume of cleaned-up notes totalled 100 pages.

Diary extract 1 – Fabric fairs:

I'm talking with Elle about fabrics and fabric fairs. She likes going there, getting to touch, handle, and be inspired by both new and traditional fabrics. First, she selects an array of samples, and then, a few days later, she makes up her mind on the one she prefers and emails the suppliers to ask for a price. Sometimes it is too expensive, so she goes back to the samples she gathered to select new ones. She typically gets many, many samples at the fabric fairs, after which she will progressively sort through them. She says, 'in the fair, after a while, you saturate. It's just too much fabric. Like in a perfume shop, it becomes overpowering, you can't take it anymore. It's good that you can first take samples then choose later on in the following weeks'. Once Elle has enquired about prices and the minimum quantities that can be ordered (fabric suppliers always set a minimum quantity), she asks for a 'coupe type'. This is the first piece of fabric submitted (by suppliers) to the designer and serves as a reference for future production. This piece of fabric allows the two designers to produce a prototype piece in the studio and, together, all the prototypes will constitute a whole collection, 3 months later.

Elle often talks about these fabric fairs, a fabric she saw there, and how it made her think of this other thing, then something else, and so on. Going to fabric fairs is the first step in the creative process, as the fabric is the main source of inspiration. Interestingly, fabrics seem to bring renewal. The 'encounter' with materials has the power to create images that act upon her thinking.

Diary extract 2 – New fabrics:

This morning I asked Ada how Elle finds the will to start a new collection, knowing that when they have to start the next collection (e.g. summer 22), they also have to send the previous collection to buyers (summer 21) and launch the just-finished collection (winter 21/22) with the manufacturers, which means they are juggling three collections at once. She instantly replies, 'We go get the new fabrics... (...) and it's those new fabrics that spur us to start again as soon as possible'. Ada stops what she is doing to show me the various fabric samples, explaining how they build the collection out of those initial purchases, describing the suppliers behind the samples – mostly Italian companies – and the characteristics of each fabric, the item they start to imagine from those tiny pieces of material...

Buying the fabric is also central to discussions with manufacturers. Manufacturers often complain about the fabrics, commenting on their price. Differing viewpoints are heard. Several times, one of the manufacturers is heard telling the designers that the fabrics they buy are too expensive. Most of the time, Elle listens. Roles are fluid, comments can come from anyone. There is a shared belief in the legitimacy and necessity of differing viewpoints. In the following episode, for example,

another manufacturer suggests ordering from a cheaper supplier:

Diary extract 3 – Listening to manufacturers:

I am going with Elle to [the manufacturer] to discover the fabric they just got in from the supplier. 'Discover' is the proper term. Four months ago, Elle chose a specific fabric (with parallel lines) to prototype a T-shirt, and there were many orders for this item at fairs. After that, [the manufacturer] told her they knew a supplier who had the same fabric at half the price. So, she took the decision to choose 300 meters of this less-expensive fabric for production, but since then she has agonized over the decision and keeps saying it was a mistake, 'maybe it was a stupid move. I'm afraid the fabric won't be good enough quality'. She did not feel comfortable having to change supplier, but she had to cover her costs. That made her make up her mind. (...) At [the manufacturer], we discover the fabric and, luckily, it is of good quality. Elle handles it, cuts it, checks its robustness for a long time before slowly smiling and then starting to imagine even more pieces using it, drawing lines in the air to imagine the future piece in volume.

Frequent contact is how Elle maintains conditions that keep conflicting rationales present within work processes. Negotiation between rationales is even more important than the eventual conflict resolution. It builds a common culture and the mutual understanding necessary for conversation. The exchange of views is essential within this iterative process.

Diary extract 4 – Economic concerns:

I ask Elle if she had already thought of using cashmere. Elle: 'Impossible, it's too expensive'. Me: 'But aren't people ready to pay good money for high-quality cashmere?' Elle: 'No, because now mass-market brands are selling it for less than 100 Euros'. Me: 'But how do they manage with their costs?' Elle: 'They manufacture in China'.

Here, Elle explicitly voices economic concerns. She is always conscious of the need to cover costs but does not always act accordingly. The confrontation between rationales is not avoided but accepted as part of the process. Through this ethos of openness, things can move on.

Diary extract 5 – Artistic priorities:

Elle starts cutting a skirt in a grey jersey fabric, then realizes she wastes a lot of material while cutting the pattern. The different pieces of the pattern are adjusted to the fabric while cutting it, but sometimes it's hard to fill the space between pieces, which generates a lot of scrap off-cuts. Elle hesitates, 'Do we stick with this fabric?' She goes into the next room and checks the price, and finds it is '€15 for 1 meter', which is expensive. She hesitates, as she could swap the grey jersey for a far cheaper black cotton... 'Ok. Let's stick with the jersey, now we've started'. The choice of fabrics is not always dictated by price. I can see she definitely wants to work with jersey, handle jersey, find creative solutions with jersey, and what she has in mind and in her hands does not 'fit' with black cotton.

Here, Elle is able to say 'no' to the economic choice and avoid compromising her artistic values. The changes, if agreed to, would have sacrificed artistic for economics. Friction also provides an opportunity to practice a 'warding off' attitude. Elle makes the effort to seek balance. She makes sure artistic rationales remain present this time, when economic rationales were favored at other times (see diary extracts 3 and 4). All in all, her decisions are based on what (she feels) is right for the design, as well as for clients.

These field-note extracts illustrate the creative process is not excluded from the purchasing activities but is effectively part of them. The creative process starts at the fabric fairs, which are key creative moments. Several times Elle expresses a renewed commitment to keeping both concerns present, what Austin et al. (2018) call a 'multi-voiced process'. Fabric is considered with respect to its price, obviously, but also with respect to its evocative power. At the beginning, Elle takes time, experiments, and proceeds by trial and error. Economic choices also pave the way. Her attitude is not one of defiance or provocation toward such choices.

Purchasing activities involve this maximum openness. When the designers interact with sellers (mostly from Italy), they talk about the material's characteristics and properties, which are sources of inspiration for the new collection. A relationship with a seller develops over time. Sellers know the designers, how they work with fabric, and also their preferences in terms of colors and experiments, or requirements in terms of solidity and thickness. The many interactions imply close and frequent associations with economic rationales for Elle. Inner conversation between rationales is at its highest point, as Elle engages and gets involved in discussions with the sellers, with both rationales in mind. She is committed to making perspectives converse, talking about numbers (prices, quantities) but also about design possibilities and desires. Moments of negotiation naturally emerge and are encouraged. The purchasing process is melded with creative rationales as there are many possibilities expanding from it. There is space for both artistic and economic practices to unfold. One does not dominate the other, and the comings and goings between them are incessant, materializing in the conversation at work.

In quite opposite terms, toward the end, the process becomes much faster, and less time is devoted to creative intentions and endeavors. After a few months, there is no time left for experiments; Elle needs to sell her designs. Economic rationales become more prevalent. And lower levels of conversing are observed.

Second variation: Low levels of conversing

The result of 3 months of designing is around 60 prototypes setting the tone for the season. At the end, creative practices

become scarce. Conversation dries up. At trade fairs, the designers show the prototypes to sales representatives for clothing stores worldwide.

As the new collection nears completion, Elle starts mentioning the potential reaction of buyers – she never did this beforehand. With trade fairs getting nearer, the garment-in-the-making becomes closer to being ready-to-sell, and thus takes on more economic rationales. Elle herself recognizes the designing process has come to an end. It is difficult not to notice the slow emergence of the shadow cast by buyers and fashion decision-makers. They progressively materialize.

Diary extract 6 – The stress of pricing:

It is now time to fix prices. Ada says, 'fixing prices, it stresses us out! I mean, it concretizes the work, you know. So, it becomes real, and so it's necessarily stressful. Trade fairs are coming, and I can feel that the atmosphere in the studio is changing. Clothes now shift to enter the business side. I mention this to Ada, who approves. She tells me they really do not like going to trade fairs, 'it's just a bad time to pass'. Labels are put on garments, and garments ironed and prepared for the upcoming trade fairs. As the deadline approaches, economic interests make their presence felt in the studio, in a strange, i.e. 'heavy' way.

Work practices now focus on presenting the collection, which is when creative studio-objects become high-end fashion commodities. Elle gets ready to move to the outside world and take on an 'industry professional' persona. The new collection of prototypes is presented to a prominent audience of buyers in specific exhibition spaces, after which it will be produced in quantities according to the orders placed at these fairs, before being shipped all over the world.

The time has come to put lots of care into presenting the garments, naturally going through the 'external appearance', adding worth and significance through the many other affective interacting elements, such as hair and makeup for pictures or accessories to present next to the garments on the clothing rack at the fair. The collection now looks and appears professional. More space is given to the radiant aura around the clothes, ironing out evidence of the improvisational reality of spontaneous actions that are, for the most part, associated with creative actions. The crystallization process starts with an initial messy design state and ends up in a much more rationalized process marked by measuring techniques (how much fabric will be necessary for orders), fixing prices, grading (adjustments for sizes), and the design of silhouettes (presentation of clothes to the buyers). Creative rationales are shut down for these steps. The dominance of the economic perspective is palpable. Big buyers can even have an influence on the line, as they may ask for specific designs that would 'sell more'.

Diary extract 7 – The power of big buyers:

It is the end of the day, I am working on threads and ironing special versions for one of the big buyers that ordered a sleeveless dress. Ada explains that during trade fairs, big buyers sometimes ask for specific designs: this blue dress in beige, this short skirt in long, this shirt sleeveless, etc. Elle often sees no sense in what demanding buyers ask for, but follows their requests as she cannot possibly refuse the money they bring in. Likewise, some pieces might be dropped after the fairs if they do not catch enough attention – i.e. orders – from buyers.

The meeting of perspectives results in silence rather than a multivoiced dialogue. At trade fairs, Elle waits for people's reactions, looking out for any appreciation of the collection. Even though she is a professional designer, showing a new collection is exciting yet always a source of anxiety. This extract shows there is also no parity of status between rationales anymore. If her designs fail to resonate, her future business might run into trouble.

In these moments, the roles are confining. Elle dissociates herself and her designs from the company: her brand name (the fashion house's name) is *Elle Fonta*, whereas the company's name is *El*. She consciously uses two different names, so when she talks about economic obligations, she talks about *El*, in evidently impersonal terms, as if it were not hers. Some business-related activities actually happen in parallel, as emails between the financial and accounting persons show: Elle is copied in but does not intervene in the exchange and communication between them. *El* happens autonomously. These two names and entities embody the differentiation between the artistic and economic roles.

Performing as a seller is sometimes necessary when buyers visit the studio. This splitting between rationales is illustrated when a buyer from Canada has an appointment in the studio. Elle is so late she barely sees the buyer, and Ada has to take care of the meeting on her own. The following extract illustrates Elle's closed attitude to the other (here, the buyer), materialized in her provocative attitude. There is no effort to remain engaged with the other and to maintain multiple voices, including conflicting ones, in close juxtaposition.

Diary extract 8 – No engagement with buyers:

I come in the studio with Elle, around 11. The buyer is here and has been for an hour. She [the buyer] is already done with her selection. Elle does not ask about the buyer's order or opinion of the new line. She will have a look at the order form, but only once

the buyer has left. She is not curious about her opinion of the new collection and does not even ask the buyer a single question, even though she had flown in all the way from Canada! She totally avoids any small talk. I am intrigued about why she makes so little effort, and it is obvious she just wants the visit to end. And when, at last, the buyer leaves, she looks relieved. (...) It really feels like buyers are not welcome around the clothes. How many times in the studio do I hear things like 'buyers really think they can get whatever they want' or 'buyers are just wheeler-dealers; they don't care about design at all'.

Elle does not engage in substantial investment in the interaction, not even responding to the buyer's tentative attempt to establish contact. She is hard on buyers who she solely associates with economic rationales. There is no sharing with buyers, no openness to the other. This outside interaction illustrates how her own conversation becomes fractured.

Work intensification through growth is another typical consequence of the economization process resisted at *Elle Fonta*. Elle could produce more, as demand for her collections is constantly increasing. However, growing bigger and investing in commercial means or communication would mean less time for designing, and Elle willingly rejects that. Her experience is that artistic rationales do not have a voice at these steps. Refusing to invest time and energy in these is her way of maintaining design control, not 'giving in' totally to economic rationales and the expected way of doing things within those. She is trying to develop a successful business venture, yet this is fueled by motives superseding the rational search for profit. Far from mass manufacture, less than 2,500 pieces are produced each season. Elle takes these decisions based on what kind of fashion house she wants to be, hence bringing back in the artistic voice. With these medium-volume series, *Elle Fonta*, the brand, is currently available at more than 50 outlets across the world. With no need for the runway presentations of directly operated boutiques, and no desire to refine her brand image or design a commercial strategy, Elle does not connect artistic rationales with economic ones here. Her brand name, in fact, is her own moniker, written in lowercase letters.

To conclude, and building on key scenes from the field, the findings reveal two facets of conversation, one with high levels of conversing where artistic and economic rationales feed each other, and the other with low levels of conversing, where conversation struggles and the imbalance between rationales predominates. In the first transformation step (purchases), the two rationales are coupled, whereas in the final steps of the

Table 1. Findings: a summary

| The four dimensions of the conversation (Austin et al., 2018) | Dialogical interaction | Confining of roles | Conflict | Pursuit of unity |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| Its variations | | | | |
| First variation (high levels of conversing) | Commitment to interaction: – <i>differing viewpoints (manufacturers, sellers) are heard/shared belief in their necessity</i> – <i>ethos of openness during purchasing activities</i> e.g. extracts 1, 2 | Trading roles: – <i>designer voices economic concerns, and sellers voice artistic ones</i> – <i>contacts are frequent and being fostered</i> e.g. extract 4 | Conflict is welcome: – <i>prices are negotiated, as well as design possibilities</i> – <i>at certain points, designer says 'no' to external suggestions</i> e.g. extract 5 | Striving for unity in outcomes: – <i>Several times designer expresses renewed commitment to both concerns</i> – <i>favors aesthetic rationales at times, and economic rationales at others in a fluid-like manner</i> e.g. extract 3 |
| Second variation (low levels of conversing) | No commitment to interaction: – <i>no sharing of information with buyers</i> – <i>provocative attitude during selling activities</i> e.g. extract 8 | Roles are confining: – <i>designer dissociates herself from the company (different names)</i> – <i>no effort whatsoever to perform as a seller</i> e.g. extract 6 | Conflict is avoided: – <i>big buyers influence the line to 'sell more' and designer cannot afford to say 'no'</i> – <i>no parity of status between rationales anymore</i> e.g. extract 7 | No striving for unity in outcomes: – <i>creative rationales are shut down during rationalized process at the end</i> e.g. measuring techniques, fixing prices, grading – <i>economic rationales are shut down when resisting work intensification and overall growth</i> e.g. medium-volume series, no marketing strategy |

process (sales), those same rationales become more and more disjointed, illustrating how much easier the conversation is at the beginning rather than at the end for this designer.

Table 1 summarizes the aforementioned findings, highlighting a few representative examples of the whole story.

During the purchasing phase, the designer makes a genuine effort to achieve conversation and avoid the dominance of one rationale over the other. Tensions exist between artistic and economic rationales, yet the commitment to conversation focuses the designer on the in-between, the 'with' (Austin et al., 2018, p. 1512), rather than on expected or taken-for-granted identities. At the end, when selling the collection, Elle does not make an effort. Other-ness takes over with-ness. The 'generative relation' (Austin et al., 2018, p. 1512) leaves room for polarization toward one rationale or the other.

Discussion

This paper has examined how the relational language, or conversation, between artistic and economic rationales unfolds within creative entrepreneurs' work activities. We identified and characterized high and low levels of conversing, or variations, within this conversation, along with work activities and showed that the continuity of the conversation relies on these variations. The creative entrepreneur follows her own suite of

variations to keep the conversation between rationales going over time.

The discussion falls into two main parts. The first section details the contributions to the conversation concept, its *variations* (1), and *continuity* (2). The second part details the contributions to the literature about creative entrepreneurs.

Contributions to the conversation concept

Nuanced inferences about conversation arise, this paper submits, from thinking through the variations.

The conversation's variations

In the studio, the designer's engagement with either rationale varies as the creative process moves forward. There are surprisingly few empirical studies examining how creativity is managed and organized at work (Gotsi et al., 2010; Warhurst, 2010), and even fewer more specifically unpacking the incursion of economics (Austin et al., 2018; Linstead, 2010). This paper suggests extensions to theory by refusing either/or thinking (DeFillippi et al., 2007) and voluntarily developing theory that is believed to be especially applicable to creative work and its distinctive characteristics (Caves, 2002; Gherardi, 2022) while contributing to the 'living with' perspective (Austin et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Reckwitz, 2014). Austin

et al. (2018) show the economic and artistic can become conversant in creative organizations when creative and commercial teams are committed to it. They encourage a focus on the relational process and deplore the lack of research on these conflicting rationales at levels other than organizational. We apply the concept of conversation to an unprecedented level of analysis. Conversation in this article is embodied in the figure of the creative entrepreneur, allowing the researchers to go beyond the classical opposition between artistic and economic teams within organizations (Bilton, 2011; Montanari et al., 2016). What happens in the field is gone into detail. We demonstrate the conversation relies here on the variations the creative entrepreneur allows within it, whereas Austin et al.'s (2018) insistence is on how creative organizations allow their teams of organizational members to work with one another.

When conversational flow is achieved, space for collaboration and creativity opens. It is also very fragile (Aroles et al., 2021; Austin et al., 2018) and relies on the creative entrepreneur's ability to play along and accept the struggle, directing their own efforts into maintaining openness to both perspectives in the process. Conversing is fluid when the necessity of having differing viewpoints is understood. In the findings, the purchasing step is composed of an intricate mix of economic and artistic practices, until it is impossible to do one without the other (Enhuber, 2014). Elle's efforts to constantly remain engaged are observed through 'frequent and familiar association' (Austin et al., 2018, p. 12) with economic preoccupations. The 'bivalent, monological and dictating tendency' (Austin et al., 2018, p. 12) of one rationale over the other is warded off, allowing them to dialogue. The designer makes both rationales responsive to one another. This article posits some variations are easier than others, at certain points in the process (the beginning versus the end) but also at certain points in a career. The phenomena of hierarchy and domination come into play. In the field, Elle's variations of the conversation between art and commerce would be very different if she had not found success – in the way she deals with buyers, for instance.

Thinking through variations allows analysis of the conversation to be enriched at a fine-grained level. Overall, variations within the conversation show that conversation is always an achievement in the context of organizational realities as these necessarily include competing rationales. The creative entrepreneur mediates the conversation between artistic and economic rationales in the course of their work. This paper shows creative entrepreneurs can, at times, make the two rationales converse and weaken this conversing at others – following the environment, their own intuition or strategy, etc. Understanding creative work through variations invites the identification of ad hoc negotiations between rationales, and to look for what

keeps the conversation going, no matter what. Indeed, the findings also show that the succession or suite of variations over time is what ensures the conversation's survival. The conflicting interaction between the artistic and economic deliberates and arbitrates itself temporarily. When the conversation unfolds between two teams, as Austin et al. (2018) say, harmony is expressed through the 'whole' they constitute or 'unity'. When a single person is animated by this conversation, the way they allow the conversation to unfold overall is by finding their own sequence of variations and embracing it. Again, the conversation is always at play, and at the individual level, the conversation is able to continue precisely because of its possibility to vary. A commitment to these variations (high then low levels of conversing, and so on) is the key to the conversation's survival and continuity.

Beyond stereotypes, this paper opens up perspectives on the economic roles creatives might shoulder (Eikhof, 2015). It insists on questioning the stereotypes of creatives who could not assume economic rationales (Glynn, 2000; Guillet de Monthoux, 2004). The two perspectives do exist, this is not denied, yet, through the findings, established relationships are questioned. When both rationales are present through high levels of conversing, the creative entrepreneur knows how to manage the business and enjoys it. Enhancing control over the economic aspects of the work is a way to enhance control over the creative aspects, allowing the conversation to fully take place. In modern organizations, the 'creative person' is often depicted as being crowded out of the workplace by the 'economic person' (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007; Hjorth, 2003). The economic person is understood here as conditioned by the organization to carry out predetermined activities in order to maintain control and predictability, thus constructing creative passion as non-organizational (Hjorth, 2003). This article offers novel ways of moving beyond poststructuralist theory and its perceived emphasis on the domination of creative subjects by power (Fotaki et al., 2017; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Future research could observe and analyze the diversity of the conversation variations deployed by creative entrepreneurs in different creative contexts.

The continuous conversation

There is a lack of concepts or frameworks to help think about not just the divergences but also, crucially, the interplays between creative and economic logics of practice (Gotsi et al., 2010; Montanari et al., 2016). Economic and artistic practices can easily 'live with' one another at times and be partially or totally separated at others. For this reason, adopting a longitudinal perspective holds much potential for analyzing the combining of rationales in-the-making. To the question 'How do

artistic and economic rationales become conversant?', the 'when' is added, highlighting the variations of the conversation and its continuity over time.

In this particular case, the empirical work has demonstrated that the conversation is easier at the fabric-to-garment transformation stage. Conversing unfolds as spaces open, for plural voices to be heard, in multiple ways, without a single perspective dominating. At the beginning of the creative process, the designers are able to make some compromises (deal with fabric costs, buy within budget) while starting the new collection. They do not resist the economic orders that are part of the creative experience. Economic practices are experienced as resourceful at the purchasing step but overwhelming at the final step, sales. Closing sales erodes the conversation. When the designers get their hands on the fabric (first in the form of samples, then in large rolls), the emulation taking place around the fabric is like fuel. They get their inspiration from it, from the rawness of the material, the possibilities for experimenting, and so on. In contrast, sales are the ultimate scene and are lived as such. This marks an anxious time for them. Selling means being vulnerable, as their designs are being examined by economic criteria. The anxiety of concluding the collection and terminating the process overrides any joy felt in presenting their offer. This article shows how nervous the main designer is during trade fairs, and how strongly she wants to avoid that moment of finalizing a deal, where some powerful buyers might ask for slight design changes. She sees such requests as a threat to her integrity and artistic priorities as a designer.

The balance of power is key here (Linstead, 2010; Sutton, 2001). If creative practices disappear beneath economic preoccupations (Eikhof, 2015), then the conversation fades away. Following this reasoning, instilling creative practices during economic thresholds (such as presenting the line in a very original way, designing silhouettes by thinking about aesthetic shadows and light rather than commercial appeal) could allow the conversation to continue. Our findings illustrate a peculiar suite of variations (low conversing at the sales step). But this could happen differently for another designer at this step, who might integrate many creative insights into it. Some designers are notably famous for the amount of care and creativity put into the design of sets for Fashion Week shows. For each creative worker, there is a balance or precise suite of variations that is struck through their practice. We believe these conversation variations may vary from one creative worker to another. More empirical work is needed to analyze the various specificities of this continuous conversation.

The point is, these answers are missed if the conversation is not thought of in dynamic terms. The empirical work here confirms our methodological choice. Thinking of the conversation varying opens up a new research avenue, a more nuanced understanding of how conflicting rationales combine

in creative history and process (Linstead, 2010). Thinking longitudinally broadens the common definition and boundaries of the creative process (Montanari et al., 2016). Our findings illustrate how strongly purchases equate to imagining forward, and, in that sense, is creative. Things are understood as open during buying activities and remain as such until the end of the designing phase, when the new collection becomes ready for display on garment racks. Lines are blurred when the process starts or stops. Buying is imagining and, as such, opens up possibilities in terms of conversing. Conversing drives the creative process forward, and the easier and more fluid the conversing is, the more difficult it is in practice to draw a line between artistic and economic activities in daily creative work (Bérubé, 2019; Enhuber, 2014). Conversely, the more the conversation struggles, the more the perspectives 'rigidify' while withdrawing to their usual perimeters (Horvath & Dechamp, 2020).

Overall, the evolution of the conversation depends on each entrepreneur's variations. The designer followed in this paper demonstrates a surprising suite of variations, which feeds current reflections on unconventional forms of entrepreneurship.

Contributions to the literature on creative entrepreneurs

Establishing one's own company or team is one of the mechanisms used by creative individuals to enhance control over the artistic and economic aspects of their projects (Svejenova, 2005). Guercini and Cova (2018) highlight the lack of research on unconventional forms of entrepreneurship and deplore it as 'not captured sufficiently by current theory' (p. 385). Based on our study, we identify a new type of creative entrepreneur; one who aspires to reproduce rather than accumulate assets. As an unconventional entrepreneur, the designer observed does not consistently seek opportunities when planning, launching, and developing a new venture. Her creative organization's reason for existing is based on the continuity of creation, with all the costs in balance, rather than making a profit. Far from behaving like heroic entrepreneurial figures as key agents of capitalism (McCaffrey, 2018), this designer favors alternative measures of growth and prosperity. Elle designs throughout with an active disinterest in profit or additional earnings – as long as she makes enough to keep on designing. Keeping the business at a reasonable size is what matters. In daily life, production and sales are the key (to continuing) and always gain the upper hand over more elaborate economic practices. Elle does not refuse to sell her work and obviously does not resist the income from making a sale, but she rejects the idea of continuously seeking more profit from it. Her practices are unconventional as in not adhering to established convention or accepted standards (Gloria-Palermo, 2021;

Guercini & Cova, 2018). There is no 'desperate search for opportunities' (Guercini & Cova, 2018, p. 385).

This study makes a contribution to creative entrepreneurship research (Bérubé, 2019; Hausmann & Heinz, 2016; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001) by shedding light on alternative ways to manage a business. Paying heed to Parker's recent manifesto (2021) for 'building an alternative curriculum' of alternative ways of organizing, this article makes a gesture toward the heterogeneity of entrepreneurial ways. The main designer's attempts are read as a spilling over from the orthodox ways of doing things. Conventionally, and corresponding to the stereotypical entrepreneur, opportunity recognition consists of identifying the opportunity first and then developing an organizational path as described in the traditional literature (Gloria-Palermo, 2021; Guercini & Cova, 2018). Interestingly, as witnessed in the field, being successful for this creative entrepreneur means moving from one collection to the next, rather than growth, fame, or fortune – far from the myth of the 'cool' job in a 'hot' industry that Neff et al. (2005) describe for creative workers. As a creative entrepreneur, Elle is aiming for the 'small is beautiful' as satisfactory – selling the exact number of pieces she needs to, a threshold she does not want to cross. 'Small is beautiful' is the subject of the conversation she embodies, and it is about reproducing assets. Here, the phrase 'small is beautiful' refers to the book of that title by the economist Schumacher (1973), in which he advocates an 'economy of permanence' based on the sustainable use of resources. Reproduction of assets means Elle will be able to keep designing and live from her art. This is understood as a 'sustainable' use of creative resources. Accordingly, she performs in the market via her brand in her own way. This willingness to step back from outcomes exemplifies this type of creative entrepreneur; a willingness to work 'without a firm sense of what can be gained' (Hjorth & Holt, 2016, p. 52). Not because she does not have the competence, but because she does not want to. This is close to Hjorth and Holt's definition of entrepreneurship (2016) as generosity of action: the action of opening up a possibility without a known end. This is how such a creative entrepreneur can develop a continuous and coherent body of creative work over time (Caves, 2002; Svejenova, 2005). The aesthetic added value does not correspond to traditional control functions, and classical performance-oriented lines of argument might be fatal for the creative impulse surrounding the designing of a new collection. The subsequent domination of a managerial rationale makes it necessary to actively 'breach this order' (Austin et al., 2018) so a multi-voiced, conversationally established space can emerge.

The strategies that work through tradeoffs and warding off are underlined, with a creative entrepreneur playing the game but not extensively, thus marking a tangent from the kind of guidance offered in management textbooks (Koivunen, 2009). The observed practices are at odds with the traditional

dominant models described, taught and performed as such by the managerial *doxa* (Hjorth, 2003; Parker, 2002). It is demonstrated here that desire and authenticity in creative action (Guercini & Cova, 2018; Menger, 1999; Van Iterson et al., 2017) is precisely what organizes creative professionals, rather than dominant managerial strategies or conventional professional interest. Adopting unconventional behaviors allows differentiation between economic and more capitalistic rationales when it comes to sales. Creative work may be risky, but it is also a powerful source of meaning and self-direction (Menger, 1999). Entrepreneurial passion produces an intense positive emotion toward entrepreneurial tasks and activities important to the entrepreneur's self-identity (Guercini & Cova, 2018). Conventional wisdom dictates creative workers pay a price for seeking desirable work in competitive markets (Rowe, 2019). But artists are resilient in resisting the economization process of their artistic activities (Dutraive & Szostak, 2021). In line with Svejenova's theory of authenticity-driven career creation (2005), this paper recognizes the agency of creative entrepreneurs who follow an economic path allowing them to remain true to their creative calling. This distinctive and true-to-self-identity (Svejenova, 2005) is precisely understood as the source of stability (Castel, 2009) leading to these new forms of entrepreneurship (Guercini & Cova, 2018). This 'path with the heart' (Svejenova, 2005, p. 947) or investment and trust in the creative input enables the patterns identified to stand out meaningfully and powerfully for those involved. Dedication is nurtured among the community of similar practitioners for and by whom alternative practices are enjoyed (Contu, 2014; Menger, 1999). These forms of entrepreneurship carry a lot of potential in contemporary settings, where the rapid acceleration of change in information-rich societies (Rosa, 2013) has increased uncertainty, instability, and insecurity, hence considerably undermining entrepreneurs' traditional ways of doing (Guercini & Cova, 2018).

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