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New framings and practices of critical research

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The two chapters in this section on “social entrepreneurship, relationality and the possible” push at our understandings of social entrepreneurship. Both take a relational view of the world, exploring the importance of the relationships between people, and between people and ‘things’. What emerges are insights into social entrepreneurship as a social change practice not so much for finding accommodations in what is already present but for shifting the frame of what is thinkable and doable. The chapters document strategies for social change while also recognising that social change is an unpredictable and uneven process that involves responding to the unexpected. The chapters also invite reflection on the contribution of social research to the social change process by demonstrating how social research can be oriented towards ushering in the new, an orientation that is captured in the notion of research as a performative practice. In what follows, I take up these themes of relationality, social change and research orientation.

A Relational View of the World

Victor J. Friedman, Israel Sykes and Markus Strauch present social entrepreneurship as ‘a widely distributed, prosaic process of everyday interaction through which citizens co-construct the societies in which they take part’ (p.). Such an understanding shifts the emphasis away from individuals and their initiatives to the more mundane but nevertheless complex processes by which people act *in concert* to generate change. This is strikingly evident in their case study of Beit Issie Shapiro, an organisation that since 1981 has been helping to transform how services are designed and delivered for children with developmental disabilities. In the case study we hear of how relationships and partnerships were formed with and between staff, families, volunteers, donors, professionals, neighbours, community members, ministry officials and others in order to create new worlds and new possibilities for children with developmental disabilities. What is documented in this chapter is no superficial makeover or quick-fix solution but a decades-long and comprehensive process of transforming an entire field of practices and policies.

Marta B. Calás, Seray Ergene and Linda Smircich similarly present a relational view of the world; however, they go one step further to consider the role of non-human actants.

They take us into a world in which it is not only humans that are capable of exercising agency, rather agency is widely distributed such that all entities (human and non-human, animate and inanimate) are potential actants. Calás et al. explore this through the example of an enterprise that has sustainability at its core and by focusing on the actancy of the cotton seeds that are pivotal to the sustainability 'mission'. Using the Actor Network Theory approach of following the object they reveal the contributions of not just a variety of human actors (organic and conventional farmers in countries from around the globe; farm workers; 'middlemen' in the cotton supply chain; factory workers; fabric dyers; clothing designers; sales people; publicists; copywriters; customers and more) but a variety of non-human actors (the seeds themselves; rain water and ground water; irrigation infrastructure; soil; fertilisers; pesticides, herbicides and defoliants; insects; chemical bleaches and dyes; energy generation; machinery and factories; fibres, yarns and fabrics; shop fittings; clothing labels and so on). What emerges is a world that is at once solidified around an established set of practices (or 'field' as Friedman et al. would say) but also open to the same sort of unravelling that can occur as when a nick or tear is made to the body of a 'finished' garment.

Taken together the two chapters present social entrepreneurship as a process of fundamentally changing how fields operate, with the focus in these two chapters being the fields of what might be called 'disability services' and 'business'. Social entrepreneurship is thus pushed from being a "system-maintaining, social-order approach" (to borrow the phrase that James DeFilippis, Robert Fisher and Eric Shragge use to refer to some forms of community development (2010, p. 103)) into more radical terrain as *a system-changing activity*. What then becomes critical is how the social change process is understood as taking place.

The Social Change Process

In the case of Beit Issie Shapiro, Friedman et al. identify a series of 'strategies' that were used, including developing a vision of an alternative way of providing services for children with developmental disabilities; introducing new ways of thinking about children with developmental disabilities; changing what was considered the norm in the sector; and building relationships and partnerships (as above). Friedman et al. identify that these shifts in what they call "the symbolic operations that change relationships, meaning, and rule of the game" (p.) were far more critical in generating transformation than developments at the material level of new products, services or organisations.

Here there are parallels with the practice of reframing, an idea which was brought to wide attention by the cognitive scientist and linguist George Lakoff. In *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (2004) Lakoff argued that we make sense of the world through 'frames' which organise and structure our cognitive unconscious. For Lakoff, social change occurs by reframing, a process of using language to destabilise established ways of thinking and change what counts as common sense. I have written about reframing with my colleagues J.K. Gibson-Graham and Stephen Healy in our book *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming our Communities* (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013). In this work we explore the ways people across the globe are transforming

economic activities in order to build what we call ‘community economies’, that is economies based on recognising and enacting interdependencies between people and between people and the world around. We argue that the practice of reframing is central to the process of economic transformation. The range of initiatives that we document in *Take Back the Economy* are testament to the ways that people are reframing the economy not as a machine that operates according to its own unvarying logic but as a series of practices that emerge from the actions that people take in their everyday lives; not as inescapably capitalist but as comprising a diversity of ways of working, transacting, running enterprises, relating to property and investing in futures. Just as Friedman et al. identify that shifts in the symbolic operations entail changes to relationships, meanings and rules, so too the practice of reframing involves shifting how we think about and understand our place in the world, our relationships with human and non-human others, and the values we ascribe to these.

Reframing has been fundamental to the social change process. In the nineteenth century, the abolitionist struggle to end slavery was based on the reframing of slaves as fellow humans, captured in the image of a kneeling slave and the accompanying question, which became a catchphrase for the movement on both sides of the Atlantic, “Am I not a man and a brother?” Arising out of the abolitionist movement, the women’s rights movement has successively used the strategy of reframing to that extent that generation by generation the lives of many women have been transformed (with struggles continuing in many parts of the world). Characteristic of these major social movements, and of social change activities in fields such as disability services (discussed by Friedman et al.) and smoking (as we discuss in *Take Back the Economy*), reframing changes our sense of what is possible, introduces new ways of acting and generates new realities. It is not surprising that in the case of Beit Issie Shapiro one senior ministry official recounts how the vision that was laid out in 1980 “at the time ... sounded delusional” but is today the basis of how services in Israel operate. I am reminded of the philosopher Peter Singer’s comment in 2012 when the European Union’s ban on battery cages for egg-laying hens came into force. Reflecting on his activism against battery cages in the early 1970s he said “Many people applauded our youthful idealism, but told us that we had no hope of ever changing a major industry. They were wrong” (Singer, 2012). In both instances, something only imaginable to a few has become not just a reality but an accepted norm. This is the work of social entrepreneurship.

Consistent with the relational view of the world, discussed above, the social changes that result from the practice of reframing occur through the endeavours of multiple actors working, not as one tightly organised operation, but in a range of ways on multiple fronts. In their chapter Calás et al. capture the open-ended and even uncertain nature of this process, “*human and nonhuman actants* are associated through *social entrepreneurship* in ways that make others do things” (p.). What is generated or what reverberates through such chains of effects cannot be known in advance. There are, as Calás et al. remind us, no guarantees. Thus Calás et al. destabilise the idea that human agency is able to generate, in a linear way, predictable outcomes. But they further destabilise understandings of human agency by introducing the idea of a posthuman subjectivity that displaces humans as the locus of change. Their account of the effects produced by nonhuman actants, such as cotton seeds, has

parallels with Jane Bennett's essay on hoarders, those who are "preternaturally attuned to the call from things" (2012, p. 241). Bennett's exploration of hoarding is guided by the maxim of putting things in the foreground and humans in the background, in the same way that Calás et al. foreground the capacity of seeds to provoke actions oriented around something we call sustainability. The combination of relational and posthuman thinking that features in these works is pivotal in a climate changing world which is calling on humans to become different types of creatures, ones that are more attuned and more susceptible to the changes around us. In such a world, the social change process is perhaps less about taking action (in the sense of taking charge) and more about learning to be affected, an embodied process described by Bruno Latour in which humans are "moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans" (2004, p. 205; see also Cameron 2011).

The Role of Social Research

The two chapters in this section invite us to reflect on the role that research can play in the social change process. In my own work I have been strongly influenced by the understanding that research is a generative and performative practice that helps to shape the world we come to live in (e.g. Cameron and Hicks 2014; Cameron and Wright 2014). As discussed by John Law and John Urry (2004), all research is a performative practice. Even research that purports to be objective and 'merely' descriptive nevertheless generates findings that combine with existing bodies of knowledge to help make some realities stronger and more apparent, and others less so (p. 396). Thus, as Law and Urry highlight, it is important for researchers to consider what realities our research is helping to bring into being or strengthen.

In their chapter, Friedman et al. explicitly take a different approach from existing research in field theory and social entrepreneurship by examining not how fields emerge and are maintained but how fields are transformed. They do this by adapting the idea of an enclave to conceptualise how Beit Issie Shapiro operates within a larger field through "a distinct configuration of actors, relationships, meanings, and rules of the game that challenge those of the incumbent field" (p.). The intention is to show how Beit Issie, although embedded in the field of disability services, has been able to operate in ways that have both challenged and transformed the wider field. It is this capacity to change and transform existing fields that Friedman et al. characterise as social entrepreneurship. Thus their investigation of Beit Issie (i.e. the questions they ask, the concepts they use, the features they focus on etc.) is driven by this agenda of helping to make more apparent the ways that social entrepreneurship can help, as they put it, "expand the realm of the possible".

Calás et al.'s chapter is similarly oriented towards expanding the realm of the possible but theirs is a more experimental mode of research in which they are seeking to "spark the imagination" by rethinking concepts such as the social and entrepreneurship, and recombining them as *social entrepreneurship*, a form or modality of social entrepreneurship that is not human-centred.

Together these two chapters demonstrate some of the possibilities that emerge when researchers are attentive to the performative elements of research. On the one hand, Friedman et al. offer us an example of research that is attuned to investigating practices in order to help

deepen our understanding of the sorts of strategies that social entrepreneurship might mobilise to help create new worlds. This project leads to questions such as what other sorts of strategies are being used in social entrepreneurship to create new worlds? What are some other fields that social entrepreneurship is transforming? What are the contexts in which transformation is difficult to achieve? On the other hand, Calás et al. offer us an example of an exploratory form of research that is pushing at understandings of social entrepreneurship in order to shed new light on how we might conceive of and practice social entrepreneurship in a world in which the givens are destabilised. As we contend with life in a climate changing world it seems that both modes of research have much to offer. Perhaps more than ever we need a deep understanding of the social change process while at the same time being open to new forms of revolutionary thinking and acting.

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