

Prof. Dr. Franz Liebl

Unidentified Theory Objects of Trend Monitoring (XXXIII): Kidnapping as a Matter of Entrepreneurial Innovation

Franz Liebl

"The DJ doesn't know what she wants until she hears it."
Kodwo Eshun

Black Futurism – A New Way of Trend Monitoring

"The Unidentified Theory Objects, the so-called UTO's, are accidental clusters in the theoretical field. ... UTO's are crystal balls in which the weak light of a non-existing theorem appears."

This was written in 1993 by Amsterdam's Bilwet Foundation which aims at the advancement of illegal knowledge. Since then, the illegal knowledge of Bilwet has provided extremely powerful methods of futures research and trend monitoring. My research on the market for trend monitoring has shown that the Bilwet Foundation is not the only organisation to work in this area. Also in the UK there exist some approaches of such future-oriented scientific work. However, not until recently have they found a platform for their discourse. As most important example I want to mention Kodwo Eshun who gained worldwide attention when introducing his analytical category of "Unidentified Audio Objects".

The "Unidentified Audio Objects" are breaking new ground in the bermuda triangle of post-colonialism, science fiction, and contemporary black music. Why this combination? Which relationships does Kodwo Eshun, being Afro-British, identify between post-colonialism and issues of science-fiction, e.g. the kidnapping by aliens? He describes this relationship in an interview as follows:

"A key moment was when Paul Gilroy in 'The Black Atlantic' argued that modernism began with slavery. The mass transportation, the kidnapping of people from Africa to America, represents a total rupture within modernism, represents an existential crisis, a crisis of history ... Later ... Mark Sinker emphasized the analogy between the kidnapping by aliens and slavery. For him, the two were basically the same thing: the aliens have landed long ago, in the 17th century. They abducted a lot of people thus creating a series of genetic mutations in America." (Translation by the author)

In other words, the encounter with the unfamiliar, the abduction from one's well-known environment, the kidnapping by aliens, is regarded as an important basis of future-oriented cultural production. This form of black futurism – recently discussed by Mark Dery and Diedrich Diederichsen – expresses a relationship that had gone unnoticed so far. However, it bears important consequences for modern management theory. In this 33rd part of my series of lectures called "Unidentified Theory Objects of Trend Monitoring", I want to present the logic of the principle of abduction and kidnapping. I want to show the implications for entrepreneurship in general and entrepreneurial innovation in particular.

The innovation of a dynamic entrepreneur could have its starting point at several different aspects of abduction and kidnapping. However, I have identified two main elements under which all varieties can be subsumed. The first one refers to the trauma aspect of kidnapping. The second one refers to its attractiveness. I will call this the enjoyment aspect.

The Trauma Aspect

Let's have a look at the trauma aspect. According to Boris Groys a trauma deals with something *"that one does not understand. One does know something, but it cannot be categorized..."*. This feeling of not understanding, this feeling of irritation, this not-knowing-what-is-happening-with-you without doubt is caused by the singularity of kidnapping, by its improbability.

However, this improbability is rapidly declining. Since 1977, the year of the Schleyer kidnapping case, kidnapping has turned out to be one of the ordinary job risks for German top managers. Due to globalization, the situation has become even worse, turning the threat into a permanent one. On June 30, 1998, the Financial Times published an extensive report on the increasing risk for expatriates of being kidnapped. South America, in particular Columbia, Mexico, Brasil, Guatemala and Venezuela, in Asia the Philippines, and in Africa Jemen, Nigeria and Somalia are considered to be extremely

dangerous countries. Also the countries of the former Soviet Union, especially Kazachstan and the Northern Caucasus, in which approximately 800 people were kidnapped last year. In total, the number of kidnappings has doubled worldwide over the last 5 years. However, not only the number of kidnappings is increasing, there is also a trend towards bigger ransoms. Among the highest amounts are the 30 million Deutschmarks that had been transferred in the famous Reemtsma case.

The economic dimensions of the whole kidnapping industry were described by the German Newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 1998:

"... last year rebels in Columbia earned 910 million Dollars by kidnapping, drug smuggling and blackmailing. The rebels' revenues have risen by 130 percent within the last four years. Right now the guerilleros earn more than the seven largest Columbian companies in total." (Translation by the author)

Without any doubt, these trends have created a huge market for security services and products. The security industry is booming. And in the United States some gentech start-ups owe their growth to the parents' need for a genetic fingerprint of their children – in case they should get kidnapped. This is supported by data from American market research studies. And in Germany it is only a question of time that there will be a nationwide database of genetic fingerprints.

Recently, the situation in the German insurance sector has changed considerably. Until now, the Federal Insurance Control Commission did not allow insurance contracts against kidnapping and blackmailing, because it was considered to be offending good morals. In August 1998 the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported:

"There will be a new market for German insurance companies. In coordination with the Ministries of Finance, Justice, and the Interior the Federal Insurance Control Commission revised their position against kidnapping insurances. ... The target groups ... are rich families and companies who want to insure their employees. Insurance fees will be considerable. Details are not given, but the fees for families may be as high as 5000 Deutschmarks per 1 million Deutschmarks of coverage. For companies, fees may even be higher due to higher risks." (Translation by the author)

The Enjoyment Aspect

Even when the trauma aspect seems to be dominating, we should not forget the attractiveness of the enjoyment aspect. Consumer behavior is changed completely when it comes to lust. The incomprehensible is not experienced as irritation but as a highly welcome deviation from one's ordinary life. This bears considerable implications when estimating the market potential. Contrary to the trauma aspect, the enjoyment aspect shows the limits of conventional market research. Hardly anybody would admit in public that being kidnapped would seem an attractive idea. And there are possibly not many people that have thought about this being a potential source of lust. However, it is this very attractiveness that in fact seems to exist when taking a closer look. A first weak signal was the kidnapping of Patty Hearst. She was abducted in 1974 and finally collaborated with her kidnapers robbing a bank in the name of their political aims.

Thus I do not speak of sentimental Hollywood comedies like "A Life Less Ordinary" where the victim seduces her lover to simulate such a crime. Rather, I want to refer to two completely different aspects that I am going to explain in detail.

First, in an economy that is pervaded by information overload from new media, it is no longer financial capital that possesses a central position as the scarce resource. Now attention is becoming the scarce resource, as theorists like Goldhaber and Franck emphasize. In other words, a second economy is established that works parallel to the capitalistic economy. This new economy is driven by a competition for attention. Attention becomes the new currency, and being famous is the result of its accumulated capital.

Andy Warhol's idea that everybody will be famous for 15 minutes has introduced a completely new access to fame. Nowadays this idea sees its revival in talk shows and on the internet. In addition to famous people in the public eye, there exists a new generation of so-called micro-stars. And being kidnapped is a safe way of becoming temporarily famous as a micro-star. Perhaps it will provide even more. The example of Jan-Philipp Reemtsma shows that being kidnapped may make you more than a

mere micro-star. Rather it could make a person, although caught in a basement, rise to durable fame. This tactics may be also used as a means for supporting any kind of issues, be they political or others. In order to place issues on the public agenda, spectacular news events are required – as we could often see in the case of hijacked airplanes.

Now I want to talk about the second driver of lust. For the victim the kidnapper embodies the foreign, the other, i.e. the alien. This mysterious and traumatising phenomenon is structured by phantasies which are, according to Slavoj Žižek, of a primarily sexual nature. Assuming superhuman sexual power and magic skills, these phantasies refer to unlimited power of the others, to their kinky sexual preferences and secret hypnotic forces. Drawing on Lacan, Slavoj Žižek calls this a plus-de-jouir, a more-than-enjoyment, a surplus of lust.

KIDNAP — A Business Design for an Innovative Service

Blast Theory, a start-up company from London, are using the supposed surplus of lust which makes the kidnapping an attractive – maybe even exciting – service. From detailed analyses of the kidnapping process Blast Theory gained the following important insights: observing and being observed, following and being followed play a central role in the early stage of kidnapping. Later on, games of dominance and submission are introduced among the participants.

These aspects had to be covered by Blast Theory's market research design in innovative ways. This was necessary because there was a considerable risk of getting – advertently or inadvertently – biased answers. The interviews to support product development had to disclose the secret phantasies and desires of the interviewees. Therefore questions relating to the crime or even to the product under development were not useful – a mistake that is made in research designs very often. Thus Blast Theory asked which role kidnapping and abduction nowadays play in our consciousness and, above all, how much people enjoy voyeurism, exhibitionism and playing games of submission and dominance. The result from this research in which I was involved at the end of 1997 can now be experienced in the form of a marketable product called KIDNAP. KIDNAP reflects the imbalance that currently exists between the secret desires of consumers and the products and services available on the market.

KIDNAP is now to be introduced into the market, and an advertising campaign has already started. Not long ago British movie theatres showed an advertisement that offered registration as a potential kidnapping victim – for a considerable fee of course. From this group of people Blast Theory chose two persons after extensive observations, kidnapped them and kept them in a secret place for 48 hours. The project was broadcast by live streaming on the internet. As we can see, the product called KIDNAP refers simultaneously to all sources of a surplus of lust. That is why market expectancies are rated by investors as highly promising.

Management by Heidegger: On the "Worldhood" of New Markets

If we take the logic of kidnapping seriously for product design, then kidnapping means considerably more than mere escapism – which is otherwise typical for marketing events. In contrast to many services in the leisure and entertainment sector, the product KIDNAP is a genuine innovation, a true entrepreneurial achievement in the literal sense. The reason for this is one of the central subjects of the rest of my talk. In the following I want to outline the peculiarities of entrepreneurship.

What is significant for innovation and entrepreneurship? Unfortunately, management theory has not much to say about this. But it is Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus who contribute important characterisations and explanations. These all go back to Martin Heidegger. According to Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus innovations create completely new subworlds in the sense of Heidegger. "World" according to Heidegger can be regarded as a totality of interrelated products which people use to achieve certain purposes. And these activities enable those performing it to have identities. Which means that these identities are the meaning or point of engaging in these activities. Heidegger describes this as follows in "Being and Time" which I will quote in the German original version:

"Das hergestellte Werk verweist nicht nur auf das Wozu seiner Verwendbarkeit und das Woraus seines Bestehens ... in ihm liegt zugleich die Verweisung auf den Träger und Benutzer. ... Mit dem Werk begegnet demnach nicht allein Seiendes, das zuhanden ist, sondern auch Seiendes von der Seinsart des Menschen, dem das Hergestellte in seinem Besorgen zuhanden wird; in eins damit

begegnet die Welt, in der die Träger und Verbraucher leben, die zugleich die unsere ist."

Summing it up, management by Heidegger means the following: The genuine entrepreneur gives people new products by which they get the possibility to follow their purposes. These purposes have a deep effect on peoples' identities thereby changing them. In doing this, entrepreneurs create completely new subworlds. According to Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus we speak of entrepreneurship not until all three aspects have been met. Only then a new subworld is created and colonized.

Taking this into consideration, kidnappings are more than a mere compensation and transcendence of the ordinary life which is generally true for celebrations or events. Kidnappings represent worlds of experience in the true sense of the word and create a completely new microcosm. This microcosm touches people by traumatizing them on the one hand, and by creating a surplus of lust on the other hand. No other experiential product, no other service meets so properly both desires at the same time.

Aliens, Trends, and Kidnappers – What Categories Reveal About Entrepreneurs

I would like to finish my talk with two thoughts that go beyond the issue of innovation in service marketing.

First, scientific analyses show that there is a considerable structural kinship between trend scouts and trends, victims and kidnappers, earthlings and aliens. This kinship manifests itself as follows: trend scouts, victims and earthlings are confronted with the task to look for something without knowing what it could be and where to find it. The smaller the difference by which an alien identity can be recognized, the more desperate becomes the search for the one, tiny sign. Thus what is significant for a trend, for an alien, for a kidnapper – a slight glance in the eyes of the person vis-à-vis, a gap in the biography, a small news report in a second-rate newspaper? Probably everything can be a weak signal. And the more closely it is related to the shared system of cultural values, attitudes, and rituals, writes Slavoj Žižek, the scarier the situation for the people involved.

Second, I would like to refer to the context in which Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus investigate innovation and entrepreneurship. Their original aim was to find out how history is being made. In the course of their theory-building, Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus came to the following conclusion: by colonizing uncharted terrain in a universe of possibilities and by creating new subworlds entrepreneurs are making history. But entrepreneurs do not only make history, they also make science fiction. William Gibson, founder of the cyberpunk genre, once described the entrepreneurial attitude of science fiction as follows:

"Science fiction doesn't predict the future, it determines it, colonizes it, preprograms it in the image of the present ."

This leads me to the following conclusion: if we demand a new entrepreneurial era and aim at teaching entrepreneurship at university, we must constantly keep in mind the three key roles of an entrepreneur: trendsetter, alien and kidnapper.

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