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## CONFORMING NON-CONFORMISTS: SEMIOTIC MANIFESTATIONS OF AN ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY.

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### ABSTRACT.

Existing research has exposed the role of myth and metaphor in the social construction of entrepreneurship. This study considers the physical images portrayed, an appreciation of which presents a useful additional dimension in understanding the entrepreneurial construct. The role of image and identity is seldom considered in serious entrepreneurial academic work although it forms a concrete presentation of expectation, albeit of a stereotypical nature. The categorisation and analysis of the components of an entrepreneurial identity widens our knowledge about entrepreneurship as a socio-economic phenomenon. These images form part of the identity of enterprise, a physical manifestation of a nebulous phenomenon and act as '*visual metaphors*'. This study extends research into the entrepreneurial narrative by the semiotic analysis of entrepreneurial imagery, examining how these entrepreneurial identities and images are constructed in narrative and in the media as a semiotic formula, which surprisingly has much in common with class based, criminal iconology.

### INTRODUCTION.

The concept of an entrepreneurial 'identity' and the related manifestations of '*icons or iconologies of entrepreneurship*' have received little academic attention. This is surprising, given the increasing acceptance that entrepreneurship can be understood as a social construction formed by the words, signs and symbols that people use to understand the phenomena. On the other hand, the existence, or lack, of any universal symbols of entrepreneurs is unsurprising, given the diverse nature of entrepreneurship and the miscellany of gender, ethnic, demographic and cultural differences that influence its construction. Entrepreneurship spans many occupational boundaries and classes, but traditionally the entrepreneur is regarded as a non-conformist, as someone different. Nevertheless, in this paper we argue that entrepreneurs do project a range of culturally specific, socially constructed identities, which paradoxically, conform to social expectations. This, we note, is achieved by the use and projection of specific artifacts and possessions. So in this way entrepreneurs are non-conforming conformists.

This paper arose from an earlier study about public perceptions of entrepreneurs (Smith and Anderson, 2001). We had invited our respondents to describe entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs but were intrigued that some 40% of our sample answered by giving stereotypical descriptions about clothing, type of cars, specifically using such descriptors as 'flash' or 'theatrical'. Thus our respondents had constructed entrepreneurial identity by invoking stereotypes and accentuating artifacts. Of course, the more perceptive respondents appreciated that one had to see the entrepreneurs operating in context and listen to them talk before identifying them as real entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, this application of stereotypical imagery heightened our appreciation of the hidden role of semiotics in producing these images of entrepreneurs within narrative and the media. Given the lack of research about this topic, this paper attempts to remedy this by examining the extent, role and significance of artifacts and possessions in the construction and projection of stereotypical entrepreneurial identity. We consider visual images of real life entrepreneurs and media images of fictional entrepreneurs. We argue that these are not trivial, they are visual metaphors of entrepreneurship and therefore shape public perception of entrepreneurial expectation. The paper has three sections, first a literature

review of entrepreneurial identity to locate the semiotic analysis in the wider body of social construction and entrepreneurial identity. This also shapes and justifies the research questions. Secondly, the presentation and analysis of the data from a semiotic analysis of collected images associated with entrepreneurship. This is followed by a reflective analytical section, which considers meaning and purpose. The research questions are twofold. First the descriptive - *is there a common, stereotypical image of entrepreneurship and what are the manifestations?* Secondly the conceptual - *what do these mean and how can we understand them?*

## CONSTRUCTING ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITIES.

Entrepreneurship is complex and is variously investigated from a psychological an economic or a social perspective. Historically, entrepreneurship has been conceptualised as an individual level phenomenon, leading us to see it in a psychologically reductionist way (Chell, 1985), or alternatively to over-socialise (Granovetter, 1985). Accordingly, from a psychological perspective, images of dynamic change makers pervade the public perception. From the social the broad image is also one of change. For economics, that “dismal science”, images are less obvious, perhaps a reflection of the conceptual difficulty in locating entrepreneurs in neo-classical economic theory. Most often, what we see is the manifestations of economic success. However, these atomistic and discipline bound approaches take little heed of entrepreneurship as a social production, and neglect our understanding of the elements of its social construction. But entrepreneurship is also an enacted collective identity (Hjorth & Johannisson, 2002) which suggests that entrepreneurs must make use of image in developing this collective entrepreneurial identity. Entrepreneurship is also conceptualised as an action based phenomenon and any analysis of action requires an account of the use of multiple semiotic resources. Thus the sign phenomena of speech, the body and dress all have a part to play in semiotic construction. Consequently we are interested in the physical appearance of an individual entrepreneur and the possessions and artefacts they use to project their entrepreneurial identity.

The notions of image and identity are receiving growing scholarly and managerial attention (Christensen and Askegaard, 2001). Indeed, contemporary social critics have pointed out that we live in a society saturated with images (e.g. Baudrillard, 1981; Ewen, 1988), and some scholars (e.g. Christensen and Cheney, 1994; Cheney and Christensen, 1999) propose that the quest for visibility and credibility in a cluttered and sometimes hostile environment has made the questions of identity and image salient issues. Images and stereotypes may be superficial, they are nonetheless real social constructions (Berger and Luckman, 1967) and they *represent* a reality. Moreover, stereotypes offer a parsimonious and convenient way of engaging with complex phenomena. For entrepreneurs themselves, the notion of becoming and being an entrepreneur may become a difficult position to realise. It may raise questions of existential anxiety, Am I who I seem/ claim to be? Stereotypical conformity may provide some sort of ontological security to address these issues. At the very least the taken-for-granted aspects of stereotypes provide a mechanism for constructing and conforming, the signs can be read and understood. Goodwin (2000) calls these semiotic fields and argues that social action, in this case entrepreneurial action, is accomplished not only by the social actor, but by others able to systematically recognise the shape and character of what is produced. It is this link between the semiotics of the individual and the contextual understanding of the signs produced which provide the basis for this paper. Signs, or rather the system of signs- semiotics, create and convey meaning.

However, as Goodwin notes the cognition of these signs is a social process embedded within a historically shaped material world. Indeed, we propose that for entrepreneurship, this

material world is as much economic as social. Nonetheless, for this paper we are concerned less with what entrepreneurs do, or even what they seem to do, but simply with how they appear to others and how this appearance is projected. What, if any, patterns exist; how are they produced and do they have any meaning beyond superficial appearance? Identity is shaped by specific human actions and is influenced by culture and experience. Culture impacts upon collective identity, Erikson (1969) resulting in certain cherished artefacts becoming cultural markers (Leland, 1998) or even cultural matrices (Rohlf, 1962). In this study we are concerned with the “*paragon in Western business literature*” the rugged, individualistic self-made entrepreneur eulogized by Gopalkrishnan & Shapiro (undated).

### Identifying Entrepreneurial Imagery in Literature.

The literature does not engage directly with entrepreneurial imagery, although the basic principles of identity are embedded in anthropology and psychology. Most often, as a topic, entrepreneurial identity has been discussed in books written about the projection of success, Packard (1961), Lewis (1989), Spillane (1993) and Arnott (2000). The major theme is that entrepreneurial identity is inexorably connected to class structure, image and reality (Marwick, 1980) and is projected using socially constructed images of success. Marwick (1996:33) stresses that class is related to identity, first as shaped by history; secondly, as evidenced by its subjectivity, e.g. by studying people and images of class; and thirdly, as perceived in modern society. Bardell (1990) stresses how identity is based upon environmental, social, political and ethical dimensions. Signaling theory suggests entrepreneurs project their identity and values by using value and commitment signals. Examples include the signalling of personal net worth via actions (Leyland and Pyle, 1977) and appearance. Identity is also linked to the concepts of power, status and prestige. Morris and Marsh (1988:57) appreciate the importance of badges and insignia, as well as clothing as emblems of allegiance. They show how clothes are a useful medium through which to display wealth and status, in addition to stimulating a sense of belonging. So such manifestations have twofold purpose, first as a badge of belonging (social identity) and secondly as demonstrating individual achievement (psychological).

Although the possession of substantial power and status may also allow one to disregard group affiliations and reduces the need to impress one's peers by employing iconic display, for most, as Morris and Marsh (1988) indicate, adornment and decoration, as a universal channel of communication, play an important part in cultural identity. We suggest identity is also influenced by semiotics and projected via the possession and display of cultural artefacts, clothing and by personal grooming styles, mannerisms and that these images are best encountered in fiction, autobiography, newspaper and media content. This is important, because as de Koning & Holmberg (2000) stress media images reflect our assumptions about entrepreneurs. Thus, how the entrepreneur is portrayed visually will influence perceptions of reality.

The entrepreneur is a predominantly masculine construct and this influences entrepreneurial identity, which is also linked to the iconology of success. It is affected by a triad of negative phenomena; idolatry, narcissism and totemism whereby the artifacts and possessions associated with success become worshiped and used as props to bolster ego and vanity. Wilkins (1979) cited in Chell *et al* (1991) criticises McClelland (1961) for his the glorification of “*achievement imagery*”. This is important because Flugel (1935:65) suggests that men repress narcissism and have few outlets for personal vanity; so clothes and badging take on an extra dimension of importance. In some instances this may lead to an over attachment to powerful imagery and the accusation of ‘*Flashiness*’ so often leveled at entrepreneurs from the working class. This accusation is a powerful societal discriminatory mechanism, forming part of the wider societal disapproval of the ‘*nouveaux riche*’ described by Morris and Marsh (1988:90) as “*lower*

*class boys who have made good and wish to declare their arrival in a new income bracket*“. It appears that class origins and the masculine context of enterprise help shape which symbols are deemed significant.

To challenge the dominant male imagery Anita Roddick (2000) conducted a poster campaign using semiotic images to confront the masculinity of the construct. Notwithstanding this, we found that elements of the imagery are transferable to female entrepreneurs. For instance, Steiner (2002:14) in invoking an account of the female tycoon Jan Fletcher describes her as oozing success, being dressed in a white power suit, wearing a diamond encrusted Rolex and looking like she had stepped off the set of *Dynasty*. Steiner further describes her in terms of personal artifacts such as a silver Monte Blanc pen, gold bangles and a marquis diamond ring. Steiner completes the picture with a mention of her Aston Martin DB7 with the personalized number plate JAN 1. This reported imagery is not really a feminine image, but merely a feminised version of the masculine iconography of success.

The ‘Tycoon’ is an important stereotype of entrepreneurial success associated with masculinity, power, status and maturity, depicted in caricature as balding, overweight, middle-aged men smoking cigars. Wansell (1988) refers to this image as the belligerent self-seeking tycoon. The role of the ‘*mid-life crisis*’ in shaping entrepreneurial imagery is pertinent because increasingly the profile of the entrepreneur is that of the male who embarks upon the journey in later life. Being confident and mature they will inevitably want to buy the good things in life that were denied them in their previous working lives and may gravitate towards more overt display of success. Tycoons are free to select and choose artifacts from the distinctive iconology of power. Thus the obligatory primary success status symbols of the entrepreneur, the ubiquitous Mercedes and B.M.W, can be cast aside as vulgar, having now achieved their purpose of conforming to the entrepreneurial dream. To distinguish themselves, the tycoon must adopt more prestigious props such as the Lotus, the Ferrari, the Lamborghini or other distinguishing ‘*marques*’ of success. Tycoons share some imagery with the ‘*iconoclastic super-executive*’ (Fallon & Srodes, 1983:47). Nonetheless this overt and ostentatious display lends itself to caricature. Hence the bold tycoon is mocked by Golding & Middleton (1982) who claim that scroungers are also often portrayed wearing suits and smoking cigars. These same pejorative images that are trotted out to vilify the entrepreneur are also used to demonise the criminal, the scrounger and the rogue. Golding & Middleton (1982:105) provide evidence of this by describing a cartoon depicting the image of a tycoon with a cigar with the caption ‘he started with nothing and now he is on social security’. This perversion of entrepreneurial iconology might be seen as evidence of the flexibility of the image, but we would like to argue that such adaptability can only exist when the semiotic construct itself is sufficiently powerful and established. This is because only symbols which can be “taken as read” can be manipulated in this way.

Smith and Anderson (2001) identified that there are more negative entrepreneurial stereotypes than positive ones. This is in keeping with the notion of the entrepreneur as a likeable rogue but also fulfils the purpose of providing us with a framework of contrasts. Amongst those identified are two enduring entrepreneurial stereotypes, the ‘Spiv’ and the ‘Businessmen Gangster’. Table 1 provides a fuller account of these stereotypes. Another interesting formation is that of the NEPMEN of 1930's Russia described as burlesque figures of western capitalism/gangsterism (Lyon, 1937) prove harder to find. Two examples of positive entrepreneurial stereotypes are the ‘*Yuppie*’ (Morris & Marsh, 1988) and the ‘*Stealth Wealthy*’ (Hinde, 2001). Morris & Marsh (1988:22) discuss the Yuppie [Young Upwardly Mobile Professionals] phenomenon, which originated in the USA during the 1980’s to describe “*a new breed of rising entrepreneurs*”. They became an enduring image of the enterprise culture and many aspired to the life style that denoted people with similar jobs, styles of language, interests,

tastes and attitudes. In class conscious Britain the yuppie label became a distorted class image associated with arrogant, youthful, predominantly middle class professionals who wore 'Barbour jackets' and frequented 'Wine Bars'. It became a collective taunt for those who succeeded but spurned traditional (humble) working class culture, merging with other middle class stereotypes. Hinde (2001:13) discusses the growing, predominantly male, socio-economic entrepreneurial grouping referred to as '*The Stealth Wealthy*' whose preferred style is '*understated*' with expensive jewellery worn out of view. They are less likely to venerate money than the generation of the 1980's. These stereotypes are frequently associated with a higher social location. In addition to contrast with the brashness of the Yuppie image, they present an interesting modern contrast to the conspicuous consumption of the leisure classes so castigated by Veblen (1899).

It is difficult to construct a unified imagery associated with entrepreneurial identity because of the individuality of the entrepreneur and their rise from different class locations. However, in biographies one encounters certain pointers. For instance, Yates (1991:214) in discussing the legendary entrepreneur Enzo Ferrari refers to the "*de rigueur uniform of the sporting fifties: La Coste pullovers, lightweight slacks, and Gucci loafers, accentuated with Rolex watches*". Characteristically, the older Ferrari did not utilise this power dressing mechanism, but dressed in simple dark coloured suits. Yates (1991:400) stresses that Ferrari crafted his personal image and in later years adopted dark sunglasses as part of his persona. Lightfoot (1998:11) in describing a criminal entrepreneur he was introduced to, invokes the following description - "*Slim, despite a hard drinking lifestyle, sun tanned and dressed in smart shoes and a Ralph Lauren T-shirt...carrying the handbag size leather wallet de rigueur for the entrepreneurial set in this part of Europe. With his Gold Rolex Oyster on his wrist, he looked every inch the successful businessman*". These examples, separated in time by a period of thirty years, and stemming from different ends of the entrepreneurial scale suggest that one can indeed identify the entrepreneur. Clothing and artefacts play a significant part in the fabrication of entrepreneurial identity combining to create clichéd visual stereotypes. Some vivid examples include Fallon & Srodes' (1983) reference to the enforced casualness of John DeLorean's \$700 dark blue three-piece suits with the vest unbuttoned, shirts with long pointed collars. More general symbols include Morris & Marsh (1988:22) acknowledgement of the *Filo-Fax or personal organizer* that became a universal entrepreneurial status symbol.

From the literature it was apparent that entrepreneurial identity is a complex, multi-faceted construct but can usually be categorised within three identifiable types, Conformist imagery; Non-Conformist imagery and Criminal imagery. Table 2 illustrates the iconic elements of each category. The first category contains elements, which can be described as the corporate executive look; the corporate tycoon look; the stockbroker look and presents a generic successful business look. The non-conformist category is composed of the maverick tycoon look; the flash entrepreneur look; the eccentric entrepreneur look; the yuppie look; the barrow boy look; and the bad boy look. The third category is composed of 'the spiv'; the Mafioso-entrepreneur; the businessman-gangster; and the ordinary criminal look. Entrepreneurs appear to revel in what MacIntyre (1997:104) refers to as the "*risqué image*". This no doubt reflects the desire to appear as non-conformists.

The key element in entrepreneurial rubric has become the association with success. This is particularly true in Britain where the iconology of success has become an established mental map or "success script" (Hjorth & Johannisson, 2002:4). This scripting of success seems to be why entrepreneurs may conform to these unwritten codes. Arnott (2000: intro) explains that most people concentrate on the outcomes of success, the external motivators rather than the root causes of success, causing them to "*fixate on the final artifacts by which one measures success*". Arnott describes a carefully constructed environment of success, manipulated by cultural artifacts and

style of dress. Indeed, Arnott warns of the dangers of apparent low self-esteem and dressing down, stressing the conventional wisdom that clothes make the man - appearance creates self-esteem and breeds success. Arnott suggests a direct relationship between dress and level of success. Spillane (1993) similarly warns those intent upon achieving corporate success against projecting an iconic entrepreneurial persona by imitating the studied casualness of Richard Branson. Yet, many entrepreneurs prefer to dress down, adopting the casual, under-stated look. Brian Souter, of Stagecoach, like Branson has adopted a very casual mode of dress. But it is interesting to note how the press responded to the financial troubles affecting the giant international bus company, regularly dwelling on the open necked shorts and plastic carrier bag that became the keynote of Souter's appearance. Being a maverick is acceptable when all is going well, but when things go wrong? It appears that Arnott has it right when he (2000:84-88) advocates the adoption of an enduring style as a method of projecting ones image; dressing for success. Clothes are a code, a language and are a powerful form of communication.

### Belonging and belongings.

In this section we want to expand on the purposes served by semiotic manifestations. We see two elements, the display of success and a demonstration of affinity, membership of the successful elite. Thus far we have identified that clothing and artefacts can be used to amplify entrepreneurial identity by acting as symbolic accoutrements. Berger (1963:95) notes how these are of great importance particularly in showing others that one has arrived. So semiotic symbols represent success but also signify the membership.

This is achieved by displaying what Vulliamy (1998:43) refers to as the "*icons of western capitalism*". In a capitalist society the icons of success are all generally products of the capitalist productive process. Interestingly, many of these items bear easily recognisable brand logos. Examples include:

- Luxury cars - BMW; Mercedes; Jaguar; Bentley; Ferrari; Porsche.
- Expensive items of designer clothing e.g. Armani, Kline etc or Branded labels such as Nike, Adidas.
- Jewellery e.g. Rolex watches and ostentatious gold jewellery.

It is not so much the consumption of these items, which signifies, but more the mere ability to possess. The signification is in the presentation of possession. It seems likely that an association with the prestige of high quality brands is seen to be transferred. This is the creation of identity, an identification with success. Yet conversely, such belongings also signal belonging, the badges of affinity to others who can also afford these productions.

One effect of the proliferation of this capitalist imagery and its association with success results in what we refer to as '*Myopic Capitalist Imagery*', because the visual effect of the trappings of wealth, success and status, blind one to the origins of the success. Regardless of the legal or illegal origin of the capital, the final appearance is the same. Successful businessmen and criminals share the same generic images. The public only see the outwardly visible signs of success, displayed by the successful, not the path chosen to achieve them. These items create a culturally specific visible ordering of success, hence providing a form of '*visual legitimacy*', in turn, authenticating the identity of the individual.

Images of success can be fabricated by the impression management of clothing, artefacts, and an appreciation of the power of such icons. Visible trappings of wealth set one apart in the social order. In general social terms we can see how the objects themselves become sought after cultural artefacts, in their own right and a form of transfer of status, from the object to the person.

One cannot be completely seen as belonging until one conforms to the expected type. Cultural artefacts thus become symbolic objects, totems, achieving the status of '*cult objects*' as posited by Sudjic (1985). Cult objects may be mass-produced and available to all in society. Other general examples of the cult object of entrepreneurial significance are the mobile telephone, the filo-fax and the lap top computer, which become identifiers, symbolising more than their original intended utility. Youth groups may prize the cultural identity associated with particular brands and styles of clothing. Morris and Marsh (1988:58) remind us that when sufficient numbers of people all own and revere these items they create social tribes with "*all the characteristics - bonds - alliances, shared customs and lifestyles of their counter parts in traditional cultures*". Members of a cult display excessive enthusiasm, worshipping a deity (or artefacts) with an admiration amounting to devotion or veneration.

In the specific terms of entrepreneurial artefacts we also see a ranked order in possessions. Hence, just a Mercedes motor car is not sufficient, it needs to be better, more select and limited, so a Ferrari does nicely. We argue that the notion of an entrepreneur has achieved near cult status. Accordingly the preferred images are perpetuated as stereotype via a process of '*semiotic affirmation*' whereby one seeks to conform to cultural expectations using cherished possessions and artefacts. Kennedy (1967:75) points out how émigré groups who make it, invariably revel in the conspicuous display of wealth wearing "*the same rich clothes, the diamond ring, the jewelled watch, the strong sickly sweet perfume*". Similarly, Arlacchi (1983:98) discusses the physiognomy of an indigenous entrepreneurial class for whom wealth was based upon a proud awareness of the "*symbols of prestige, and unfolded itself in the ostentatious exhibition of objects acquired for cash and in the exultation of power and the virtues of self and family*".

In the pantheon of entrepreneurial artifacts and possessions, pride of place is given to the motorcar. Morris and Marsh (1988:58) regard expensive cars such as BMW's to be cult objects and emblems of power, stressing that it is a universal powerfully symbolic object permitting the projection of self expression whilst acting as an emblem of allegiance to a particular class or membership of fiscal and social elites. Yates (1991:341) refers to women and cars as symbols and the trappings of success. Therefore the Porsche; BMW; Mercedes; Rolls Royce or Range-Rover is an expression of success via fiscal ability and by extension, proof of an entrepreneurial propensity. The possession of (or access to) high value / high status cars enhances the manufactured image of importance. Of course it is also an image that can be fabricated, such cars can be hired for the day, or even hour! Thus entrepreneurial imagery can be used as a form of personal aggrandizement and for the manufacture of importance (Anderson & Jack, 2000). Morris and Marsh (1988:91) appreciate the significance of the car in the creation of the "unconscious stereotype", but in this scenario may become a very conscious statement. It looks likely then that entrepreneurial identity must be consciously projected because it does not naturally occur. However, it can be achieved by the adoption of culturally specific artifacts and possessions, but it also requires an additional component. The iconic entrepreneur must possess a sense of drama and the ability of an actor.

## THE SEMIOTICS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY.

Semiotics has a long, if not entirely respectable, history, since signs and meaning were systematically studied during the medieval and renaissance periods (Echtner, 1999). Modern semiotics is normally associated with Saussure and Pierce. Saussure defined semiotics (1916:16) as "*a science that studies signs within society*", but was most concerned with the use of language. In contrast, Pierce broadened the topic to non-verbal sign structures. What characterises his



conception is that signs do not simply stand for something, but that signs stand for something to somebody. Hence semiotic signs are relational devices of meaning production. This distinction may be important in understanding the semiotics of entrepreneurship, because for example whilst the sign of the Eiffel Tower is significant for a Frenchman it may be meaningless to a Kalahari Bushman (Echtner, 1999). Accordingly we see how the production of signs in language, body and dress produces a code of understanding that can only be fully appreciated by an insider group familiar with decoding these symbols of identity. The ontology of semiotics is obviously rooted in viewing “reality” as a social construction. Mankind is the creator of his reality, and this reality is defined by the structures created (Deely, 1990). Consequently the signs that signify this reality are not universal, but established through particular social conventions (Eco, 1979). Epistemologically, the aim of semiotics is to identify the codes and recurring patterns of a particular sign system and to understand how these are used to communicate meaning (Echtner, 1990; Fiol, 1991). Ryder (1995:7) stresses signs are not data that can be dismissed as true or false, but provide hints that illuminate. Singer (1994:392) suggests that there is an archetypal element in semiotics and that the power of the symbol lies in its ability to attract people and lead them towards that which they are capable of becoming.

In this section we conduct a semiotic analysis of collected images associated with entrepreneurship. Being a semiotic (and thus comparative) study it also analyses images of criminality and corporate identity, demonstrating that as social constructs they all rely on similar artifacts (albeit used in different contexts) to project socially recognizable identities. This allowed a three dimensional (and thus richer) analytic triangulation. The methodology employed is a categorical analysis of the components of the entrepreneurial image. Common themes in the data are established and differences examined by using techniques of constant comparative analysis. Both the general form and specific artifacts are identified and compared from images collected as raw data collected from newspapers, magazines and biographies. The analysis confirmed the complex construction of the imagery of entrepreneurship projected via identifiable sub-themes of class and criminality, providing evidence of the powerful social process of demonology.

This section should be read in conjunction with appendix one (and its explanatory table) which contains 20 selected images of entrepreneurs or images associated with entrepreneurship from which success / identity and therefore entrepreneurial propensity can be inferred. Images 1 to 17 emphasise the masculinity of the construct. Image 1 is of the fictional icon Arthur Daley, a linear descendent of the ‘Spiv’. Note the trilby hat, the overcoat, the smile, the cigar and flashy jewellery. Image 2 is of the fictional icon Derek ‘Del Boy’ Trotter, portrayed here in a parody of gangster iconology – note the suit, the black shirt, white tie, the overcoat draped over the shoulders reminiscent of the ‘Godfather’. Image 3 is of the real-life gangster Dave Courtney in full ‘*gangster rigmarole / regalia*’ – note how it parodies images 1 and 2. Courtney refers to this as his ‘*storybook gangster*’ persona. Image 4 portrays the successful ‘*man about town look*’ and the gentleman portrayed could well be an entrepreneur. Image 5 is also of ‘Del Boy’ in his ‘*barrow boy*’ persona – note the flat cap, the smile, the jewellery, the rings, the cigar, the fur-skinned jacket. Image 6 is a humorous parody of the ‘Del Boy’ character – note the excessive adornment of jewellery, watches and the iconic filo-fax. Note how the stereotypical visual construct of the entrepreneur is built up in images 1,2,3,5 and 6 using artefacts associated with class or demographic socio-economic groupings. Image 7 is of Sir Richard Branson – note the goatee beard, the smile, the flash clothes and the theatrical stance. Image 8 is of the historical entrepreneur Sir Thomas Lipton – note the trademark ‘van dyke’ beard and the sailing attire. Both images 7 and 8 characterise the projection of theatrical imagery. Image 9 of Sir James Goldsmith portrays the stereotype of the corporate executive / tycoon – again note the cigar and the smile. Image 10, – exemplifies the ‘*maverick tycoon*’ look. Image 11, shows Nicholas van Hoogstraten

as a flash young entrepreneur and image 12, portrays him as a '*businessman-gangster*'. Image 13, portrays a Mafiosi-entrepreneur – note the sunglasses, the cigar, the assured casual, suited look. Image 14, depicts the '*bad boy*' look – note the casual suit and the absence of socks. Image 15, is the '*bad boy*' look parodied as a storybook character. Image 16, is a line drawing of a villainous second-hand car salesman (Robinson, 1983) – note the open necked shirt, the suit and the cigar. Image 17, is a cartoon contrasting the 'clean cut', corporate look to the stereotype of the hedonist. Image 18, is an item of gold jewellery (a semiotic symbolic representation) moulded as a \$ sign – note the stars and stripes behind signifying the 'American Dream'. These trinkets are popular with flash entrepreneurs and the criminal sub-culture. Image 19, represents the phenomenon of 'semiotic affirmation' and is of the '*bling*' worn by a 'Puerto-Rican gangsta' - note the rings, jewellery and pose. Image 20, represents the car as an example of 'Myopic Capitalist Imagery'.

Paradoxically, two of the most famous icons of entrepreneurship in Britain are both fictional and humorous creations – namely '*Arthur Daley*' [See image 1] and '*Del Boy*' [See images 1,2 and 5] who have become part of British folklore. In foreign market places, street traders chant a comic mantra of - "*Cheaper than Asda Price, cheaper than Del Boy, cheaper than Arthur Daley*". Their images have become synonymous with the entrepreneur per se to a generation of British television viewers as loveable rogues. The Arthur Daley persona is the creation of the actor George Cole from an earlier character "*Flash Harry*". The actor David Jason based the 'Del Boy' character upon an acquaintance who fancied himself as a bit of a businessman (in love with his own image) who projected the appearance of a perfect businessman down to the camel hair overcoat, the shirt and tie, trousers with razor sharp creases, and highly polished shoes. The irony (and hence the humour) lay in his inability to communicate the proper image of a gentleman because of a broad 'Cockney' accent. This accentuated the 'wide boy' image incorporating the use of body language and mannerisms. It evidences a class based communicational deficit. Both personify the '*dodgy businessman*' operating at the fringes of criminality. Unfortunately this has embedded the entrepreneur in the national psyche as being synonymous with flashiness and dodgy deals - posing image problems.

In real life, it is often necessary to search for such emblems of entrepreneurial identity because of the entrepreneur is not such a socially visible phenomenon as the criminal. This does not disprove our argument, that there are entrepreneurial stereotypes. We do not argue that all or indeed any, entrepreneur will conform to this hypothetical ideal type. We merely try to explain its existence as perceived. Moreover, some entrepreneurs are modest self-deprecating individuals. It must also be remembered that success is culturally defined and therefore different socio-economic groupings within the same culture may share similar visions of success and project similar images. Also, the artefacts used to construct a particular identity frequently occur in combinations of each other and these 'stack up' creating accepted cultural stereotypes. Notwithstanding this, the entrepreneur has a less universally accepted imagery than the gangster. Also, entrepreneurs tend to be confident individuals who disdain the idea of copying the appearance of others. Many are not impressed by exhibitionism or by the possession of artefacts signifying wealth. The flash persona is often the uniform of wannabe entrepreneurs who deliberately project such stereotypical imagery. The genuine entrepreneur may project personality, charisma and energy that characterises them as a genre. They make a definitive visual impact manifesting themselves semiotically via gestures and animated action.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE IMAGES.

At a descriptive level, there are many parallels between the linguistic and the semiotic. The selected images appear to conform to, and to confirm the entrepreneurial myth and the

images act as a carrier of the entrepreneurial narrative by illustrating the fable. We found many patterns of similarity, some sufficiently powerful to suggest stereotypicality. Yet an essence of the image is difference, showing entrepreneurs in contrast to non-entrepreneurs. However, most interesting is the paradox of conforming to non-conformity. The similarities within the ways that this difference is constructed, mean that the images also conform! The symbolism of entrepreneurship conforms to the symbolism of our fabricated world. The role of the media in the creation of these stereotypical images (particularly in relation to comedy) offers a rich vein of material, worthy of further study. We argue that there are several common, stereotypical, visual images of entrepreneurship, which manifest themselves in comedy and in photographs. These in turn influence public perceptions of negotiated reality. These images are related to masculinity, power, status and wealth and mean different things to different people. They will inspire some to emulation but frustrate and anger others who do not share the ideology. These images work at a hidden (taken for granted) level, as do myth and metaphor – which they compliment. They work because of the process of intertextuality.

This paper demonstrates that entrepreneurial identity, like its linguistic construct, is a predominantly masculine, formulaic construct. It further suggests that, far from being the mythic rugged individualist, the entrepreneur projects a paradoxical image of being a ‘conforming-non conformist’. It concludes that ‘entrepreneurial identity’, particularly in Britain, is heavily influenced by such demographic issues of ‘class’ and surprisingly ‘criminality’, resulting in a confusing form of ‘myopic capitalist imagery’. Humour and parody also play a significant part in the creation of entrepreneurial identity and cultural stereotypes. Semiotics is a useful visual channel through which entrepreneurial fable is transmitted, thus illustrating the entrepreneurial fable by bringing it to life. By adopting the accepted iconology of entrepreneurship the actor is in effect performing and transmitting accepted storylines / enacting a play. Semiotic practices such as gesture, posture, dress, writing, speech, photographic images, film, television and media projections influence the entrepreneurial construct. They affect how it is portrayed and enacted, particularly when recourse is made to the theatrical aided by artefacts and props. We must be mindful of scripted deceit because semiotics contains all that is necessary to lie convincingly.

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Table 1: Negative Entrepreneurial Stereotypes.	
The Spiv.	Was a British institution - smartly dressed man who made a living by shady dealings, existing by their wits rather than holding down a job. They frequented Public Houses, being regarded as sharp-witted likeable rogues or wide boys. They emerged during WW2 as black marketers. Portrayed as flashy dressers e.g. velvet collars and lurid kipper ties and stereotyped by the pencil thin moustache, the trilby hat (worn at a rakish angle) and the long trench coat (required to hide the contraband goods of watches, chocolate, cigarettes etc). They were men who knew everybody but did not engage in crime themselves (McIntosh, 1975:61). They were folk-heroes whose illegality could merely consist of selling toffee apples during rationing (Parker, 1981:30). They have left a legacy on the entrepreneurial construct with the term still being used as a descriptor for streetwise entrepreneurs.
Businessman-gangster.	Operate in the shadow world linking legitimate and illegal business. Traditionally, gangsters were depicted as lacking in brainpower and entrepreneurial propensity (Taylor, 1984:150-1). However, many villains regard themselves as being local businessmen. Indeed, the <i>“resident gangster”</i> with a suit of a <i>“sartorial double-breasted style”</i> has become a cliché in the nightclub business (Taylor, 1984:150-1). Geis in Wells (1992:Foreward) stresses that the public are intrigued and respectful of wealth, secretly admiring those who beats the system.

Table 2: Constructing Conformist, Non Conformist and Criminal Identities.		
Types.	Sub-types.	STEREOTYPICAL ELEMENTS
<p><b>CONFORMIST LOOK.</b></p> <p>Leaning towards the formal and conservative. A cloned look.</p>	Corporate Executive.	Expensive suits in conservative colours, overcoat, monogrammed silk shirts, matching ties accentuating networking e.g. public school or club, expensive accessories cuff-links & tie pins, smart (short) well groomed hair, clean shaven (no facial hair / beards). Cigars, gold pens, one ring only, mobile phones, attaché cases and laptop computers. Cars must be top of the range models. Cultured accents preferred. A look to aspire to.
	Corporate Tycoon.	A similar construct to above but with more lee-way to demonstrate initiative, independence and eccentricity. Cars will be ‘marques’. Perhaps leaning towards the ‘Country Squire’ look. Accents will be mixed.
	Stock Broker.	Similar to above but more regimented with pin stripe suits, white shirts and the obligatory red braces (Ironically a look parodied by Russian gangsters).
	Business Look.	A pale parody of above achieved at a budget.
<p><b>NON-CONFORMIST LOOK.</b></p> <p>Iconoclastic imagery leaning towards individualism, the casual and flamboyant.</p>	Maverick Tycoon.	The antithesis of the corporate tycoon look varying from the eccentric anything goes to a watered down version of the executive look – expensive blazers worn with jeans, casual open necked shirts, expensive shoes with no socks. Facial hair, goatees, pony tails, even long hair is permitted. Jewellery is worn in abundance making a definite statement of counter cultural roots. Cars will be ‘marques’.
	Flash Entrepreneur.	A watered down version of above. Open necked shirts worn with designer suits and jewellery on display. The obligatory lower range BMW or Mercedes predominates.
	Eccentric Look	The eccentric entrepreneur does not conform to expected imagery and will often not be recognisable as such.
	Yuppie Look.	In Britain the Yuppie look is associated with a definite middle class slant and is often confused with other middleclass stereotypes such as the ‘Sloane Ranger’.

	<p>'Barrow Boy' Look.</p> <p>The 'Bad Boy' Look.</p>	<p>The successful entrepreneur (and their partner) may gravitate towards this social milieu. It is mildly non-conformist. Brilliantly parodied as 'Del Boy'. The stereotypical image of the working class entrepreneur as flash and crude. Flat caps, sheepskin jackets, the obligatory rings and jewellery. Situated on the fringes of criminality.</p> <p>A deliberately constructed hedonistic 'play boy' artifice.</p>
<p>CRIMINAL LOOK.</p> <p>Iconoclastic imagery leaning towards the flamboyant and stereotypical.</p>	<p>The 'Spiv'.</p> <p>Mafioso-entrepreneur.</p> <p>Businessman-gangster look.</p> <p>Ordinary-Criminal Look.</p>	<p>Brilliantly parodied as 'Arthur Daley'. A variation of the businessman look associated with criminality.</p> <p>Open necked shirts, expensive suits, leather jackets, cigars and sunglasses. Surrounded by an entourage.</p> <p>Will project the image of the businessman but will betray themselves by 'subtle' tell tale signs of criminal tendencies in the form of mannerisms, associates or flash jewellery. Surrounded by an entourage.</p> <p>Jeans, boots, black shirts, black leather jackets, jewellery. Silent and non-smiling.</p>

Appendix One: Entrepreneurial Images (See page 15).	
Line 1, image 1	The fictional entrepreneur / Spiv, Arthur 'Arfur' Daley played by George Cole.
Line 1, image 2	The fictional entrepreneur 'Del Boy' played by David Jason in classic gangster rigmarole.
Line 1, image 3	The real life gangster / criminal entrepreneur 'Dodgy' Dave Courtney in full gangster regalia.
Line 1, image 4	The successful man about town from a Rover car advertisement.
Line 2, image 5	The fictional entrepreneur 'Del Boy' in his 'barrow boy' persona.
Line 2, image 6	The 'Del Boy' impersonator Maurice Canham showing the 'barrow boy' look parodied.
Line 2, image 7	The entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson demonstrating 'theatrical entrepreneurial imagery'.
Line2, image 8	The historical entrepreneur Sir Thomas Lipton demonstrating 'theatrical entrepreneurial imagery' (Mackay, 1998).
Line 3, image 9	Image of the Tycoon Sir James Goldsmith – depicting the corporate tycoon look (Wansell, 1998)
Line 3, image 10	Image John Delorean – depicting the 'Maverick Tycoon' look (Fallon & Srodes, 1983).

Line 3, image 11	Early image of the entrepreneur Nicholas Van Hoogstraten – the flash entrepreneur look.
Line 3, image 12	Image of the entrepreneur Nicholas Van Hoogsraten – the Businessman gangster look.
Line 3, image 13	Image of the fabled ‘Mafioso entrepreneur’ Luciano Liggio (Arlacchi, 1987).
Line 4, image 14	Image of the entrepreneur Kjell Rokke demonstrating the ‘bad boy’ look.
Line 4, image 15	The bad boy look parodied as a children’s hero ‘Ernie the entrepreneur’ – Smith (2002).
Line 4, image 16	A line drawing showing the genre of the ‘bad boy’ businessman 2 <sup>nd</sup> hand car salesman (Robinson, 1983).
Line 4, image 17	Cartoon contrasting the differences between corporate / entrepreneurs. Davis (1987)
Line 5, image 18	An item of iconoclastic jewellery symbolising success, wealth and the American Dream.
Line 5, image 19	Semiotic affirmation known in criminal circles as ‘bling’. Bourgois (1995).
Line, 5, image 20	A BMW sports car – an example of myopic capitalist imagery.