

Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction (Picasso).

A fairytale.....

*A long time ago, three noble entrepreneurs went out to
establish businesses...*

1. The first entrepreneur establishes a small business in a niche market. After the enormous success of the business the entrepreneur organises a further business. A non-profit orientated community service.
2. The second person is the only one that has the background of a rich family. He also succeeds in establishing a business and has now the advantage that he is the only deliverer for this good in one region.
3. Finally the last of them comes up with a genius business idea that is ahead of its time. Against all odds the business is established and is now the market leader

...and they lived happily ever after.

These three entrepreneurs have all fulfilled the entrepreneurial dream, to start up an own business and to succeed. **But** only one of the enterprises is real. Two are just made up by movies and books. It is not easy to decide, is it? What is “real” and what is just a “myth”? Is there a boundary between reality and myth? Can we define what a “real entrepreneur” is? What he looks like, what goes on in his mind?

In our first lecture we came up with an endless list of adjectives and descriptions that try to answer the latter. Everything was there from charismatic over goal orientated to creative. In the literature you can also find a lot of different definitions of entrepreneur, some of them quite similar and all describe the image we have in our mind how an entrepreneur must be. But there is no **one**, no **absolute** definition. From a positivist’s point of view the entrepreneur should ergo not exist. As in positivism there is no unclear, undefined thing. As entrepreneurs are all around us the positivist epistemology is not applicable, it would lead to a dead end because entrepreneurs do exist! A more subjective approach seems adequate; we cannot deal with an entrepreneur within scientific boundaries. So we must set the entrepreneur in a different context. I prefer to apply a postmodern approach as postmodernism is appropriate to deal with myths. When we apply postmodern aspects we can deal better with the entrepreneur as postmodernism denies absolute things, there is nothing like an absolute real thing. If the boundaries of real and fake vanish where stands the entrepreneur? Did he exist in “modern” times and vanished now into a myth? Did he ever exist or was there only the myth? Or gave the myth birth to the entrepreneur?

No wonder, someone with the characteristic attribute of creative does not fit within mathematical boundaries. Wait... creative... what about creation, creativity artists? Is

an entrepreneur someone like an artist? An artist creates artwork, an entrepreneur creates opportunities for doing the business. It is like “travelling on a path with own subjective reactions and changing the world, rather than getting changed by it” (Bjoerkman, p. 82). The first thing that comes in our mind when we think about an artist is someone who is sitting lonely in his room and the ideas arise from within this person. Bullshit. Nothing is created by a vacuum, even pre-modern or modern artists needed some inspiration. Of course everyone needs time alone, time to think but that is not creativity. Look at the movie “Girl with a pearl ear ring” by P. Webber you see the Dutch artist Vermeer who gets his inspiration from the young maid. Before he met her, he could not paint anymore, the inspiration was missing. Or look at Dali, his inspiration, his muse, was Gala. “The foundation of creativity is to be found in the different identities of people and arise in, and through, retrospective, continuous social process of interactions.” (Ericsson, p. 295). Lyotard explained to us that the grand narratives, stories inseparable from the system and language they are told in, are dead (Lyotard) , Nietzsche killed the meta-narrative of God, the later postmodern thinkers killed science and every other absolute notion. By killing them, a productive, vacant space was opened up and Lyotard’s approach, denying truth, right or wrong, implies that this allows us to be more creative.

For me, the latter is like a mirror for being entrepreneurial. Creativity is a dynamic form of power that flows everywhere, into everybody and only by destroying the boundaries of the modern great narratives or any other boundaries (“this will never be successful...”, “don’t make yourself ridiculous...”) we allow ourselves to use that power. Everybody can be an artist. Everybody can be an entrepreneur.

We tend to be to define entrepreneurship and creativity with good adjectives but they are not. They are neutral. Someone who sets up a fair trade business is as entrepreneurial as someone who invents a discount brothel. We set the rules for ethics and for good and bad behaviour, we decide when someone is a (good) entrepreneur and when someone is a charlatan, a cheater or a terrorist. But entrepreneurship per se has nothing to do with ethics and moral, it is about creativity. Ethics and moral are values imposed to and by ourselves to keep our society running, ruled and regulated.

At that point of my story I want to bring us back to one of the examples in the beginning. I described them very neutral, but indeed, one of the brave entrepreneurs set up a terrorist organisation. On the first sight all of the three examples seem to be inventive, creative and then we add ethics and one hero fails to fulfil our notion of an entrepreneur. While discussing entrepreneurship in class it became really obvious that the image of the “good” entrepreneur is imprinted in the heads of most of us. But my anti-entrepreneur takes Picasso’s statement verbally. Hero No 1 is Tyler Durden, the anarchic protagonist and anti-hero of the novel *Fight Club* by C. Palahniuk. His vision is to create a better world, not longer ruled by Planet Starbucks, Ikea Galaxy or Nike Empire but by “real” humans.

“Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don’t really need.” (Palahniuk, p. 149). Our culture is based on that system, Tyler wants to change it, to make us get rid of all our technology, achievements, civilization.

”Recycling and speed limits are bullshit... They’re like someone who quits smoking on his death bed... It’s Project Mayhem that’s going to save the world. A cultural ice age. A prematurely induced dark age. Project Mayhem will force humanity to go dormant or into remission long enough for the Earth to recover.” (ibid, p. 125). Tyler shows that everybody has entrepreneurial and creative power, even somebody who hit the rock bottom of society, and that this power can go into forms most of us never thought of. Or most of us are cowards who are afraid of thinking beyond the boundaries, exploring the darkest depths of their souls. Tyler Durden sets up a soap business to sell – at a premium price - finest beauty soap made of the, through plastic surgery removed, fat of the rich. He sells them their own fat back, great idea. He is even more creative and branches out in the movie and catering business. Removing single movie pictures in family films and substitute them by very naughty ones, so that he can blackmail the film company. Or working as a waiter and doing really nasty things (really, really nasty things...) with the food, the hotel manager will pay him every sum that he does not go to the press. His entrepreneurial creativity goes into ways no one would ever imagined. The book, as well as the movie ends with the blasting down of skyscrapers, the beginning of Project Mayhem and the end of our modern world. But Tyler is not real. He is a story in a story. He is the schizophrenic imagination of the storyteller in the book. But the vision of Tyler, the vision of a created protagonist in a book, starts to become real.

And it stayed not only fiction, a novel or a movie, it became painful reality to us as well, when the airplanes crashed into the Twin Towers. The book was written years before the terrorist attack but at that moment, at the latest, reality and vision collapsed into each other. The falling of the Twin Towers was the result of an entrepreneurial

business that was not set up to sell products or offer services but to destroy. Creativity translated into destruction.

The second brave man is more a conventional type of entrepreneur, the one most of us have in mind when they think about entrepreneurs. “C. Montgomery Burns, Springfield's richest man, built his atomic energy fortune from the ground up after inheriting his father's atom-splitting factory.” (Groening) He was born with the silver spoon in his mouth but was not satisfied with the status quo, he created a new business out of the old one. The former business of his father and his own are related but Burns entrepreneurial creativity developed the nuclear power station from which a whole city is dependent. Mr Burns is not real as well, he is a character in a cartoon series, “The Simpsons” but on the first sight his example could be real.

The last one is not a brave man, but a woman and – by the way – the only real, real entrepreneur story. I decided to write about the gender issue in entrepreneurship as I discovered that most people talk about HIM not HIM/HER or HER. Although everybody accepts that there are female entrepreneurs, in the mind of most people the entrepreneur is still a man. I made a little experiment and asked randomly 42 people (students at university, people in high street) to describe an entrepreneur for me. I was absolutely not interested in their view of the entrepreneur (how he looked like, how were his skills and capabilities), I was only interested in the fact if they start describing him or her. I asked for **an** entrepreneur, using the indefinite article, and all 42 people described him, the male entrepreneur. Not a single one described a she-entrepreneur or used neutral he/she. This experiment was only possible because the English language has a neutral indefinite article. French, German and Spanish use

indefinite articles that make clear if you talk about a male or female person, I could not have asked neutral in that countries, as my question would have made clear, that I asked for a male entrepreneur, for a female one or that I wanted to make people to describe female entrepreneurs although it is not the first thing that comes in their mind when they hear “a entrepreneur”. The third description fits on Beathe Uhse, a German woman, born in 1919 in former East Prussia, now Poland. Unusual for a woman at that time she becomes a pilot and even flies in tactical aircrafts in the Second World War. After the war, in the end of the 1940s she starts a second life as an entrepreneur. She sets up a magazine that talks about sex and contraception, things people never talked about at that times. 1951 she opens a mailorder shop for selling books about sex and condoms. Two years later she has 14 employees. 1962 she opens the first sex shop of the world in Flensburg, Germany. Against all odds she branches out, opens a sex museum in Berlin in 1996 and brings her business finally to the stock market in 1999. She died 2001. She is an example for seeing “entrepreneurship in a broader perspective than merely business... we could use other contexts, like creating processes in general, which not merely has an influence on employment figures but as well has an effect on people’s everyday life.” (Jansson). Beathe Uhse influenced every day life as she was one of the first people talking about sex and contraception in public when most of us would not even use the words. And for me, the most important fact, she was a woman. When she started her business females were educated to be not to do. Female life was a complete domestic one while male life was public. Beathe Uhse did things, she fought for her success. She is not only an example for the successful she-entrepreneur but generally an example that you can do all things if you really want to.

Finally I want to discuss the question if the entrepreneur really exists or if entrepreneurship is myth. If the boundaries of real and fake vanish where stands the entrepreneur? Did he exist in “modern” times and vanished now into a myth? Did he ever exist or was there only the myth? Or gave the myth birth to the entrepreneur? Did Mr Burns or any other invented character gave us the image of the entrepreneur or did we create these characters after real life examples?

In my opinion the myth gave birth to the real entrepreneur. If there were not the idea of someone who could form his own business where would the entrepreneur come from? An entrepreneur is not the simple shop owner at the corner. The shop owner is independent but has otherwise no entrepreneurial characteristics. He is satisfied with the status quo, does not want to take risks and does his job because he has always done it and will it always do. This is nothing else than somebody who works in a factory, doing the same job every day.

The entrepreneur is therefore in my opinion a myth because it leaves us space for thinking. Entrepreneurship starts via playing with options in your head. Our modern thinking tells us, that we are individuals that we can do whatever we want. Ergo, why not setting up an own business? The person who becomes entrepreneurial and starts the business can easily define the boundaries of the business. But can he define himself (or herself)? What made him change into an entrepreneurial person? Was it a long process or did he just wake up with an idea? First he envisioned and then he acted. First there was the myth, the fiction, than reality.

It has no clearly defined borders, everybody has entrepreneurial skills, everyone can do something entrepreneurial. Our first thought of an entrepreneur is that of a self-made man, like the image of Mr Burns, but when we widen our thinking we can come up with our own creative ideas, doing things we always wanted to do. The entrepreneur smashes the boundaries between reality and myth. For he is a combination of both, without the myth of being a successful self-made man, no one would set up an own business. Entrepreneurial skills is not about categories of good or evil, it is about something that is inherent in both, creativity. Entrepreneurship is neither good nor evil. Entrepreneurship is not about hard facts. Entrepreneurship is not about men or women. At the beginning you could not tell which of my three examples were faked and which was true, entrepreneurship is about feeling, envisioning enterprises (Sykes) and about human qualities. No machine is creative. Entrepreneurship is about stories, fairytales about brave men and women who actually **do** something. In the same notion we made entrepreneurship dealing with gender: no longer are women reduced to “be” as the desire of an entrepreneur is not to be but to do. Although the former grand narratives are dead, humans are always looking for something to orientate themselves on. Maybe entrepreneurship is one of the grand narratives of our times, born by those who envision their lives.

I started this essay with a quote of Picasso and it is only good to finish it with one “because deep thoughts cause long parentheses” (Villiers).

Everything you can imagine is real. (Picasso)

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